

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: ZONED DESIRES: PROSTITUTION,
FAMILY POLITICS, AND SEXUAL
IDEOLOGY IN 20TH CENTURY IRAN

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This dissertation explores the regulation and representation of prostitution in Iran during the twentieth century, and concerns itself with dominant sexual ideologies during this period. While Tehran's red-light district, *Shahr-i Nau*, is largely absent from modern Iranian historiography, I argue for the significance of this contested urban space to the understanding of Iranian history and society. Using citizen petition letters, police records, and government memos, I highlight the gradual shift in Pahlavi policy from policies focused on the informal removal or relocation of prostitutes to one focused on systematic regulation, epidemiological surveillance, and the geographic concentration of prostitution.

The dissertation also frames the social attitudes towards and the multiple meanings assigned to prostitution and examines efforts control the meaning and image of prostitution. Using women's magazines and scientific studies, I demonstrate how female reformers considered prostitution a result of outdated modes of family practices. The discourse surrounding the links between family and prostitution, then, contributed to an elite form of women's rights activism in Iran that perpetuated paternalistic frameworks within society. The entertainment industry also concerned itself with prostitution, and a growing number of Iranian movies began representing prostitution. Visibility and space were integral to the understanding of sexuality.

For women engaged in the commercial sex industry the consequences of regulation were mixed and often contradictory. Female prostitutes lived in a perpetual state of vulnerability that stemmed from inequalities in the law and social double-standards. Despite this, they strove for their own interests in the context of unequal relations of power.

In Iran under the Islamic Republic, the Pahlavi policies adopted to control and maintain sexuality and prostitution have manifested along comparable lines, highlighting cultural continuities that remain intact in the face of substantial political change. I argue that despite the momentous political and social changes that have affected Iran in the twentieth century, a study of prostitution and temporary marriage suggests that sexual attitudes remained similar. In post-Revolutionary Iran, temporary marriage was advertised as the solution to society's sexual concerns. In both cases, deviant sexuality was accepted so long as it was separate and invisible.

ZONED DESIRES: PROSTITUTION, FAMILY POLITICS, AND
SEXUAL IDEOLOGY IN 20TH CENTURY IRAN

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I owe much to my family for their encouragement and assistance over the years. My mother-in-law, Pakdokht, spent countless hours caring for our daughter while I completed my coursework and was always a phone call away when I needed childcare. My mother's dedication to learning and her selfless giving have always been a driving force and source of inspiration. My sister, Zainab, was integral to this dissertation by providing emotional support and childcare over the years despite her very young age. She continues to amaze me every day and no words could ever capture my gratitude for all that she has done and continues to do for our daughter. I must also thank my sister, Mahdieh, who made herself available despite her very busy schedule in the final

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Notes on System of Transliteration, Citation, and Dates

Arabic and Persian words and names have been transliterated according to a simplified system based on guidelines provided by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (rather than the *Encyclopedia Iranica* or the Library of Congress). For the sake of expediency, diacritical marks have been omitted except for in the case of *‘ayn* and *hamza*. Arabic and Persian words and names in common usage in English remain in Anglicized form (Khomeini instead of Khumayni, Mohammad Reza Shah instead of Muhammad Riza Shah) unless they appear in the *IJMES* Word List, revised in October 2010. Throughout the dissertation, when applicable, this list has been consulted for the spelling, hyphenation, and italicization of words. Unless the foreign words appear on this list or have become Anglicized, they are italicized throughout the text.

Also, as a general rule, I have followed the Persian pronunciation of Arabic loan words, unless they are taken directly from Arabic sources or contexts (*marja‘iyyat* instead of *marja‘iyya*, *‘iddih* instead of *‘idda*, *vali* instead of *wali*). The exception is the Arabic word *mut‘a*. As the word is overwhelmingly referred to in the Arabic sources and uncommon in Persian, for the sake of consistency, I have opted for the Arabic transliteration of the word. Unless otherwise noted, the translations are my own.

I have used the calendar converter provided by the Iran Chamber Society to calculate Gregorian dates for newspapers, magazines, and book publication dates. In regards to magazine publication dates, meticulous researchers will notice that there are a few irregularities (often only a day different) between the Gregorian dates calculated based on the calendar converter and the published dates provided by the Library of Congress where most magazines were accessed. In regards to book publication dates, in the absence of a publication month for a particular book, both corresponding possible publication Gregorian years are provided. These irregularities are extremely minor and irrelevant for the purposes of this dissertation.

In respect to the citation of sources obtained from the Iranian National Archives, every effort has been made to provide correlating page numbers to the documents provided by the Iranian National Archives. As many of the documents were provided to me in electronic format by way of a CD without page numbers for each individual document sheet, this has

proved difficult at times. When applicable, the page numbers provided reflect the numbers assigned by the Iranian National Archives in the electronic version provided.

Introduction

In the spring of 2011, I travelled to Iran to conduct research for this dissertation on prostitution and temporary marriage. While I found extensive archival material on prostitution in twentieth-century Iran at the Iranian National Archives, I had minimal success obtaining archival documents on temporary marriage. This was despite that fact that I also visited the Iranian Parliamentary Archives and the Institute for Contemporary Iranian History in addition to the National Archives. In an effort to address this impasse, I broadened my scope beyond the archives and began searching for all books on temporary marriage (*sighih or izdivaj-i muvaqqhat*) published during the twentieth century in Iran and elsewhere in the Middle East. While the Iranian National Library did not hold all the books, the Library provided me with the necessary bibliographical information to obtain the books from various publishers in Tehran, Qum, Mashhad, and Isfahan.

Consequently, one breezy morning, I rode the bus to Inqilab (revolution) Square, Tehran's publishing and book distribution hub, with my three-year-old daughter in hand. Located near Tehran University's main campus, the surrounding area near Inqilab Square and Tehran University hosts most major and minor book publishers, many of whom have offices and bookstores in the numerous book malls (*pasazh-i kitab*) in the vicinity of the Square. The experience I had that day was totally

unanticipated and, to some extent, shaped my outlook on this dissertation. That day, I visited over a dozen bookstores/publishers that I had identified in my research. Prior to my visit, I had called many publishers in advance and had confirmed that they actually sold the book I was searching for at that location.

Yet, when I arrived at bookstore after bookstore, with my three-year-old alongside, asking if they sold any books on *sighih* or *izdivaj-i muvaqqat* the responses became strikingly similar. One look at me and one look at my daughter and the answer was a definite “no.” When I mentioned the name of the book I was looking for, which was published by that publishing house, I received blank stares or a simple, “we don’t sell it anymore” or “we are out.”

I and my daughter left that day with a mere two books on the *ahkam* (laws) of marriage, both permanent and temporary. While this experience in itself may not seem noteworthy, what followed made it a pivotal point in my research. Certain that these books were sold at the bookstores I had visited, I asked my husband, who was visiting us during my research trip, to visit the same stores in Tehran, and many others in Qum, in search of the books I needed for my research. He came back, not only with dozens of books on the various aspects and challenges of temporary marriage and sexuality in Islam, but amazingly with an actual blank marriage contract specifically designed and abbreviated for temporary marriage. The owner of one of the bookstores assumed my

handsome and bearded husband was prime material for *sighih* and hoped to do him a “favor” by offering him a physical blank temporary marriage contract to utilize. This temporary marriage contract resembling state-employed permanent marriage contracts is not an official state document, and it remains unclear who published and distributed the temporary marriage contract gifted to my husband.

Our dramatically varied experiences in search simply of books on temporary marriage, and the unsolicited temporary marriage contract offered to my husband, serve as a constant reminder of the different and gendered ways temporary marriage is experienced in Iran today. I continue to wonder whether the bookstore clerks were protecting me from temporary marriage, or themselves from a mother transgressing boundaries of propriety by blatantly and publicly searching for material on temporary marriage. Apparently, as one observant acquaintance in Iran later commented on my experience, my choice of clothing and scarf/hijab resembled “Arab women,” feeding into sexual anxieties that associate temporary wives with certain imagined racial categories.

The association of temporary marriage with prostitution continues to resonate deeply in contemporary Iranian society, and despite temporary marriage being religiously sanctioned and often officially propagated, it remains a social taboo in many quarters in Iran. This dissertation is an attempt to historicize both practices and to understand them in the context of the growing social and political changes that have

taken shape in twentieth-century Iran and the Middle East. Some of the questions it explores directly relate to modern Iranian history: What does prostitution in twentieth-century Iran tell us about popular attitudes towards sexuality, masculinity, femininity, and the appropriate place of vice in urban life? How did these ideas influence the lived experiences of men and especially women in Iran? How did the views on prostitution shape views on womanhood and contribute to the production of cultural narratives about women and families? What place can prostitutes have in Iranian history and how can prostitution serve as a conceptual tool for historians of modern Iran? What is the relationship of prostitution as a fluid category to the dominant forces that have shaped the historiography of modern Iran? Ultimately, the dissertation also asks how the peculiar case of temporary marriage can contribute to feminist scholarship and theory.

This dissertation argues that despite the momentous political and social changes that have affected Iran in the twentieth century, a study of prostitution and temporary marriage suggests that sexual attitudes remained strikingly similar throughout the period under study. Men's "need" for heterosexual sex remained a stable understanding of sexuality and of manhood in the period covered by this dissertation. "Normal" men were sexual while "normal" women were chaste. Both prostitutes and temporary wives served to alleviate the sexual "needs" of men. Under the Pahlavi state, prostitutes were contained and zoned within red-light

districts and inspected for sexually transmitted infections to avoid health risks to men who frequented brothels. While shortly after the anti-Shah Revolution of 1979 Tehran's red-light district was demolished and sex outside of marriage outlawed and harshly penalized, the newly established state promoted temporary marriage—as a sexual union—to appease the sexual “needs” of men. In doing so, it delegated and zoned all non-marital sexual desire into the realm of temporary marriage.

The dissertation as such is a reflection of its sources. While I had hoped to locate archival material on both prostitution and temporary marriage for the various decades of this dissertation, the overwhelming majority of my sources on prostitution pre-date 1979. On the subject of prostitution, the dissertation utilizes numerous citizen petition letters, police records, court records, intergovernmental memos and the minutes and findings of the Permanent Commission for the Prohibition of Vice. It also employs the life-stories of female prostitutes published in the women's magazine, *Banuvan*, along with scientific studies on the topic published in the magazine and elsewhere. In addition, it utilizes popular culture and especially movies to foster a better understanding of male popular perceptions of prostitution. Reading these sources together and against each other has made this study of prostitution possible.

On the issue of temporary marriage, apart from a handful of references to temporary marriage in archival documents, the majority of the employed sources consist of books and articles published by mostly

male intellectuals and religious scholars in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon throughout the twentieth century. As a one of a kind anthropological study on temporary marriage in Iran, Shahla Haeri's interviews in 1979 and 1981 with women contracted in temporary marriages and the religious men who advocated the practice also serve as insightful material for this study.¹

While the different categories of sources (intellectual, personal, official) that became available for this dissertation were beyond my control, I have selected to see them as complementary. Much of the writing on modern Iranian history is focused on official state sources, rendering it one-sided, and Iranian historiography is dominated, until very recently, by statist approaches. Not only has this history been largely about "great" men—at times important women—and key political events, but sources used have disproportionately focused on particular forms of official documents. This research, therefore, is an exercise in the utilization of movies, photographs, women's magazines, personal life-stories and narratives, petitions, court records, police records, secret government memos and decrees, and religious books to study a much neglected topic in twentieth-century Middle Eastern history.

During my research in Tehran, the Iranian National Archives proved an invaluable repository of police records, court records, government memos, and citizen-petition letters, although the sources

¹ Shahla Haeri, *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Shi'i Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1989).

utilized for this dissertation were scattered across various files and folders. The delicate nature of the subject of prostitution, drugs, and temporary marriage being studied by a female researcher “from the West” also made obtaining some material more tenuous. Perhaps as expected, during my research I came to realize that economic and political history was much better served by the Iranian National Archives. The files on social history were scattered and necessitated a longer time to access. In Tehran, I also repeatedly visited the *Markaz-i Asnad-i Majlis* (Iranian Parliamentary Archives) and the *Mu’assissih-i Mutali’at-i Tarikh-i Mu’asir-i Iran* (Center for Contemporary Iranian History). At the former, obtaining any archival material was exceptionally difficult and accessing each source required the approval of the head archivist. In addition, the sources were not organized and my requested material often not found. At the latter, I was not able to locate relevant written material, yet the Center housed significant visual material.

My visits to the *Kitabkhanih va Markaz-i Asnad-i Astan-i Quds-i Razavi* in Mashhad and the *Kitabkhanih-i Ayatollah Mar’ashi Najafi* in Qum did not yield any sources yet provided interesting insights into private library and archives in Iran.

The women’s magazines and personal life-stories employed for the dissertation were almost exclusively accessed at the Middle Eastern and African Reading Room of the Library of Congress. My research at the National Archives in College Park did not yield any pertinent sources

directly relating to this dissertation. Minimal references to drug consumption patterns and venereal disease in Iran were, however, obtained.

The published primary sources in Arabic and Persian on temporary marriage, and to a lesser extent prostitution, were obtained at the *Rasul Jafariyan Library* in Qum and the *Institut Français du Proche-Orient* in Damascus.

The history of prostitution is almost entirely absent from the historiography of modern Iran. One scholar went so far as to argue that “there is no record that the issues of prostitution, drugs, and disease were publicly or privately addressed,” even while acknowledging the existence of Tehran’s red-light district in the 1970s.² Other scholars of modern Iran have remained silent on the subject of prostitution. While woman and gender as categories of analysis have made significant inroads into the historiography of modern Iran, the history of sexuality has recently begun to make appearances into Iranian historiography, though, at times, it is disregarded as identity politics.

The involvement of women in the political process in the twentieth century has to a large extent shaped the historiography of women and gender in Iran. Scholars such as Parvin Paidar, Mahnaz Afkhami, and Homa Hoodfar have charted women’s participation in national politics and highlighted the centrality of the “women’s question” to the

² Kamran Tallatof, *Modernity, Sexuality, and Ideology in Iran: the Life and Legacy of a Popular Female Artist* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 57.

discourses of modernity, revolution, and Islamism.³ Afsaneh Najmabadi's first monograph sought to signify the importance of gender to the writing of Iranian political and national history by rectifying the historical amnesia surrounding one of the major catalysts for the Constitutional Revolution, the sale of Iranian women and girls by peasants to pay taxes.⁴

More recently, Camron Michael Amin and Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet have expanded the history of women and gender in modern Iran. Amin's work utilizes a paradigm of "male guardianship" to define and explain the role of the state in the women's movement. He argues that Reza Shah's "women's awakening" project of 1936-1941 was informed by decades of previous public discussions on the "women's question" that eventually shaped policy.⁵ Locating state feminism within larger cultural trends, he locates female agency in the subsequent movement for equal rights in the 1940s. Kashani-Sabet's work has chronicled the centrality of women to the nationalist project and argues for the importance of maternalism rather than merely feminism to understandings of the women's rights

³ Homa Hoodfar, *The Women's Movement in Iran: Women at the Crossroads of Secularization and Islamization* (Paris: Women Living under Muslim Laws, 1999); Mahnaz Afkhami, "The Women's Organization of Iran: Evolutionary Politics and Revolutionary Change," in *Women in Iran: From 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, eds. Lois Beck and Guity Nashat (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁴ Afsaneh Najmabadi, *The Story of the Daughters of Quchan: Gender and National Memory in Iranian History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998).

⁵ Camron Michael Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman: Gender, State Policy, and Popular Culture, 1865-1946* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2002).

movement in Iran.⁶ Maternalism was closely linked to the hygiene movement in Iran and allowed for a language of nationalist politics that was channeled through new conceptions of the patriotic woman. Her discussion on marriage and sexuality is relevant to the present study as it delineates the growing conception of marriage by social reformers as the solution to prostitution and delineates marital hygiene as a response to prostitution and early marriages.

While the aforementioned works are by no means exhaustive of the research on women in Iran, they represent two major trends in Iranian women's and gender history. First, an overwhelming focus is placed on women's relationship and gender's significance, as a category, to politics, to political milestones, to the state, and to intellectuals. Such one-sided prominence of the state and political and intellectual elites is problematic when the major sources for the writing of such history have been the press, treatises, legal documents, and textbooks. This focus directly relates to the second trend, the absence of subaltern voices in the writing of women's and gender history. At a time when female literacy was at miniscule levels and male literacy astonishingly low, one is left to ponder the extent to which such conversations and debates materialized in the life of everyday illiterate Iranians. How did the changing discourse on women and the sweeping legal changes pertaining to their bodies affect

⁶ Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Conceiving Citizens: Women and the Politics of Motherhood in Iran* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

the lives of women, and men, who were categorically absent from such conversations?

While historians have overlooked subalterns, anthropologists have been fundamental in documenting the ways in which non-urban Iranians navigated the political changes in their lives and bargained with the social and political forces that dominated their lived experiences. The works of Erika Friedl, Julia Huang, and Lois Beck have contributed to understandings of how subaltern women—nomads in the latter two cases—navigate the structural forces that shape their lives.⁷ Shahla Haeri and Ziba Mir-Hosseini both have documented the different and often contradictory understanding of such seemingly straightforward legal concepts as marriage and Shiite Islam's stance on gender.⁸

While the history of sexuality in modern Iran has recently emerged into view, almost no attention has been paid to prostitution. Afsaneh Najmabadi's work on the *amrad*—the young male adolescent who was the object of desire for adult men—has challenged historians' twentieth- and twenty-first century experiences that perceive gender as a binary category between men and women. By refusing to overlook alternative modes of sexuality and sociality, she restores eroticism and homosociality

⁷ Erika Friedl, *Women of Deh Koh: Lives in an Iranian Village* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991); Julia Huang, *Tribeswomen of Iran: Weaving Memories among Qashqa'i Nomads* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Lois Beck, "Qashqa'i Women in Postrevolutionary Iran," in *Women in Iran: from 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, eds. Lois Beck and Guity Nashat (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

⁸ Haeri, *Law of Desire*; Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: the Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Marriage on Trial: a Study of Islamic Family Law Iran and Morocco Compared* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 1997).

to histories of modern Iran. While her work does little to locate female eroticism and female sociability, it has been significant in challenging prevalent binaries of gender and identifying “compassionate marriage” as an invention of Iranian intellectual encounter with Victorian respectability.⁹

The most comprehensive and broad scholarship on sexuality in modern Iran is unmistakably conducted by Janet Afary in her recent monograph, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*.¹⁰ Covering the struggle of women in Iran from the Constitutional Era to 2006, she charts the evolving conception of accepted sexuality in Iran and argues that the construction of modern sexuality which was influenced by Iran’s encounter with the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and Western Europe resulted in less fluid understandings of sexuality and penalized homosexuality and homoerotic love, both of which had been accepted in pre-modern Iran. Focused on European travelogues, literary sources, and print media, she maintains that the emergence of heterosexuality as the accepted form of sexual behavior went hand in hand with the construction of new gender roles. Subsequently, women’s struggle for equality and extended rights became secondary and never materialized.

⁹ Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

She further contends that while the newly imagined sexual economy that developed after the Iranian Revolution understood women as second-class citizens and reversed many of the legal gains women had made, it harbored a new Muslim-Iranian model of sexuality for the twenty-first century which resembled nothing in the decades preceding legal changes in the lives of women. While Afary's book is essential in bringing sexuality studies to Iranian history, the topic of prostitution is strikingly absent from its discussions except for a minimal mentioning of literary material that touched on prostitution.¹¹

While the inaccessibility of sources might explain an evasion of the topic of prostitution as a viable historical subject, the absence of substantial material on the history of women and gender during the second Pahlavi regime remains an enigma. The brief overview of scholarship above demonstrates that a major focus of the recent scholarship has been on the late Qajar and first Pahlavi period (1925-1941). Apart from women's political participation, one can claim that the 1950s, 1960s, and to some extent 1970s have been excluded from the historiography of women and gender in Iran, and historians of women and gender have overlooked this period.

In addition to Janet Afary's discussion of sexuality, one must mention Kamran Talattof's history of the Iranian actress, dancer, and poet, Shahrzad. Talattof chronicles Iran's struggle with modernity and

¹¹ Afary, *Sexual Politics*, 168-169.

female sexuality through the subaltern life of Sharzad, and argues that the reason modernity has failed in Iran is because of the absence of modern notions of sexuality.¹² Curiously, as the one study that is closest in spirit (nonelite and personal history) to the topic (prostitutes and dancers) and time-period (1940s onwards) of this dissertation, it has claimed that “no record” of public or private discussions on prostitution remains.

This study therefore focuses on an overlooked topic in modern Iranian history. While the study goes back as early as the 1930s and continues to the turn of the century, its major focus is on the post World War II period and particularly the three decades preceding the anti-Shah Revolution of 1979. Since in addition to prostitution this dissertation also addresses the issue of temporary marriage, a predominantly Shi'i practice, its discussion of temporary marriage has been broadened to also include intellectuals and religious commentary from Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, which contain sizeable Shi'i communities and/or Shi'i shrine cities.

Apart from Shahla Haeri's work on temporary marriage in Iran published over two decades ago, little, if any, scholarly attention has been paid to the social aspects of temporary marriage across the Middle East.¹³ In contrast, the study of the history of prostitution has been

¹² Talattof, *Modernity, Sexuality, and Ideology in Iran*, 220-222.

¹³For a jurisprudential discussion on temporary marriage see: Arthur Gribetz, *Strange Bedfellows: mut'at al-Nisa and mut'at al-Haj: A Study Based on Sunni and Shi'i*

slowly growing in the field of Middle Eastern history as evidenced by the burgeoning numbers of published articles on the topic. As the typical trajectory of the historiography of women and gender in the Middle East has focused on Egypt and Turkey, studies of prostitution in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic have been most forthcoming.¹⁴

A number of findings from these studies regarding prostitution in Muslim societies should be mentioned. First, research on the pre-modern

Sources of Tafsir, Hadith and Figh (Berlin: Schwarz, 1994); also: Juliet Williams, "Unholy Matrimony: Feminism, Orientalism, and the Possibility of Double Critique," *Signs* 34, no. 3 (spring 2009): 611-632.

¹⁴For the history of prostitution in Egypt see: Hanan Hammad, "Between Egyptian 'National Purity' and 'Local Flexibility': Prostitution in al-Mahalla al-Kubra in the First Half of the 20th Century," *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 3 (Spring 2011): 751-783; Hanan Kholoussy, "Monitoring and Medicalising Male Sexuality in Semi-Colonial Egypt," *Gender and History* 22, no. 3 (November 2010): 677-691; Khaled Fahmy, "Prostitution in Egypt in the Nineteenth Century," in *Outside In: On the Margins of the Modern Middle East*, ed. Eugene Rogan (New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2002); Liat Kozma, *Policing Egyptian Women: Sex, Law, and Medicine in Khedival Egypt* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011); Liat Kozma, "Wandering about as She Pleases: Prostitutes, Adolescent Girls, and Female Slaves in Cairo's Public Spaces, 1850-1882," *Hawwa: Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* 10 (2012): 18-36; For Prostitution in the pre-modern Ottoman Empire see: Abdul Karim Rafeq, "Public Morality in the 18th Century Ottoman Damascus," *Revue du Monde musulman et de la Méditerranée*, no 55-56 (1990): 180-196; Elyse Semerdjian, *'Off the Straight Path: Illicit Sex, Law, and Community in Ottoman Aleppo* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008); James Baldwin, "Prostitution, Islamic Law and Ottoman Societies," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 55 (2012): 117-152; Marinos Sariyannis, "Prostitution in Ottoman Istanbul, Late Sixteenth-Early Eighteenth Century," *Turcica* 40, (2008): 37-65; For the history of prostitution in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic see: Holly Shissler, "Womanhood Is Not for Sale: Sabiha Zekeriya Sertel against Prostitution and for Women's Employment," *Journal for Middle East Women's Studies* 4, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 12-30; Kyle Evered and Emine Evered, "Syphilis and Prostitution in the Socio-Medical Geographies of Turkey's Early Republican Provinces," *Health and Place*, 18, (2012): 528-535; Malte Fuhrmann, "Down and Out on the Quays of İzmir: European Musicians, Innkeepers, and Prostitutes in the Ottoman Port-Cities" *Mediterranean Historical Review* 24, no. 2 (December 2009): 169-18; Müge Özbek, "The Regulation of Prostitution in Beyoğlu, 1875-1915," *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 4 (July 2010): 555-568; For prostitution in Mandate Palestine see: Deborah Bernstein, "Gender, Nationalism and Colonial Policy: Prostitution in the Jewish Settlement of Mandate Palestine, 1918-1948," *Women's History Review* 21, no. 1 (February 2012): 81-100.

period suggests that prostitution was consistently policed and punished by a pattern of banishment and relocation, even in the cases of repeat offenders, despite Islamic legal prescriptions against sex outside of marriage.¹⁵ Second, in the modern period, the codification of the law often meant more rigid penalties for prostitutes and harsher surveillance of their bodies, a point that directly correlates to the third issue. Third, location and space were fundamental to female prostitutes' social and legal experiences. For example, in red-light districts in Egypt, prostitutes lived within the fabric of society and maintained an uneventful life. Outside of red-light districts and in unregulated prostitution zones the social attitudes towards prostitutes' presence were increasingly hostile. The colonial presence coupled with state modernization and centralization policies altered this situation and was destructive to the previous way of life of prostitutes.¹⁶ Visibility and boundary crossing constitute another significant finding of recent scholarship on prostitution in the Middle East. Both concepts are prevalent throughout and fundamental to this dissertation. In Egypt prior to colonial rule, prostitution was policed and penalized when it became visible or when boundaries of respectability were crossed.¹⁷

¹⁵ Elyse Semerdjian, "Sinful Professions: Illegal Occupations of Women in Ottoman Aleppo, Syria," *Hawwa*, 1, no. 1 (2003): 63; Marinos Sariyannis, "Prostitution in Ottoman Istanbul," 54.

¹⁶ Hammad, "Between Egyptian 'National Purity' and 'Local Flexibility,'" 753.

¹⁷ Liat Kozma, "Wandering as She Pleases," 24 and 26.

This dissertation contributes to the historiography of modern Iran and sexuality in the Middle East on a few levels. First, it points to the abundant possibilities for a study of modern Iran focused on nonelite agents. Modernization, centralization, and state policies shaped the experiences of female prostitutes, customers, and the men and women in their proximity, neighbors of prostitutes and petition writers against the presence of prostitution in neighborhoods, were as instrumental in shaping national policies on prostitution. While regulated prostitution in Iran must be understood in the context of the expanding political power of the state, female prostitutes were at the nexus of their communities and the state, and a study of prostitution in Iran reveals how local politics contributed to the shaping of national policy on prostitution across Iran to the detriment of female sex workers. This is a departure from the theoretical framework that sees the state as the acting force in determining the trajectory of Iranian life in a top to bottom pattern.

Instead, a study of prostitution reveals compelling evidence that the “problem” of prostitution was placed on the state agenda after repeated petitions and neighborhood complaints. Second, it contends that family and family politics were central to the imagination of a healthy and modern Iran. The problem of prostitution was as much a failure of families as anything else. Third, while the imagined quarrels between religion and modernization have permeated histories of modern

Iran, a study of prostitution in Iran suggests that religion and morality were only one factor that contributed to action.

While prostitutes, parents, customers, and neighbors embraced aspects of religion, they evaded or neglected other parts of it. In the same light, they negotiated with and navigated through other changing legal commands that were imposed on them. They exhibited autonomy and agency over their lives and worked through both religious and secular law to maintain their lived experiences. Despite religious doctrines prohibiting non-marital sexual encounters and scholars' approach to take such prescriptions at face value, morality and religion only occasionally affected prostitutes' lives and entered debates on prostitution. Last, the study of prostitution in Iran highlights trends and practices that have been located elsewhere in the Middle East.

The dissertation covers both a broad geography and time period. It utilizes archival sources on prostitution from most major Iranian cities, though Tehran clearly features more prominently. In its discussion of temporary marriage, it covers intellectual discourse from the early twentieth century to recent times from Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon, and in doing so, charts the notable similarities across time and space regarding the discussion of female sexuality in Islam, which influences social and legal policy in Iran, and directs personal actions for some Iranians.

The dissertation is divided into three parts, each including two chapters. The first part addresses the administration of prostitution and

efforts to segregate vice during the second Pahlavi State. Chapter one chronicles the solidification of Tehran's red-light district and the overall policy of making prostitutes invisible. The second chapter expands geographically to cover prostitution in various Iranian cities and argues that over time what was once an incoherent and fluid policy on prostitution gave way to systematic regulation and containment of female prostitutes across Iran. In the process it foregrounds the daily lives of female prostitutes. Part two aims to highlight the representation and control of the image of the prostitute, as sympathy for some forms of prostitution became, while popular disdain for other forms of it were expressed. The third chapter focuses on the fascination with prostitutes in popular culture and the myopic attitude towards them. As movies were an important medium of male entertainment, this chapter most clearly demonstrates the double standard of sexuality for men and women. The fourth chapter investigates the female reform movement in Tehran and the effort to "save" prostitutes and "educate" society about the family practices that led to prostitution.

The last section focuses on sexual ideology in Iran in the past few decades. The fifth chapter grapples with the relationship of prostitution to temporary marriage and covers a wide range of discourses in the second half of the twentieth century in Iran on both topics. In doing so, it synthesizes agents from the previous chapters and brings them together before moving to a discussion on temporary marriage and its important

relevance to feminist theory, the history of sexuality, and the place of prostitution in the Middle East. Since contemporary legal codes and laws in Iran proclaim to be based on Shi'i law, the last chapter of the dissertation takes a closer look at the clerical establishment's outlook on temporary marriage across geographic and temporal scope. In doing so, it moves beyond Iran and addresses the issue of Shi'i sexuality through an analysis of intellectual discourse and religious rulings on temporary marriage. I hope this chapter can serve as grounds for future research.

I must note, I neither see nor intend to treat prostitution or temporary marriage as static phenomena. The very definition of prostitution as a category is problematic since it is impossible to define prostitution in a vacuum; rather it must be understood in its historical context.¹⁸ I have attempted to stay as close as possible to my sources

¹⁸ For a sample of historical scholarship on prostitution in non-Western societies problematizing prostitution see: Amy Stanley, *Selling Women: Prostitution, Markets, and the Household in Early Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Christian Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai: a Social History, 1849-1949*, trans. Noel Castellino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Donna Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and the Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991); Katherine Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Laurie Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters: Prostitutes and Their Regulation in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990); Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003). For a sample of sociological scholarship on prostitution see: Joyce Outshoorn, *The Politics of Prostitution: Women's Movements, Democratic States and the Globalisation of Sex Commerce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Kamala Kempadoo, ed., *Sun, Sex, and Gold: Tourism and Sex Work in the Caribbean* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999); Kamala Kempadoo and others, eds., *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered: New Perspectives on Migration, Sex Work, and Human Rights* (Boulder, Paradigm Publishers, 2005); Kate Hardy and Sarah Kingston, *New Sociologies of Sex Work* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing,

and to reflect their perspectives, though at times I have used the term sex work—which I acknowledge is anachronistic—interchangeably with prostitution. This merely reflects my personal perspective of prostitution as a form of work.

Also, this dissertation is a study of female prostitution. This is not to suggest male prostitution did not exist. During my research, I came across only one archival document that mentioned male prostitution and as a result have chosen to focus on female prostitution, which was visible, widespread, and part of a frank public discussion on Iranian sexuality, masculinity, and womanhood. The dominant understanding of gender and sexuality saw female sexual desire as passive and invisible and respectable woman as innately asexual outside of marriage and passive sexually within marriage. Sex both within and outside of marriage remained the prerogative of men, so long as it did not threaten the institution and sanctity of the family. Masculinity was closely connected to sexuality and it was understood and expected that men would frequent prostitutes or temporary wives at some point. The spatial containment of prostitution in red-light districts across Iran, the epidemiological surveillance of their bodies, and their characterization as victims during the Pahlavi regime all point to such factors. While the Islamic government after the Revolution of 1979 outlawed prostitution

2010); Patty Kelly and Susan Dewey, *Policing Pleasure: Sex Work, Policy, and the State in Global Perspective* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Laura Maria Agustin, *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry* (New York: Zed Books, 2007).

and eradicated red-light districts, it continued to function under very similar sexual ideologies that expected men to seek and “need” sex outside the confines of permanent marriage. In this, it propagated another set of “deviant” and socially outcast women to address such needs and advertised temporary marriage as the solution to society’s sexual concerns. In both cases, the domestic and the sexual remained separate, and both prostitutes and temporary wives existed on the outskirts of society as outcasts and threats. Yet, despite being marginal, these women were understood by some as an integral part of an orderly society.

PART I. Urban Politics and Administering Prostitution

Chapter 1: The Politics of Regulation: Grassroots Protest, Controlled Space, and the Anti-Vice Campaign in Tehran, 1946-1959

Introduction

On Tuesday, February 25th, 1958, the Permanent Commission for the Prohibition of Vice held its first meeting at the Ministry of State's Office of Social Issues in Tehran. Present at the meeting were representatives from the Ministry of State, the Organization for the Fight against Poppy Cultivation and the Use of Opiates, and Tehran's Police Department. The Commission fits neatly within larger international trends where various committees and commissions were formed in urban and industrialized centers to combat prostitution and vice. In the United States, the second decade of the twentieth century witnessed a proliferation of municipal vice commissions and civic committees, and numerous cities across the country conducted investigations of urban prostitution.¹⁹ New York's Committee of Fourteen, Chicago's Committee of Nine, and El Paso's Committee of Ten are only a few examples.²⁰

After its first meeting, the Permanent Commission's members and its power grew exponentially. The Permanent Commission itself was the byproduct of years of grievances and letter writing from anxious citizens and an organized effort on the part of the Ministry of State to combat vice and particularly drug use and distribution. Over the course of the

¹⁹ Ann Gabbert, "Prostitution and Moral Reform in the Borderlands: El Paso, 1890-1920" *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12, no.4, 2003: 588.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 589 and 595.

previous years, numerous commissions, from within various governmental organizations and entities, had been charged with addressing the growing, and visible, problem of vice in Tehran. Yet, they all achieved little and proved short-lived. Hence the abovementioned Commission, beginning operations in February 1958, bore the term “permanent” in its official name. The Commission’s report to the prime minister argued that members should be appointed permanently for a prolonged and specified time and chosen from amongst the most respectable and well-regarded members of their organizations or departments.²¹ This was in response to previous accusations of corruption brought against members of previous commissions and widespread complaints and accusations against Tehran’s police precincts and officers on charges of corruption and bribery.

Over the next few months, the Commission held eleven more meetings and drafted reports and recommendations for various governmental agencies and particularly the prime minister’s office. This chapter follows the activities and recommendations of the Commission and highlights the process that led to its creation and the implementation of a widespread, and selective, crackdown against vice in Tehran and its surroundings. The fight against vice in Tehran was guided by the citizen’s desire to protect the purity and morality of families and women and by the Commission’s desire to combat crime

²¹ “Ta‘til-i Amakin-i Fisad va Ta‘qib-i Sahiban-i An,” Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 293001292, 697.

and corruption. Using police records, confidential intra-governmental memos, ministerial orders, and citizen complaint letters and petitions, this chapter highlights the politics of regulating space and demonstrates a policy of selective crackdowns and the tolerated containment of “immorality” on the part of the authorities. In doing so, the chapter illustrates some of society’s core attitudes towards sexuality: namely, the acceptance of prostitution as an inevitable social evil. Prostitution was tolerated so long as it was invisible and quasi-regulated.

While the fight against vice was defined as combating drinking, drug use, prostitution, and gambling, the authorities’ main crackdown was on drug use and distribution. Gambling was next on the agenda and prostitution followed. When the authorities did crack down on prostitution, it was selective. Certain houses of ill-fame were immediately shut down upon being reported. Others were only closed after repeated complaints. Still, some remained unchallenged. The latter was particularly the case in the area known popularly as Shahr-i Nau (New City), which became known as Tehran’s red-light district.

The deep connections this area had to organized crime and the presence of a handful of strong thugs connected to a few members of the majlis (parliament) and police may explain the delayed fight against corruption in this neighborhood. Yet, even when criminal leaders owning and operating many of the “houses of corruption” in the area were momentarily jailed, the women working in Shahr-i Nau were rarely

detained or fined. This was in stark contrast to the policy adopted for “crimes against modesty” in areas outside of Shahr-i Nau and streetwalking during this period. The selective implementation of policies and regulations on prostitution points to boundaries of deviance that could be tolerated. This process, as we know, is not unique to Iran, and elsewhere in Egypt and the Levant policies of relocation were adopted to address prostitution. In Egypt especially, prostitutes were able to operate with relative ease and freedom in the red-light district of Mahallah al-Kubra.²² In a sense the desire for social reform and the fight against vice and corruption existed alongside an attitude that regarded prostitution as a necessary social evil for the satisfaction of men’s sexual desires within contained spatial parameters. The solution was seen as the creation of “safe” space for “respectable” families and most importantly for married women and virgin girls. Hence, the utilization of the term “contained morality” to describe this process.

The chapter begins by depicting grassroots responses to and concerns with prostitution and the moral agenda behind them. It then moves to the official policies and politics associated with the anti-vice campaign, highlighting the selective nature of the movement. While prohibition, regulation, and decriminalization have historically manifested themselves as responses to prostitution, in Tehran during

²² Hanan Hammad, “Between Egyptian ‘National Purity’ and ‘Local Flexibility,’” 753.

this period, elements of all three surfaced as pragmatic solutions to prostitution, essentially creating a clear moral map of Tehran.

Grassroots Protest and Prostitution

By the second half of the twentieth century, Tehran's population and geography had steadily been growing; its population reached 1.5 million by 1956 and grew to about three million by 1966, signaling the rapid urbanization of the city.²³ This rapid urbanization alarmed many of Tehran's citizens and increased concerns about public morality and the visibility of vice, and particularly prostitution, in the city. In her recent work *Conceiving Citizens: Women and the Politics of Motherhood in Iran*, Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet clearly demonstrates the concern of Western missionaries, philanthropic organizations, and physicians along with Iranian writers with public hygiene and the growth of syphilis and gonorrhea in the first half of the twentieth century.²⁴ As Kashani-Sabet establishes, the various Western and Iranian authors used their claims of what they perceived as the rampant spread of venereal disease in Iran to comment about the moral character of Iranians and the need for moral reform.²⁵ While Kashani-Sabet demonstrates the concern of various writers with venereal disease and prostitution in the years not covered in this chapter, complaint letters and petitions from concerned citizens written to the prime minister's office confirm the "widespread" presence

²³ Ali Madanipour, *Tehran: the Making of a Metropolis* (West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons, 1998), 42.

²⁴ Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Conceiving Citizens*, 75-90.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

of prostitution in various districts of Tehran.²⁶ The term widespread is used here to denote that prostitution was in fact spread across the city rather than to point to its magnitude. It is difficult to determine the exact extent of the trade; however the complaint letters demonstrate the anxieties about the existence of prostitution in Tehran and the toll it was seen as taking on public morality and Iran's international image. Interestingly, concerns with public hygiene and venereal disease rarely surface in these letters. This section, then, is about efforts of residents of various neighborhoods of Tehran to create a clear moral map of Tehran and the desire to imagine the city as divided according to strict moral categories. In the process, these residents sought to order the sexual geography of Tehran according to their own moral map, which was developed around binaries of respectable versus not respectable and moral versus immoral. Historians of prostitution in other urban cities have delineated similar binaries. In the United States these binaries were often defined along the color lines of black and white, and reforming prostitution often served the purpose of maintaining or solidifying racial hierarchies.²⁷

²⁶ A considerable portion of this chapter is based on correspondence from citizens to the prime minister's office or between various government entities and the prime minister's office. It is important to note that rarely do the letters and correspondence bear mention the actual name of the prime minister. During the fourteen years covered in this paper, fifteen men became prime minister. What the people wrote to was the Office of the Prime Minister rather than a particular person. Therefore, this trend is reflected throughout the chapter and the names of the prime ministers are not mentioned unless they appear in the actual sources.

²⁷Emily Landau, *Spectacular Wickeness: Sex, Race and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 200.

While prostitution was heavily focused in the southwest of Tehran known as Shahr-i Nau, it also surfaced scattered throughout the rest of the city, and when it did, it created a moral panic on the part of neighboring residents, since it threatened the moral fabric of society and also caused an inconvenience for the citizens of Tehran. The line between the respected and the disreputable was clearly drawn as indicated in examples of panic over clients of the sex trade knocking on random doors looking for “the house of prostitution.”²⁸ The writers of one such letter from September 1946, Murteza Salihi and Muhammad Husayn Shimirani, asked the prime minister’s office to have the prostitute in their neighborhood evacuate her residence and moved to another location.²⁹

In 1946, another anonymous letter to the prime minister complained that twenty days earlier a prostitute had moved to his neighborhood and that thugs (*vilgardhay-i mahal va chaqukishha*) frequented her residence and created problems for residents and ruined the residents’ reputation. The author goes on to beg the minister’s office to order an investigation before the comforts of men and woman and particularly young girls were disturbed. What is notable and clearly spelled out in this letter is the recommendation that the accused woman be sent back to her original neighborhood and district, where she

²⁸ “Shikayat-i Sakinan-i Mantaqih-i Dah-i Tehran Nisbat bih Gustarish-i Fisad va Fahsha dar Mantaqih-i Mazbur,” Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 310000215, 43.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 40-42.

belonged.³⁰ The district the writer was referring to was Tehran's Tenth District, which encompassed the area Shahr-i Nau. The familiarity with the red-light district and the inherent expectation that the accused prostitute be sent back to her district signals an acceptance of prostitution so long as it was separated from the rest of society. In the popular perception, prostitution was much more closely linked to crime and moral corruption than with venereal disease and social hygiene, that is, moral not physical contagion. The main concern was to move prostitution away from respectable families and communities.

In October 1946 over ten residents of Bagh-i Nau neighborhood signed a letter to the prime minister complaining about the presence of a prostitute in their neighborhood. They wrote that her presence in their neighborhood had brought thugs and lowlifes into their neighborhood and asked the prime minister's office to look into the case to "save the dignity of innocent people."³¹

While numerous residents of Tehran filed complaints against prostitutes in their neighborhoods and expected prostitution to be contained within the red-light district, ordinary residents of District Ten in Tehran also felt that prostitutes needed to be moved out of their neighborhood and to the outskirts of the city. In other words, residents of District Ten, which encompassed the red-light district, saw themselves as separate from prostitutes and the vice surrounding their

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

neighborhood. They considered themselves and their families respected, modest, and entitled members of society and demanded that prostitutes be relocated.

Between July 1946 and May 1950, the Organization of Western Tehran and individual residents of District Ten wrote numerous angry letters to the prime minister, the minister of state and Ayatollah Kashani complaining about the plight of Tehran's Tenth District and the perceived rampant moral corruption of its prostitutes. While crime, brawls, drugs, and prostitution were prevalent in this district, the main concern raised was with prostitution, and the expectation of residents was that prostitutes immediately be relocated to locations outside the city.

Abbas Bahar Dust, a resident of the Tenth District, wrote to the prime minister on July 1946 complaining of the "horrible" and "shameful" sights residents and particularly female residents of the neighborhood had to witness. He then went on to ask whether it was acceptable for ten thousand modest families to be sacrificed for the whims and desires of "a bunch of corrupt individuals."³² On April 1948, Mr. Bahar Dust once again wrote a letter to the prime minister indicating that authorities demanded to know why he had moved his family to such a neighborhood and that he was not receiving a helpful response from them.³³ Yet again, on April 1950, he wrote to the prime minister as well as the majlis. He claimed that while the police had been tasked with

³² *Ibid.*, 60.

³³ *Ibid.*

relocating the women and were ordered to find them a new suitable location, no such promises were kept, and he complained that the prostitutes were now expanding their operations in other areas of the neighborhood.³⁴

The problem here was the rapid urbanization of Tehran. Decades earlier, what was now labeled Shahr-i Nau was in the outskirts of Tehran and scarcely inhabited. The rapid urbanization and growth of Tehran meant that Shahr-i Nau was now part of the city. Hence, new families had moved to the area and co-existed alongside prostitutes. In June 1947, the Western Tehran Association wrote a letter to the Ministry of State citing the abovementioned fact. They argued that previous authorities had the foresight to prevent the mixing of “corrupt” women with the rest of society therefore preventing the degradation of noble (*najib*) families. Now that Tehran had grown, chaste families were in danger of corruption and their modesty and chastity (*'iffat va nijabat*) were in danger. The Association complained that rather than relocate the women to other areas, they were now allowed to remain in the proximity of respectable families. The Association requested that the prostitutes be relocated elsewhere to guarantee the future morality of one hundred thousand noble families, a number that was ten times Mr. Bahar Dust’s original estimate.³⁵ Thirty-seven days later, the Association wrote yet another letter, complaining no action was taken and families in the

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

neighborhood continued to live in unacceptable conditions which threatened their honor.³⁶

As indicated in the letter above, citizens rarely expected the eradication of prostitution, but understood their own respectability in the denunciation of prostitution. What they more often than not sought was the exclusion of prostitution from their neighborhoods. Prostitution was seen as an inevitable social ill that needed to be contained and more importantly separated from the rest of society. In this light, both residents adjacent to Tehran's red-light district and those in Tehran's other neighborhoods sought to have prostitutes removed from their neighborhoods and away from the eyes of their women and children. Prohibition was rarely raised as an expected solution. The realities of social life, politics, and corruption within Tehran's police department, however, made relocation a slow and at times far reaching goal.

In addition, the complaint letters also highlight a grievance system which, to many citizens, appeared as an important vehicle to exert their rights as citizens and attain their expectations from the government. On the other hand, the complaint letters rarely, if ever, indicted the government or high officials within it for the problems set forth; rather they focused on local authorities as the perpetrators in their fight against prostitution, pointing to a process of self-regulation by the writers of the complaint letters.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

Police Corruption, Politics, and the Urban Geography of Vice

The existence of corruption within Tehran's police force is evident through the letters written by citizens and the inter-departmental memos between the prime minister's office and other ministries. As indicated in the previous section, most complaint letters were written directly to the Office of the Prime Minister, and many complained that they had already attempted to solve the problem of prostitution in their neighborhoods through the police precinct in their district. They argued that the police either took bribes from prostitution houses and did not prosecute them or in cases protected them. In September 1957, the residents of Sayyid Khandan area wrote to the minister of state protesting the move of a prostitute into their neighborhood. Over the course of seven months, they repeatedly complained to the police precinct without any results. In retaliation for their complaints, they argued, vagrants harassed residents and threatened them if they continued to complain.³⁷

In another letter to the minister of state, the residents of Sirah-i Zarrabkhanih, in northeastern Tehran, begged the Minister to send reputable inspectors to personally investigate the house of prostitution (*fahishih khanih*) in their neighborhood, since the police protected and supported the house. They argued that in no way did they intend to insult the police or army, but could no longer tolerate the situation.³⁸ In

³⁷ "Ta'til-i Amakin-i Fisad va Ta'qib-i Sahiban-i An," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 293001292, 614.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 479.

yet another letter to the prime minister's office, residents of District Three, located in northern Tehran, argued that prostitutes had rented two houses near the French embassy and were spreading corruption and causing the demise of morality in District Three. Despite their complaints to the local and central police, no action had been taken to remove the prostitutes.³⁹

The repeated complaints and letters to the Office of the Prime Minister and the minister of state signal a clear dissatisfaction and mistrust towards the police in Tehran. Many individuals believed the police systematically took bribes from criminals and one writer testified that the criminals themselves suggested that contacting the police for help was a useless effort, since they would be released immediately after paying bribes.⁴⁰ This was especially the case in Shahr-i Nau, where organized crime ran deep and police protected criminals. Situated in the southwest of Tehran, by the 1960s, Shahr-i Nau spanned roughly 135000 square meters and encompassed 269 houses that were operated by 174 individuals, with 1258 prostitutes living on the premises. The prostitutes lived and work in the neighborhood, and the area contained most of their needs, as it included shops, cinemas, medical facilities, and a police precinct.⁴¹

³⁹ "Shikayat-i Sakinan-i Mantaqih-i Dah-i Tehran Nisbat bih Gustarish-i Fisad va Fahsha dar Mantaqih-i Mazbur," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 310000215, 88.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴¹ Farman-Farmaian, *Piramun-i Ruspigari dar Shahr-i Tehran* (Tehran: Amuzishgah-i 'Ali Khadamat-i Ijtima'i: 1969), first chapter.

While elsewhere in Tehran appealing to the prime minister's office produced more desirable outcomes, in Shahr-i Nau, even with an order from the prime minister's office, change was very slow to come. By 1958 however, the prime minister's office had ordered the Permanent Commission for the Fight against Vice (*kumisiyun-i da'imi-i mubarizih ba fīsad*) to take serious measures to address vice in Tehran. However, even with an appeal to the prime minister's office, it was often difficult to achieve the desired results, and the relocation of prostitutes often depended on the letter writer and the location of prostitution. In other words, after a complaint letter had been filed with the prime minister's office, some neighborhoods witnessed the immediate relocation of prostitutes while others continued to repeatedly complain.

Often, in cases where houses of prostitution were immediately shut down and/or relocated, it was either because of its proximity to certain locations or the power of the individual setting forth the complaint. Rarely did an investigation ensue immediately for "regular" citizens. In April 1954, the principal of Alburz High School, a well-known high school in Tehran, wrote a letter to the minister of culture alerting him to the presence of a house of prostitution (*fahishih khanih*) near the northern section of the school and close to its dormitories. The principal warned that the women displayed themselves in front of the students and their actions would surely cause the downfall and deceiving of students.

Before an untoward event occurred, he asked the minister to order the closing of this nest of corruption (*lanih-i fisad*).⁴²

Two weeks later, the head of the *shahrbani* (police) wrote to the minister of culture informing him that even before the letter had officially reached his office through bureaucratic channels, the police force had vacated the premises and moved the prostitutes.⁴³ When compared to other complaint letters repeated over and over, the immediacy with which the prostitution house near Alburz High School was shut down is astounding and suggests a fear associated with the proximity of prostitutes to students. What is also noteworthy is that unlike other cases where citizens complained to the prime minister's office after witnessing no action from the police department, in this case, the head of the police department himself immediately wrote to the minister of culture assuring him that necessary actions had already been taken. The prominence of the Alburz High School and its importance in Tehran's education circles may account for this expediency. In another example relating to a high school, the principal of Manuchihri High School and the residents near it complained to the prime minister's office about the existence of a house of prostitution (*fahishih khanih*) in their neighborhood.⁴⁴ The deputy to the prime minister ordered the head of

⁴² "Darkhast-i Mudir-i Dabiristan-i Alburz dar Khusus-i Ta'tili-i Markaz," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 297018486, 2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁴ I would like to *emphasize* that while the terminology used in this chapter to refer to women engaged in sex work or their actions contains implicit and explicit derogatory connotations, in no way and by no means is it used here to place a value

Tehran's *shahrbani* to immediately investigate and report back so the prime minister could be informed of the progress and the measure being taken.⁴⁵

A month later, the deputy to the prime minister once again wrote to the head of the *shahrbani* instructing him to immediately provide a follow-up in regards to the initial complaint.⁴⁶ It is only after this second letter from the prime minister's office that the head of the *shahrbani* informs the prime minister's office that Aqdas Ma'rufih⁴⁷ (Aqdas the Prostitute) had been arrested and sent to the Justice Department for sentencing.⁴⁸

The prominence of high school principals and the proximity of the houses of prostitution to students created a sense of urgency, and the police commissioner had been instructed to immediately follow up. In two other cases, the police commissioner informs the prime minister's office that the issue of prostitution had been resolved. In the first case, Haj Shaykh Haydar Niyavarani wrote to the prime minister's office complaining of the presence of a *fahishih khanih* in the Udlajan

judgment on the actions of the women. I would have chosen to refer to the women, in the context of their work environment, as sex workers; yet this term would clearly be anachronistic. Hence, I have chosen to stay close to the sources and attempted a more accurate translation to reflect the values and morals of the time period covered.

⁴⁵ "Shikayat-i Sakinan-i Mantaqih-i Dah Tehran Nisbat bih Gustarish-i Fisad va Fahsha dar Mantaqih-i Mazbur," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 310000215, 27.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁷ It remains unknown whether the names mentioned in the sources were real or aliases used by prostitutes or assigned by the police. As can be expected, in interviews prostitutes mention adopting names that were different from their more traditional birth names.

⁴⁸ "Shikayat-i Sakinan-i Mantaqih-i Dah Tehran Nisbat bih Gustarish-i Fisad va Fahsha dar Mantaqih-i Mazbur," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 310000215, 21.

neighborhood. As with other examples, his repeated appeals to the police precinct were ignored, and he asked the prime minister to send an investigator to inspect the situation and order necessary changes.⁴⁹ As a religious man, and presumably prominent member of his community, Shaykh Niyavarani's complaint was well received by the prime minister's office, whose officials wrote to the head of *shahrbani* ordering him to immediately prevent the un-Islamic behavior taking place.⁵⁰ This is one of the rare instances that religion was mentioned. Less than ten days later, the police commissioner wrote to inform the premier's office that the "immodest" women had been moved and their case sent to the Ministry of Justice.⁵¹

In the second case where expedited action was taken to address resident grievances, Abbas Bijarchi complained about the presence of "known women" in his neighborhood and across from the French embassy. In this case, the head of the Special Investigation Task Force of the premier's office conducted an investigation and sent the results of the investigation and the women's confession to the Ministry of Justice instructing them to follow up on the case.⁵² While it is impossible to know the status of Mr. Bijarchi and his background, the sheet on which he wrote his letter indicates his prominence or at least his wealth. Unlike many of the letters which were handwritten on lined paper, Mr. Bijarchi's

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 92.

letter was typed on a sheet bearing his seal and name. In addition, the customized paper bearing his name also carried his telephone number, another sign of his social status and wealth in 1946.

What these cases have in common is the expediency with which the prime minister's office demanded a response from the police commissioner's office and the immediate action taken to remove the houses of prostitution. The plight of the women working in these houses is unknown, yet ironically, that is the point. The goal was to remove the women when prominent members complained about their presence. The proximity of the houses of prostitution near embassies was often another rationale people used for the speed of an investigation and relocation. The complaint letters indicate an appeal to save Iran's international image and highlight that the *fahishih khanih* in their neighborhood was in close proximity to the French embassy, Indian embassy or near the American School.

"Regular" citizens were often less fortunate even when the prime minister's office ordered an investigation by the police force. In one case, the prime minister's office ordered an investigation into the whorehouses operated by Aqdas Bacchidar and Asghar Isfahani. The *shahrbani* responded by conducting an investigation and reporting that Aqdas was in hiding and refused to come into the precinct for questioning.⁵³ In other cases, the police department denied and rejected the facts of complaints

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 37.

and argued their investigation found that no such houses of ill fame existed. The head of the Special Investigation Department of the premier's office demanded answers from the police department as to why it released an owner of a "bad house" only one hour after his detention, allowing him to resume corrupt work.⁵⁴ The police commissioner responded that no such house was found and the residents of the neighborhood denied any knowledge of such a house.⁵⁵ While it is safe to assume in some cases false accusations were made, such accusations were often marked by a lack of signature and no known return address. In addition, the questionable complaint letters often attacked individual members of the police force and requested they be removed or replaced rather than requesting the relocation of prostitutes to outside of their neighborhoods.

While it was possible to have prostitutes removed and relocated from Tehran's neighborhoods, the case was quite different in Tehran's red-light district, as indicated by Mr. Bahar Dust's repeated letter writing and complaints. Between 1946 and 1950, he and other residents of District Ten wrote numerous letters requesting the prostitutes to be moved from their neighborhoods. After years of grievances, when it became evident that no action would be taken, they requested to have the prostitutes limited to only one street. In his last letter written in May 1950 to the Office of the Prime Minister, the Parliament, and the Senate,

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

he complained about the excessive spread of prostitution in District Ten and argued that his last recourse would be to seek the assistance of the Shah.⁵⁶ In addition to Mr. Bahar Dust, the Organization of Western Tehran also wrote numerous letters and complaints to various governmental agencies. Unlike in other districts of Tehran, where the prime minister's office ordered an immediate investigation and relocation of prostitutes, for District Ten, a commission was appointed to investigate the situation and make recommendations. The commission's findings argued that:

Within a free and democratic system, it is not possible to force people to live or not to live in a certain area unless it is under the law, and then only when the court orders such, because of the committing of a crime. If the government deems necessary it can pursue prostitutes for having a whore house and minimize their influence in the neighborhood; yet it is more important for the Ministry of Health to prevent the spread of transmitted disease.⁵⁷

This recommendation was clearly in stark contrast to the strategy adopted in other areas of Tehran. However, the Tenth District had been designated as the area for prostitutes and, it seems, as long as they were contained within that neighborhood, authorities did little to prosecute them, despite repeated complaints from residents. It is also possible to argue that the presence of organized crime in the neighborhood and the corruption of the police force in the district hampered any efforts of change. While Mr. Bahar Dust and other residents were promised that the government was looking for another suitable area to relocate the prostitutes, the move never took place. Some documents indicate that

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

the Ministry of State was indeed seeking another location for the prostitutes and was actively seeking to demolish Shahr-i Nau and to erect a public park in its place, as evidenced by its request for a loan to designate a new area for prostitutes. However, this relocation of prostitutes from the red-light district and conversion of the space into a public leisure space remained a theoretical recommendation and never came to fruition. It was only after the Islamic Revolution in 1979 that Shahr-i Nau was demolished by force.

In sum, the inability or the refusal of the police department to address prostitution during this period in Tehran created much frustration and distrust of the police force, and the prime minister's office became the people's last recourse. The constant bypassing of the police and direct writing to the Office of the Prime Minister, the complaints about corruption and bribery among the police and the repeated resurfacing of houses of prostitution after they were effectively shut down promoted the special investigator of the premier's office to recommend the creation of a commission from various organizations to construct a conclusive plan to address prostitution.⁵⁸ Separated from the day to day realities of the interaction between complainants, the police force, and prostitutes, they sought to address citizen concerns while modernizing and rehabilitating the city.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 8 and 9.

Drugs, Sex, Gambling, and the Law

The repeated complaints by residents of Tehran, and perhaps more importantly, the entry of the topic into the press expedited the necessity for an organized and coherent approach to the problem of vice in Tehran. However, the approach taken was not always cohesive and symmetrical and at times clashes occurred between various organizations and governmental entities as to how to handle the situation. In addition, the political realities of the time and the prevalence of organized crime in Shahr-i Nau meant that despite repeated attempts to destroy and relocate the red-light district it would remain intact. By 1957, an independent investigative unit had been established by Tehran's police force (*Idarih-i Polis-i Tehran*) that could conduct investigations without interference from police precincts and districts.⁵⁹ In addition, the Permanent Commission for the Fight against Vice held extensive power and authority to eradicate vice in Tehran and its surroundings. In addition to Shahr-i Nau, during the same period, prostitution was also prevalent in the roadways leading to Tehran in Karaj Road and Shimiranat Road. The former connected Tehran to the town of Karaj on the west of the city and the latter road connected Tehran on the north to the neighborhoods of Shimiranat and Qulhak.

The situation in the "houses of corruption" along the roads leading to Tehran was quite different from Shahr-i Nau. The buildings were

⁵⁹ "Ta'til-i Amakin-i Fisad va Ta'qib-i Sahiban-i An," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 293001292, 733.

scattered along the road and it appears guests would rent a room to engage in carnal behavior. Often, the families of the owners lived elsewhere in the city, and the *mihmankhanih* (guest house/motel) only served as a meeting place for individuals wanting to engage in sex, drugs, and/or gambling. While Shahr-i Nau was run by a number of rival thugs who held much power over the neighborhood, the *mihmankhanihs* along Tehran's roads were much less organized. They had fewer connections to politicians and police and hence were easier targets for reform. Therefore, when the Permanent Commission began its crackdown on vice, it disproportionately focused on closing down the *mihmankhanihs* along Karaj and Shimiranat Roads. In addition, the fight against prostitution also meant a crackdown on streetwalking and vagrant women.

While the police's fight against prostitution was selective in nature and targeted certain groups of prostitutes and particular locations for prostitution, in the grand picture of the fight against vice, prostitution only played a small role. The majority of the attention of the police force focused on drug use and distribution followed by gambling.

During this period, Iranian criminal law was vague on charges against prostitution, as the selling of one's body in and of itself was not criminalized. What the law did penalize was pimping, facilitating prostitution, and adultery. Article 211 of the Iranian Criminal Code punished individuals with six months to three years in prison and a fine of 250-5000 riyals for the following persons: "a pimp or individual who

erects or maintains a house of prostitution or hires a woman to please the lusts of others.”⁶⁰

Based on article 213 of the Criminal Code anyone whose livelihood was fully or partially based on the earnings of a prostitute, or anyone who protected a prostitute in her profession would be penalized with six months to two years’ imprisonment.⁶¹ In addition, based on Article 212 of the Iranian Criminal Code any married women who had an illicit sexual relation with a man, any married man who had an illicit sexual relation with a woman, or any man who had an illicit sexual relation with a married woman was penalized from six months to three years’ jail time.⁶² In other words, under the law, prostitution per se was not criminalized. However, forming a house of prostitution, aiding in prostitution or benefiting from prostitution was illegal and penalized. Also, adultery, and not *zina*, extra-marital sex per se, was criminalized, as the law protected the institution of marriage. The punishment for drug use, however, appears much more lenient when the prescribed imprisonment periods for prostitution related offences and drug use are compared. Based on article 275 of the Criminal Code, the public consumption of opium, heroin, cocaine, hashish, morphine, and alcohol was penalized with imprisonment from three months to six months, and any and all items and pieces used to consume/inhale drugs that were

⁶⁰ Ahmad Kamangar, ed., *Majmu'ih-i Qavanin-i Jazayi va Qanun-i Asasi ba Tamam-i Islahat ta Akhir-i 1330* (Tehran: Chap-i Taban, 1951/1952), 84.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 85.

seen in public would immediately be confiscated and destroyed by the authorities. The creation of an opium house or gambling house was punished by six months to three years in prison.⁶³

What is notable here is the emphasis on the fact that the law only penalized *isti'mal-i alani* or public and open use of drugs, and that the penalties for facilitating prostitution were harsher than those for drugs. The official actions of the police force were far from reflecting the law, and numerous individuals were sentenced for drug possession and distribution in their homes. The evidence the police often used to convict individuals was the creation of a *shirihkish khanih* or house of opium, even though the amount of drugs confiscated often suggested their possession for personal use. During the first eight months of 1336 (April-November 1958), the investigative branch of Tehran's police department reported the following confiscations and closings:⁶⁴

1. 1647 opium lamps (instrument used for the consumption of opium)
2. 45.133 kg of pure opium
3. 17.482 kg burnt opium
4. 3.652 kg cooked opium (*shirih-i matbukh*)
5. 3.357 kg opium remains (*tufalih-i shirih*)
6. 4.600 kg hashish

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁶⁴ "Ta'til-i Amakin-i Fisad va Ta'qib-i Sahiban-i An," Iranian National Archives Tehran, 293001292, 48.

7. 3.992 kg liquid opium
8. 164 gambling houses
9. 37 prostitution houses

Considering the fact that during each arrest, on average between 1-30 grams of opium and 1-2 opium lamps were confiscated, the above-mentioned numbers point to an astounding crackdown on drug use in the city within people's homes.

During the last three months of the year 1336 (1958), the investigative branch of Tehran's police department reported 234 discoveries and arrests. Of the 234, 29 were related to gambling, 8 were related to prostitution charges and 197 were related to drugs.⁶⁵ During one of the incidents involving the arrests, the police were informed that in one of the houses of prostitution in Shahr-i Nau drugs were being used. The police raided the house and merely arrested the men using drugs and confiscated their drugs.⁶⁶ In another reports, the head of the *shahrbani* reports the closing of 79 houses of corruption. Of the 79 closings, 11 related to gambling, 1 to prostitution and 68 to drug use.⁶⁷ Of the 146 arrests made in the first month of 1337, 10 related to gambling, 136 to drug use and none to prostitution.⁶⁸

In yet another police report, of the 187 arrests, 13 related to gambling, 173 to drugs and only 1 to prostitution. This police statement

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 267-293.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 291.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 294-306 and 321-334.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 218-228 and 193-206.

is particularly interesting as it breaks down the arrests by neighborhoods. For the district encompassing Shahr-i Nau no arrests were made for prostitution, while numerous arrests were made for drug use. The one prostitute who was arrested seems to have been the repeat offender Aqdas, who was mentioned earlier.⁶⁹ Within Tehran, it appears that the police were more lenient on prostitution unless it became visible or existed near important landmarks such as schools. In contrast, they were much harsher on drug use. While the law explicitly penalized the public use of drugs or the creation of opium houses, the police took an active approach in investigating suspect's homes. In some cases, no drugs were discovered but the police argued that the smell of opium was present and hence arrested individuals.

While prostitution within homes was less targeted, streetwalking was penalized. During the second half of Farvardin 1337(April 1958), eighty women were arrested for streetwalking. These arrests almost exclusively took place at night and the repeated arrest of some of the women within the two-week span suggests that they were not detained for long at the police stations where they had been sent.⁷⁰ What was deemed inappropriate and criminal was not necessarily the sexual act itself but who performed it and where. Shahr-i Nau was deemed an acceptable space for illicit sexual behavior and the women occupying it

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 71-91. For earlier discussion on Aqdas see page 41 of this dissertation and "Shikayat-i Sakinan-i Mantaqih-i Dah Tehran Nisbat bih Gustarish-i Fasad va Fahsha dar Mantaqih-i Mazbur," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 310000215, 37.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 95, 207-216, 229-234,237-238, 253-259.

considered beyond rescue. While some authorities and newspapers expressed sympathy for women who lived and worked in Shahr-i Nau, the authorities did little to change their plight. Instead they focused on moving streetwalkers out of the public eye and preventing *fahsha* on the roads leading to Tehran.

The Permanent Commission for the Fight against Vice

When the Permanent Commission began work in 1958, it was granted extensive power and authority, and two prominent members emerged as the strong leaders who drove the new wave of crackdowns against vice in Tehran: Mr. Tabrizi head of the Office for Social Issues and Mr. Khalil Shahi head of Tehran's police force. Little in the Commission's minutes from its official meetings addresses the process and influences behind its formation, yet the Commission in ways brings to mind the efforts of the Committee of Fourteen in New York to curb vice in the first two decades of the twentieth century in the emerging urban space of New York. The Committee envisioned criminal law as the most effective measure to reform private morals and eliminate vice,⁷¹ which over time culminated in the closing of sanctioned red-light districts and the onset of alcohol prohibition in the United States.⁷² These reformers in New York, along with their counterparts in cities as far as Chicago, New Orleans, and Denver sought to impose specific notions of morality, social

⁷¹ Thomas Mackey, *Pursuing Johns: Criminal Law Reform, Defending Character, and New York City's Committee of Fourteen, 1920-1930* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005), 26.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 7.

hygiene, and race relations on emerging urban spaces in the early decades of the twentieth century in the United States.

Historians of prostitution across geographic spaces have hinted at the ways anti-vice and prostitution policies in the United States and other European countries have inspired and at times shaped social hygiene policies in other areas. Concerning Mexico City, Katherine Bliss has highlighted the influence of the social hygiene and public health movements in the United States and Europe on reformers addressing prostitution in Mexico as they positioned prostitution reform at the heart of social improvement and state building.⁷³ Similarly, Yvonne Svanstrom considers the importation of ideas and policies, particularly the regulatory health inspections of prostitutes in Paris, to explain the intensified regulatory efforts against prostitution in Stockholm in the nineteenth century.⁷⁴ One can speculate as to outside influences on prostitution policies in Tehran during this period, yet clearly mapping, controlling, and maintaining the moral geography of this rapidly growing urban space were on the agenda of both state officials and urban residents, and female prostitution was centrally implicated in the making of urban order.

⁷³ Katherine Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2001), 98.

⁷⁴ Yvonne Svanstrom, *Policing Public Women: the Regulation of Prostitution in Stockholm 1812-1880* (Stockholm: Atlas Akademi, 2000), 79.

As mentioned earlier, considerable focus was placed on eradicating drug use within people's personal spaces, streetwalking, and vagrancy. In addition, the Commission sternly lobbied to have the *mihmankhanihs* on the roads leading to Tehran closed. On May 10, 1958, with backup from Tehran's police department, the Commission raided the guest houses, arrested the women working and the men owning the houses and shut down the houses by removing their signs and revoking their licenses.

The scattered nature of the guest houses and their lack of organization compared to Shahr-i Nau, where organized crime prevailed, made them easier targets for reform. In addition, women who conducted business in the guest houses were regarded as coming from respectable families, hence making their crime more appalling. Mr. Tabrizi argued that among the women who worked in these houses and were arrested was the wife of an army officer, daughter of an ayatollah, the wife of an employee of the Ministry of Justice, newlywed brides, and even two pregnant women.⁷⁵ The goal of this crackdown was to send the women back to their families to prevent the perceived crisis in marriage and the imagined deceiving (*farib*) of girls.⁷⁶ Interestingly, Shahr-i Nau's presence was rarely mentioned as a threat to the institution of marriage by authorities, yet the guest houses along the roads leading to Tehran were

⁷⁵ "Ta' til-i Amakin-i Fisad va Ta' qib-i Sahiban-i An," Iranian National Archives Tehran, 29300129, 635.

⁷⁶ The widespread concern with the deceit (*farib*) of girls will be discussed in depth in the following chapters.

deemed avenues where married women and young girls from respectable families fell victim to vice and corruption. These women were “worth” saving while there was less hope for those already in Shahr-i Nau. According to Mr. Tabrizi’s account, during the raid, a total of twenty-one men and nineteen women were arrested and sent to the police station, and the raid was heralded as a great victory in the fight against vice and corruption in Tehran.⁷⁷ In the subsequent raid on *mihmankhanihs* in the Uzgul suburbs, a total of three “locations of corruption” were closed and fifteen women and thirteen men were arrested.⁷⁸ The numbers of arrests of female sex workers in the suburbs of Tehran noted by Mr. Tabrizi are miniscule in comparison to the extensive presence of prostitutes in Shahr-i Nau. According to Mr. Tabrizi’s personal report on Shahr-i Nau, over a thousand prostitutes worked and lived in Shahr-i Nau, which makes the arrests and closings along the roadways more questionable.

The women working in the *mihmankhanihs* clearly had more to lose from detention and arrest, and conceivably an analysis of class and socioeconomic background could be applied to account for the different attitudes towards the prostitutes in the *mihmankhanihs* versus those in Shahr-i Nau. After the major raid, the women were placed in police cars and driven to the police station. On the road to Tehran, two of the women convinced the officer taking them to make a stop at Shahr-i Nau, where

⁷⁷ “Ta‘til-i Amakin-i Fisad va Ta‘qib-i Sahiban-i An,” Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 293001292, 339 and 635.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 787.

they hired two other prostitutes for 240 riyals each to impersonate them. Upon arriving at the police station, the appearance of the women from Shahr-i Nau alarmed Mr. Tabrizi. According to his report, he immediately recognized the deception since the initially-arrested women's appearances indicated that they were married.⁷⁹ The considerable ease with which prostitutes working in the *mihmankhanihs* were able to hire prostitutes from Shahr-i Nau to replace them and the immediate acceptance of the offer by prostitutes in Shahr-i Nau raise interesting questions about the social nature of prostitution in Tehran which will be further explored in the following chapter.

Additionally, it is important to note the clash between the gendarmerie and Tehran's police force, the former in charge of maintaining order along the roadways leading to Tehran and the latter responsible for within Tehran's city limits. By some account, during the police operation gendarmes went as far as shooting at the police in their effort to stop the police and apprehend the suspects themselves. The head of the gendarmerie argued that the roadways were outside of the jurisdiction of Tehran's police force and the gendarmerie should have been responsible for providing order and enforcing the law in the roadways.⁸⁰ The press portrayed the clash as an effort by the gendarmerie to uphold vice and to promote corruption by fighting against rather than for safety, security, and morality.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 639-640 and 635-636.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 801-802 and 745.

The raids on the guest houses along Tehran's roads also generated mixed views in the press. Some magazines praised the efforts to fight vice in Tehran, but most saw it as a miniscule attempt in the fight against vice in the city. Citing the history of prostitution in cities of modern countries such as Paris and London, magazines such as *Ittila'at-i Haftigi*, *Asiyay-i Javan*, and *Taraqqi* argued that a forceful crackdown on prostitution would not only spread vice throughout the city but make it more difficult for the police to regulate and keep prostitution out of Tehran's neighborhoods. At least some literate Iranians, then, were well aware of the regulation policies adopted across Europe and used this as evidence to argue against complete prohibition of prostitution. Victorian England is particularly well studied for its adoption of a widespread regimen of regulating sexuality at home and in the Colonies during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The management of commercial sexuality throughout the Empire contributed to a British tradition of modernity that was rationalized through military and imperial goals and was promoted as a matter of security.⁸¹ The United States during the late decades of the nineteenth century also witnessed a wide toleration of regulation and many cities regulated vice through scheduled arrests,

⁸¹ Philip Howell, *Geographies of Regulation: Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the Empire* (Cambridge: University Press, 2009), 229.

where madams would appear in court and pay fines in scheduled intervals.⁸²

New Orleans' Storyville is perhaps the most notorious and well-documented example of regulated prostitution in United States, where racist businessmen sought to contain illicit and interracial sex from contaminating "respectable society."⁸³ In St. Paul the system of regulation propagated by city officials, police officers, and the medical profession functioned to minimize disorder and to facilitate the maintenance of an orderly society.⁸⁴ These examples, however, should not suggest that regulation represented a ubiquitous approach to prostitution. Rather, when authorities in different cities embraced regulation as a pragmatic policy to address prostitution, they did so for varying reasons, under different circumstances, and by way of a host of means. While in the United States regulation was short-lived and followed by years of prohibition and the criminalization of sex, in Iran, during the Pahlavi period, segregation of prostitution and regulation continued to remain the dominant approach.

The press during this period was the most vocal agent in challenging state strategies towards prostitution. Daily *Ittila'at* questioned the double standard and selective prohibition of prostitution and wondered why women in Shahr-i Nau were not seen as human

⁸² Joel Best, *Controlling Vice: Regulating Brothel Prostitution in St. Paul, 1865-1883* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 26.

⁸³ Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness*, 107.

⁸⁴ Best, *Controlling Vice*, 99.

beings worthy of social support and safety.⁸⁵ The press also severely reprimanded the gendarmerie since it clashed with Tehran's police force in its fight against vice in the roadways leading to Tehran, signaling that dealing with the moral character of Tehran's urban landscape was a primary concern for literary circles.

Prostitution, Organized Crime, and Corruption

After the relative success in fighting vice on the roadways to Tehran, the Permanent Commission focused its efforts in the fight against vice on Shahr-i Nau in the following months. Its success in Shahr-i Nau was limited and rarely involved a fight against prostitution. As with the previous situation, the Commission once again focused its efforts on drugs and gambling and attempted to curb the power of crime bosses in the neighborhood with limited success. While the owners of the *mihmankhanihs* in Karaj Road wrote numerous letters to the prime minister and the Ministry of Justice with little success, the crime bosses of Shahr-i Nau were more easily able to reduce or revoke their sentences and return to their previous lifestyles.

In most cases, even after the Commission reported crime bosses and thugs to the police and had them detained, they would be released early or their files would be lost. While the Commission attempted to curb "corruption" in Shahr-i Nau by detaining crime bosses on drug

⁸⁵ "Ta'til-i Amakin-i Fasad va Ta'qib-i Sahiban-i An," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 293001292 26-29.

charges and owning and operating gambling and prostitution houses, the women working in the sex trade in Shahr-i Nau rarely appear in the archival records. When they are mentioned, the context is about relocating or rescuing them. The Commission also dedicated considerable time and energy to the plight of young children in Shahr-i Nau. Some of these children were the offspring of prostitutes while others were vagrant children or children from orphanages taken in by criminals.

In their complaint letters to the prime minister's office, the owners of the *mihmankhanihs* asserted that they functioned only as restaurants and swore that no corrupt behavior was taking place. They presented themselves as workers providing for their families and argued that the raid and closings had left their families and children starving. In asking the prime minister to order the reopening of their restaurants, they promised that the guest houses would merely function as eateries, particularly since the Commission had removed all the beds.⁸⁶ In a letter to the gendarmerie the owners and operators of the restaurants in Karaj Road argued that they were merely engaged in honorable work and were providing for their families. They pleaded that the revoking of licenses and the cutting of electricity had left thousands of families hungry and homeless. They wrote that they were under the jurisdiction of the

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 806.

gendarmerie and not the city and requested that the gendarmerie intervene on their behalf.⁸⁷

These grievances, however, did not go far. In response to these letters, the minister of state wrote to the prime minister's office confirming that these cafes and *mihmankhanihs* were indeed houses of corruption where prostitutes and pleasure-seekers frequented.⁸⁸ In another letter, Mr. Tabrizi went as far as suggest that all cafes and guest houses along the road to Tehran (not only the ones accused of promoting corruption) should be shut down, so as to avoid complaints about injustice and discrimination.⁸⁹ In general, the prime minister's office responded by delegating the response to the Ministry of Justice and instructed the owners to wait for the investigation into their cafes to finish and their sentencing to take place.

For those crime bosses held accountable for corruption in Shahr-i Nau, the situation was quite different. While the Permanent Commission and Mr. Tabrizi made extensive efforts to curb criminal activity and corruption in Shahr-i Nau, they rarely succeeded though they were able to temporarily shut down the operation of crime bosses. The culprits making repeated appearances in the archival material were: Zaki Turk (Zaki, the Turk), Mahmud Misgar (Mahmud, the coppersmith) and Karim Abbas 'Ali. These men were considered responsible for the sexual

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

corruption, fighting, crime, and filth of Shahr-i Nau, and the minister of state repeatedly wrote confidential letters to the prime minister's office requesting that they be apprehended and brought to justice.⁹⁰

In one confidential and urgent letter, the Police Commissioner, Mr. Shah Khalili, wrote to the prime minister's office reporting that a serious fight had broken out between the rival gangs of Zaki Turk and Karim Abbas 'Ali and that the thugs of Zaki Turk had severely injured members of the rival gang. While all members involved were taken to the police station they were all immediately released since Zaki Turk threatened to contact his connections in the Senate, Senators Jamal and Nur al-Din Imami. Fearful that their position in the police department would be compromised, the police freed everyone. On numerous other occasions, the minister of state inquired about the Ministry of Justice's leniency on Mahmud Misgar or his very early release.⁹¹ The Ministry of Justice often responded by citing lack of records and the missing of investigative information as contributing to the situation.⁹²

While the authorities tried unsuccessfully to curb police corruption, crime, and drugs in Shahr-i Nau, they rarely targeted individual prostitutes. By November 1958, Shahr-i Nau had been transformed into *Qal'ih-i Shahr-i Nau* (Shahr-i Nau Citadel) since a brick

⁹⁰ "Luzum-i Ibtal-i Parvanih-i Kasb-i Kulliyih-i Amakin-i Fisad dar Atraf-i Qal'ih Shahr-i Nau," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 292001072, 1-2.

⁹¹ "Ijad-i Amakin-i Fisad Tavassut-i Mahmud Misgar va Husayn Zaghi," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 293007675, 2109 and 2119.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 2112 and 2107.

wall had been drawn around the red-light district, literally separating “respectable” families from the prostitutes. As with other cities across the globe where deliberate red-light districts were erected, these strategies of segregated regulation bred out of worldviews that conceived of the city as a functional and ordered whole, and imagined sex work as a disturbance to that socio-spatial order.⁹³ What is more, around Shahr-i Nau two main entrances had been designated which could be shut down if needed. This created physically defined boundaries between the contradictory space of the red-light district and the world outside it. These divisions were organized around specific bodily practices.

When the police did pursue prostitution in District Twenty it was to ensure that prostitutes lived and worked inside the “Castle,” contributing to the spatial ordering of Tehran’s urban landscape.⁹⁴ By late 1958, the head of the *shahr bani* ordered the immediate relocation of prostitutes living in District Twenty and particularly on Jamshid and Sarab Streets to inside of the Qal’ih.⁹⁵ The police reports indicate that during this period men were reported to the Ministry of Justice for gambling and drug use in Shahr-i Nau. They rarely arrested prostitutes and when they did arrest women in Shahr-i Nau it was almost always on

⁹³ Phil Hubbard and Teela Sanders, “Making Space for Sex Work: Female Street Prostitution and the Production of Urban Space,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27.1, March 2003: 82.

⁹⁴ Shahr-i Nau was initially part of District Ten; however the expansion of Tehran meant a revamping of the districts, and by 1958 District Ten had been broken down into District Ten and Twenty, and Shahr-i Nau became part of District 20. See figure 1 for a map of Tehran’s districts and figure 2 for a general map of Tehran.

⁹⁵ “Jilugiri az Furush-i Mashrubat-i Alkuli va Da’ir Kardan-i Amakin-i Fisad,” Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 290008324, 11.

drug charges. The exchange of sex between men and women for money was seen as a necessary evil and rarely prosecuted, yet its geographic location and spatial manifestation were strictly policed.

The police did, however, raid a guest house around Shahr-i Nau that was suspected of allowing homosexuality. The action was aimed at stopping the homosexual acts (*livat*) between two men and two children, and thus signaling sexual transgressions that were not tolerated.⁹⁶ The spatial isolation and informal toleration bestowed on “immoral” heterosexual acts did not extend, it appears, to homosexual actions. While commercial sex between men and women in Tehran’s red-light district was monitored, homosexuality was criminalized. One is left to speculate about the circumstances of the arrest, but as the police report indicated, the parties involved in the sexual act as well as the owner and the worker of the guest house were arrested. Perhaps this hints at the presence of male prostitutes in Tehran’s red-light district or merely hints at a more tolerant sexual geography where yet another form of “unaccepted” sexuality could take place. Male prostitution in the period under study is, of course, documented and explored for other urban spaces.⁹⁷ Before the advent of “gay politics,” in New York and in London, male prostitution lacked the binary divisions of homosexual versus heterosexual identities, and male sex workers continually negotiated

⁹⁶ “Ta‘til-i Amakin-i Fisad va Ta‘qib-i Sahiban-i An,” Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 293001292, 112-113.

⁹⁷ Barry Reay, *New York Hustlers: Masculinity and Sex in Modern America* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

boundaries of pleasure and self through acts that evaded easy attributions of sexual identity.⁹⁸ The commercial sex industry in Iran, however, appears to have been dominated by women selling their sexual services to male patrons across the landscape of the city.

Conclusion

While the history of Iran in the 1940s and 1950s is tumultuous with the coming of Mohammad Reza Shah to power, the rise of Mohammad Mossadeqh, the nationalization of Iranian oil and the CIA coup in 1953, almost none of this is reflected in the archival documents concerning prostitution and vice in Tehran. The Shah himself is only mentioned once or twice in passing, and the coup of 1953 is only referred to by Mahmud Misgar in his letter to the minister of state citing his loyalty to the Shah and the sacrifices he made for the Shah during the 1953 coup when he was a major player in the overthrow of Mossadeqh's regime. National politics rarely directly affected prostitution; rather local politics played a large role in determining the plight of prostitutes in various districts of Tehran and its surrounding neighborhoods. Local powerful individuals often shaped the geography in which prostitutes were able to operate. The prevalent concern with being "contaminated" by prostitutes and particularly the damaging effect they were regarded as posing to the innocence of youth and children often meant that prostitutes had more freedoms in the areas which were designated for

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

them and in which they were confined. While members of the Ministry of State often discussed rescuing prostitutes and their reputations, changing the dreadful situation (*filakat*) in which they lived, and bringing personal hygiene to Shahr-i Nau, ultimately little happened in this regard. The fight against vice in Tehran disproportionately focused on drug use, and prostitutes were rarely imprisoned or fined for selling sex. Women, however, were repeatedly sent to police stations for possessing drugs or *nigaris* (instrument necessary for drug use).

In addition, women's honor and reputation needed to be protected and a fundamental step in this process was their separation from "immoral" women. Men considered themselves as the gatekeepers to female honor and defenders of public morality; yet they simultaneously attempted to have prostitutes available in remote but convenient locations. Prostitution was regarded as an unfortunate but inevitable problem of modern Tehran and the solution was rarely eradication or prohibition. The prostitutes were rarely held responsible for their own sexual activities, and the attitude of protection bestowed and the imagined weakness attributed to "respectable" women extended to prostitutes. Therefore, the government wavered between a policy of regulation and prohibition and was selective in both. Prostitution was prohibited in public places outside of the red-light district, yet enforcement was selective. While authorities repeatedly discussed the regulation of prostitution in Shahr-i Nau in meetings, commissions, and

letters, there is little indication that during this period official policy affected women engaged in sex work.

It is not until the 1960s and 1970s that prostitutes were regulated by the Ministry of Health and asked to carry official health certificates. What the authorities did fiercely attempt to curb was drug consumption and distribution. Ultimately, however, the policies adopted did little to change the face of prostitution in Tehran and to have long-term effects. The *mihmankhanihs* along the Karaj and Shimiranat Road reopened a few months after the initial crackdown, prostitution flourished in Shahr-i Nau during the following years, and prostitution continued to exist in various neighborhoods of Tehran.

The “problem” of prostitution and the fight against vice in Tehran were in no way specific to the capital but rather reflected a larger national policy of fighting vice and defending the moral character of the society and especially women. In Zahidan (a city in southeast of Iran, near the border with Pakistan) as demonstrated in Tehran, residents wrote to authorities requesting the relocation of prostitutes, and the army also took a particular interest in the issue of prostitution as it affected the health and well-being of soldiers.⁹⁹ Officials in Tabriz wrote to the mayoral office of Tehran requesting information and guidelines on the strategies adopted in dealing with Shahr-i Nau in order to prevent the

⁹⁹ “Isha‘ih Fahsha dar Ijtima‘ A‘zayi Anjuman-i Shahr dar Farmandari-i Zahidan,” Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 293006394, 4 and 10.

spread of prostitution from Tabriz's red-light district.¹⁰⁰ In Shiraz numerous women were detained for generating houses of prostitution.¹⁰¹ And finally, along its western borders with Iraq, the authorities vehemently struggled to prevent both the traffic of women and girls to Iraq for prostitution and to identify and deport Iranian women who worked in Iraqi cities such as Karbala as prostitutes, so as to save Iran's national honor and the reputation of Iranians abroad (*mayih-i abirurizi va hatk-i hurmat-i Iran va Iranian*) that were being lost as a result of "these Iranian women having a relationship with a foreign man every minute."¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ "Avariz Zamin, Kunfirans-i Shahr-daran-i Paytakhtayi Jahan, Farmandaran-i Azarbayijan-i Sharqi, Mahsur Shudan-i Shahr-i Nau," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 340000234, 78.

¹⁰¹ "Guzarishat," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 293/12825, 11, 25-27, 34, 39, 41, and 44.

¹⁰² "Guzarish-i 'Amal-i Manafi 'Iffat-i Zanan-i Irani dar 'Araq," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 2900000878, 8.

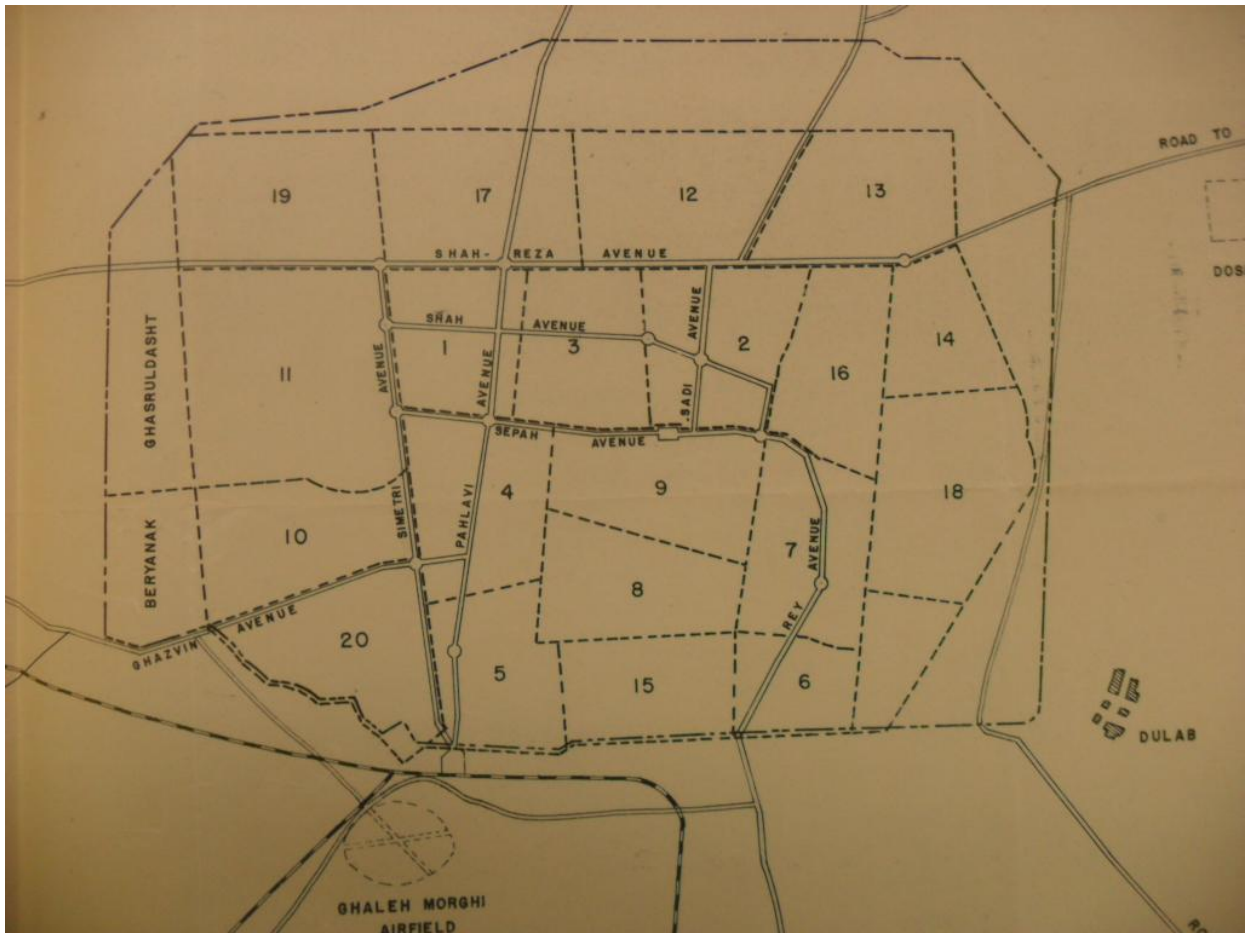


Figure 1. Map of Tehran's municipalities, Shahr-i Nau is located in area 20. "Tehran and Vicinity," 1954, Ozalid Print, Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.



Figure 2. Map of Tehran with Shahr-i Nau clearly indicated, “Tehran,” 1944, Army Press, Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.



Figure 3. What appears to be the gate/entrance to Shahr-i Nau, Tehran, Iranian National Archives.

Chapter 2: Undesired Visibility: Social Geography of Prostitution across Iran

Introduction

The campaign of Tehran's residents in the 1940s and 1950s to have prostitutes removed from their neighborhoods resulted in the literal walling off of Shahr-i-Now, Tehran's red-light district, and over time contributed to the solidification of the official policy of regulating prostitution and containing female sex workers within the red-light district. Despite these efforts, all across Iran bodies continued to be bought and sold. However, over time, what was once a moderate and selective policy of regulation developed into a stringent policing of prostitutes within and outside of red-light districts, with a gradually more strict focus on medical surveillance and inspection.

Regulation was part and parcel of a social ideology that deemed prostitution a necessary evil. It accepted heterosexual sex outside of marriage for men, but not for women, deemed women, girls, and at times young boys, vulnerable to the temptations of prostitution, and regarded the state responsible for making sex outside of marriage safe and healthy for men. Simultaneously, the predominant social view sympathized with female prostitutes who were commonly seen as forced or deceived into prostitution, which was part of the larger sexual ideology that depicted women as asexual and pure. Prostitution was a moral problem if and

when it became visible, and it was the mobility and undesired visibility of prostitution that shaped the interaction of prostitutes with the larger community and the state.

This chapter is an attempt to situate the women who sold their bodies in Iran between 1940s-1970s within their societies and to highlight their engagement with the state, their communities, and the structural forces that shaped their behavior. It takes a closer look at the gradual move to systematic regulation that culminated in Tehran's Shahr-i Nau. In addition, borrowing insights from subaltern studies, it illustrates how collective actions and local politics shaped national policy over time in Iran. In the process, it hopes to reveal some sexual habits of the men who frequented prostitutes and exhibit some of the ways in which these women practiced forms of autonomy over their lives.

Petitioning for the Relocation of Prostitutes

As the previous chapter indicates, the abundance of police records, citizen petitions, and inter-governmental memos has allowed for a detailed investigation of the regulation of vice and prostitution in Tehran. Unfortunately, the same depth and breadth of archival sources for other cities across Iran have not been located, but the available archival sources for other cities provide compelling evidence as to residents' efforts to expel prostitutes from their neighborhoods and official policies to relocate prostitutes to the outskirts of Iranian cities during the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s.

The historiography of modern Iran, and particularly of the second Pahlavi regime (1944-1979), is replete with elite and state-centered paradigms or top-down approaches. The local residents' constant appeals for the removal of prostitutes from their neighborhoods and their eventual success in having prostitutes relocated prove a poignant example of local politics and the ways it managed to influence state policies. They also reveal interesting information about citizens' access to politicians and police and the attitudes that shaped the buying and selling of sex in modern Iran.

As early as 1925, residents of Isfahan wrote to the *nazmiyyih* (police) and central government complaining about "ill-reputed" women. In response to an official decree by the central government, the head of Isfahan's *nazmiyyih* asserted that all "ill-reputed" women had individually promised to abstain from lewd (*jilf*) behavior in public and under no circumstances would allow foreign men into their houses. What is more, the police strictly prohibited commercial carriage drivers (*durushkichi*) from transporting women after dark within and outside of the city.¹⁰³

In 1938, another resident wrote to the governor (*farmandar*) of Isfahan complaining about the widespread visibility of prostitutes across the city and the role of carriage drivers who facilitated and transported prostitutes across the city and sold people's honor (*namus furushi*).

¹⁰³ "Ta'qazayi Hi'at-i 'Ammiyih-i Isfahan az Nazmiyyih dar Murid-i Jilugiri az Munkarat," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 310000153.

Identifying himself only by his first name, Ahmad, the complainant singled out one of the police (*shahrbanī*) authorities as a culprit in protecting prostitutes and promoting vice. While Ahmad blamed the prostitutes for spreading venereal disease across the population, his petition placed more emphasis on the ways the prostitutes were affecting respectable women. Not only were prostitutes capable of “tricking” respectable women and girls, but their presence and visibility, he claimed, prevented respectable (*najīb*) women from entering public space. He specifically claimed that prostitutes were “one of the reasons *najīb* women did not come out,” and hence they contributed to the women’s “lack of progress” and hindered the women’s movement and awakening in Iran. In the end, he asked that the government ensure the safety of people’s health, property and honor (*namus*).¹⁰⁴

Scholars such as Camron Michael Amin have outlined the ways in which modernity and the nation building process were closely tied to women’s progress in Iran.¹⁰⁵ The forceful unveiling of Iranian women and their unveiled entrance into the public sphere under Reza Shah had taken place only two years prior to the petitioner’s letter, in 1936. Citing prostitution as a hindrance to women’s progress and awakening during this period certainly was an effort to exploit the central government’s agenda of state-sponsored change and “modernity” and its policies

¹⁰⁴ “Shikayat az ‘Amalkard-i ‘Iddih-i Durushkihchiha,” Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 291002487, 3.

¹⁰⁵ Camron Michael Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*, particularly chapters 3 and 5.

against prostitution. Ahmad, whatever his own personal beliefs, made an explicit appeal to Reza Shah's "modernization" policies.

Responding to the inquiries of Isfahan's government into this case, in a confidential report to the governor's office (*farmandari*), the police (*shahr bani*) claimed that it had investigated the complaint by Ahmad and followed the necessary procedures to guarantee transparency in dealing with prostitution. Interestingly, when summarizing the complaint letter and explaining the letter it was referring to, the writer of the report disproportionately focused on young men who deceived girls and women and carriage drivers who transported them, pointing to the dominant official view that perceived prostitutes as victims. In other words, while Ahmad had chosen to focus on the prostitutes as obstacles to women's progress and the physical and moral health of Iranians, the police memo to the governor's office summarizing the same letter focused on the deceiving of prostitutes by men. Moreover, the writer claimed that the police had thoroughly looked into the matter and all the parties accused had denied any allegation of wrongdoing. It then claimed that the police would keep a watchful eye on the situation and investigate the matter if any transgression was witnessed.¹⁰⁶ The casual way in which the police investigated these "serious" allegations and the ease with which the allegations were dismissed, along with other evidence from archival records, particularly repeated complaints, point to a lenient policy

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

towards prostitution on the part of authorities. While residents and locals repeatedly complained about the visibility of prostitutes in their neighborhoods, the authorities seem to have been slow in responding to these desperate attempts for the removal of prostitutes. This difference in approach perhaps can be explained by focusing on the issue of visibility. While residents of certain neighborhoods were witnesses to the perceived gender and sexual transgressions of prostitutes, the authorities and particularly those not local were immune from such scenes, hence making them less concerned with it.

In articulating their complaints against prostitution, the residents of various cities in Iran employed social, moral, and political discourses to explain and demand their claims on space and to impose particular notions of gender and sexual normality on the geography of the spaces they inhabited. Conflicts over space have, of course, for long shaped the history of prostitution. In industrialized European countries, regulation was typically part of a bourgeois effort to oversee and control the working classes in growing urban centers. In Paris during the nineteenth century, for example, working class prostitutes were systematically policed and regulated while courtesans who serviced the upper classes remained unpoliced for most of the century.¹⁰⁷ Residents of “Eastern” cities such as Istanbul in the late nineteenth century also framed their claims to

¹⁰⁷ Jill Harsin, *Policing prostitution in Nineteenth Century Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 18.

public space in moral and social terms.¹⁰⁸ Both in complaints and in demands, petitioners of Istanbul displayed strikingly similar concerns with residents of many cities across Iran.¹⁰⁹ Often framing their complaints against prostitution as a threat against respectable women, residents of Istanbul, much like those in Tehran and other Iranian cities, demanded that prostitutes be relocated, a trend that was popular in the Middle East across space and time.¹¹⁰

The situation in Shahr-i Za (a city fifty miles southwest of Isfahan and located in the Province of Isfahan) is quite telling as it highlights the ferocity of the residents in having prostitutes removed, the resilience of local prostitutes as they fought to maintain their claim on space, and the complexities faced by local, regional, and state officials in managing the situation. On July 1945, in response to citizen complaints, the administrative council of the city ordered the police to remove all of the prostitutes from the Mahallih-i Nau within a week, in an effort to prevent the spread of vice and venereal disease in the city.¹¹¹ The decree was to have been a simple one generating few problems, yet the following months brought about a heated debate and repeated correspondences with the central government that pitted the prostitutes against residents and the local police. While the police removed the prostitutes to the

¹⁰⁸ Ozbek, "The Regulation of Prostitution," 561.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 561-562.

¹¹⁰ Elyse Semerdjian, "Sinful Professions: Illegal Occupations of Women in Ottoman Aleppo, Syria," *Hawwa*, 1, no. 1 (2003): 63; Marinos Sariyannis, "Prostitution in Ottoman Istanbul," 54.

¹¹¹ "Matalib-i Matruhah dar Shurayi Idari Shahr-i Za," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 2910001129, 2.

outskirts of the city, the actions of four women, Kuukab, Turan, Aqdas, and Iran caused uproar. Having been forced outside the city, these women returned to Mahallih-i Nau and retook residence there, infuriating the locals once again. In an effort to have the women removed again, residents signed a collective letter to the state government claiming that the four women and a man hired to protect them were inciting unrest (*ightishash*) in the city.¹¹²

Employing words loaded to conjure up images of political sedition to describe the activities of the prostitutes, the residents turned to the provincial government for assistance and appealed to the authorities' anxieties about political dissent. The petition which was signed and inked by numerous individuals went unanswered; yet in the meantime, the police re-removed the prostitutes. This time however, the prostitutes immediately took action and urgently telegraphed the central and provincial government complaining about the actions of the police and city against them. They argued that they had been sentenced to removal and banished without a trial and forced to sell their houses and expelled from the city. They pleaded that they were hungry and homeless in the cold weather and had no refuge.¹¹³ The provincial government demanded an explanation from the local police and began an investigation into the

¹¹² "Shikayat az Iskan-i 'Iddiyi az Zanan-i Ma'rufih dar Shahr-i Za," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 291003526, 8.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 1.

matter.¹¹⁴ In its response, Shahr-i Za's police department claimed the prostitutes were removed in response to 500 complaints by residents and that the women had voluntarily sold their houses and moved to other neighborhoods and bought houses there. It further asserted that the police had placed no pressure on prostitutes Kuukab, Turan, Aqdas, and Iran to sell their houses and maintained that the agitation was a result of the activities of the women's representative or *vakil*.¹¹⁵ In a separate letter to the provincial government, the head of the city contended that the prostitutes had either moved to other areas of the country or begun setting up house outside the city; therefore, the concerns of residents were considered alleviated.¹¹⁶

As this case indicates, the problem of prostitution was solved by relocating the women either to other neighborhoods or to the outskirts of the city. Had the women complied, little information about their struggles would have remained. Yet their resistance to physical relocation began a long process of commotion that has been well documented. It is unclear whether the women finally chose to move or were forcibly removed by the local authorities. What is clear is that not only did the provincial (rather than city) authorities not expect the women to be forcibly moved, but they expected certain legal procedures to apply to them. The moral panic shared by a large number of residents and the pressure they placed on

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

the police and local authorities for the removal of the women was not shared by the Isfahan provincial government. Prostitutes expected and demanded certain protections under the law and challenged forced relocation by local police at the request of local residents.

Official Responses to Prostitution

As mentioned, the abundance of citizen petitions for the removal or relocation of prostitutes across Iran during this period can point to the government's inattentiveness or leniency towards the moral dilemma of prostitution. Whether the government did not perceive prostitution as a moral impasse for Iranian society or was too weak or preoccupied to engage with it is not entirely clear. However, the fact that prostitutes could so effortlessly engage with the government and voice their grievances illuminates that, at least in the central part of Iran, legal resources and protections were available to them. Unlike examples provided further in the chapter where prostitutes mainly took refuge with the state from pimps and madams, in this case they were directly challenging "upright" citizens and voicing their grievances against them. Their utilization of newer modes of communication, in this case the telegraph, can also point both to their resourcefulness and access to different modes of communication.

In the one archival instance available where the central government did directly get involved in local matters of prostitution without solicitation, the order concerned the health of prostitutes and

the presence of foreign soldiers. Anxieties over the physical health of soldiers along with that of mothers have often impacted regulationist policies on prostitution. In the well-studied case of Victorian Britain in the nineteenth century, the Contagious Disease Acts grew out of anxieties over the health of imperial soldiers.¹¹⁷ More recent scholarship has served to outline the ways in which pronatalist discourses and directives combined with anxieties over maintaining the health of soldiers served to solidify policies of sexual regulation in the early Turkish Republic.¹¹⁸ In Iran, when prostitutes came in contact with soldiers, medical surveillance of female prostitutes was embraced immediately and wholeheartedly.

On August 1943, the head of Iran's *shahrbani* (police force) issued a decree to police departments across cities in Iran clarifying the government's temporary policy on prostitution in the wake of the presence of foreign soldiers in the aftermath of World War II. It concluded that since many foreign soldiers were temporarily present in the capital and in other Iranian cities, and since it was possible that the soldiers would infect Iranian women with venereal disease, and since Allied forces had complained that their soldiers had become infected with venereal disease in Iran and were demanding action from the office of the foreign

¹¹⁷ Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980), 71-72.

¹¹⁸ Kyle Evered and Emine Evered, "Syphilis and Prostitution in the Socio-Medical Geographies of Turkey's Early Republican Provinces," *Health and Place* 18, 2012: 532.

ministry, a reevaluation of the law was necessary. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the law made the creation of “houses of prostitution” illegal. In other words, it was illegal to financially benefit from prostitution or to force women into prostitution. Yet, in the wake of the presence of foreign soldiers and with the threat of the spread of venereal disease, the government actively engaged in a campaign to temporarily suspend the law and recommended that prostitutes be concentrated in particular locations in cities where they could be monitored and cleared for work and treated when infected. What is more, the decree specified that the practice of conglomerating prostitutes be carried out particularly in areas where foreign soldiers were situated.¹¹⁹

Scholars of prostitution under colonialism and occupation have documented the ways racial politics plays into policies on prostitution and the politics of venereal disease. Philippa Levine has demonstrated how the British Contagious Disease Acts across the British Empire were part of an ideology that characterized colonial prostitutes as the main conduits of sexual and moral disease, and regulation became a tool for enforcing racial hierarchies, gender ideologies, and the civilizing mission.¹²⁰ Sarah Kovner’s study of sex workers and servicemen in U.S.-occupied Japan after World War II also illuminates how Japanese prostitutes were held accountable for the spread of venereal disease by

¹¹⁹ “Kumisiyun-i Risidigi bi Vaz’iyyat-i Zanan-i Ma’rufih,” Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 291000590, 81 and 83.

¹²⁰ Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics*, 34.

both the Japanese and occupying forces.¹²¹ While many of the servicemen arrived in Japan already infected, prostitutes were blamed for the spread of venereal disease. Her study charts how ultimately the occupation changed policies towards prostitution and by extension the lives of sex workers.¹²²

While it is difficult to accurately estimate the extent to which Iranian prostitutes infected foreign soldiers and vice versa, colonial claims about the spread of venereal disease must be studied with skepticism. The British came to Iran with a long history of colonial anxieties about venereal disease and concerns about the health of their soldiers. Recent and emerging scholarship on the British colonial experience in the Middle East has recently begun documenting some of these exchanges regarding the British colonial experience in Egypt.¹²³

In the eyes of Iranian officials, however, it appears that prostitutes shared the responsibility for spreading venereal disease. As the above decree indicates, the authorities clearly took into account the probability that foreign soldiers would infect “Iranian women” with disease. Their solution on the other hand was to make available prostitutes in designated locations and to monitor their health, making sex available and safe for soldiers, and by extension protecting the rest of Iranian

¹²¹ Sarah Kovner, *Occupying Power: Sex Workers and Servicemen in Postwar Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 20-21 and 47.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 97-98.

¹²³ See for example Hanan Hammad, “Between Egyptian ‘National Purity’ and ‘Local Flexibility,’”; Hanan Kholoussy, “Monitoring and Medicalising Male Sexuality.”

women. The micro-effects of the Allied occupation in Iran and its particular effects on sexual ideologies and subsequent practices and policies in Iran remain to be discovered. It is difficult to gauge whether the subsequent policy of containing prostitutes in red-light districts in places such as Tehran and Tabriz took lessons from the experience of occupation and provided sexual services to foreign soldiers. Yet this brief colonial experience should be investigated for the potential ways in which it affected gender ideology in Iran during the Allied occupation.

The intersection of colonial rule and prostitution policy has produced an important body of literature not only highlighting diverse colonial strategies for differentiating between the ruler and the ruled but also some surprising anti-colonialist responses in relation to prostitution. U.S. colonial officials and American social purity crusaders in Puerto Rico during the early decades of the twentieth century, for example, opted for an abolitionist policy of eradication of prostitution and imprisonment of women suspected of working in the sex trade. In response and in the spirit of protecting their homeland, Puerto Rican men offered to protect Puerto Rican women from the North American colonizers by opposing the incarceration of prostitutes and launching a fierce campaign against the imprisonment of prostitutes.¹²⁴

This incident also highlights the importance of considering the transnational flow of ideas and connections that shaped prostitution

¹²⁴ Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and US Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 73.

policy around the globe in the twentieth century and in Iran specifically. Ideas about the merits and shortcomings of systematic regulation that originated in France in the early decades of the nineteenth century, concerns about venereal disease and the sexual health of mothers, visions of urban progress and growth, along with general conceptions of progress and modernization travelled across borders and shaped the politics and policies of regulation. These ideas worked to influence policy in places as far away as Shanghai and Buenos Aires.

Close connections between Shanghai and France in the late nineteenth century help explain an endorsement of regulatory policies during this period in Shanghai, while in the early decades of the twentieth century, inspired by American missionaries, an abolitionist movement took the stage in Shanghai.¹²⁵ The legacy of the Progressive Era and the systematic and widespread prohibition adopted in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s following the red-light abatement laws, it appears, were transported by missionaries to Shanghai and shaped prostitution policies. In Buenos Aires, as Donna Guy has delineated, ideas about regulated prostitution from France and Sweden inspired similar approaches in Argentina, and in 1875, the

¹²⁵ Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai*, 356.

Buenos Aires government passed an ordinance that established licensed brothels.¹²⁶

Official records in Iran only periodically referenced international influences. The press, however, as we have seen, was quick to mention regulation policies in “modernized” cities of Europe as justification for an endorsement of such policies in Tehran, and many city officials continued to remain concerned over Tehran’s international image as a cosmopolitan center of progress. Whatever the source of influence, Iranian officials clearly favored a policy of regulation as not only the pragmatic, but also obvious, choice in addressing prostitution. The almost ubiquitous prohibition and criminalization policies towards prostitution sweeping the United States following World War I seem to have had little resonance with Iranian authorities.¹²⁷

What is clear is that over time, the more lax policy of simple relocation gave way to the concentration of women in red-light districts. While the law prohibited prostitution, contradictory decrees such as the abovementioned decree of August 1943 sent mixed signals to local officials. The challenge of navigating mixed-signal policies regarding prostitution was acknowledged in Zahidan’s (southeast Iran) city council

¹²⁶ Donna Guy, *White Slavery and Mothers Alive and Dead: the Troubled Meeting of Sex, Gender, and Public Health Progress in Latin America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 19-20 and 156.

¹²⁷ For a brief description regarding prohibition policies in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco see: Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender and Anti-Vice Activism, 1887-1917* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 133-134.

meeting in February 1951.¹²⁸ The main predicament, it appears, was balancing the rights of prostitutes, as citizens of the “modern” nation, with the necessity of protecting respectable women.

While the contradictory and shifting policies on prostitution created a dilemma for members of the Zahidan governing council addressing the problem of prostitution in the city, they ultimately declared the impossibility of favoring such “spoiling elements” over “fertile and chaste mothers” (*madaran-i-‘afifih-i kasirat-ul-awlad*).¹²⁹ The recognition of some rights for these prostitutes and the debate on how to handle prostitutes are particularly astounding. While in the imagined dichotomy between prostitutes and chaste mothers prostitutes had no chance of prevailing, they were seen as unfortunate women fallen under severe economic hardships. The solution hence, the council members agreed, was to allocate money from the mayoral office to immediately send the women to their hometowns and to prevent the future arrival of any such women to Zahidan.¹³⁰ According to investigations by the police, most of the women were not local to Zahidan, but had temporarily taken residence either with relatives or alone on their way to other cities.

This, of course, did not “solve” the problem of prostitution in Zahidan. Six months later in September 1951, residents of Zahidan

¹²⁸ Near Iran’s border with Pakistan and Afghanistan, Zahidan is located in southeast Iran and houses part of Iran’s Sunni population.

¹²⁹ “Isha‘ih Fahsha dar Ijtima‘ A‘zayi Anjuman-i Shahr dar Farmandari-i Zahidan,” Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 293006394, 13.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

wrote a letter very similar in structure to the one written by residents of Shahr-i Za complaining about the sanitary conditions in their neighborhoods and the presence of prostitutes. Specifically naming eight prostitutes, the residents declared that their women and children could not dare leave their houses after five and that the prostitutes were deceiving chaste women and steering them towards unacceptable behavior. Assuming that their own womenfolk were by nature gullible and weak, they asked that the mayoral office either remove and relocate the prostitutes or buy the residents' houses so they could themselves relocate and free themselves from the troubles of prostitutes.¹³¹

The police summoned and questioned the named women and sent them to the court for sentencing. In response, the governor's office wrote to the police complaining that the point was not having only the eight women questioned, but to have all prostitutes relocated elsewhere or sent to the outskirts of the city, in order for the police to ensure the welfare of residents.¹³² The ensuing correspondences between the provincial government office and the police department, again, hint at the ambiguity of the law and its applicability. In its response letter, the police raised the problem of actually identifying those involved in the sex trade and pointed to its obligation in upholding the law of the land. In the absence of sufficient evidence, in other words, it was problematic to take

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 10.

action against accused prostitutes and suspicious women.¹³³ The provincial government office then maintained that it did expect the law to be upheld, but instructed that the police continue to monitor the neighborhood and investigate when necessary, in order to appease the concerns of residents.¹³⁴

During the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, in cities across Iran, male householders wrote to authorities and expected that their collective action would garner results and bring about change in the local spaces they, and their families, occupied. These petitions and complaints, written, signed and inked with fingerprints by dozens of men on a single sheet of paper are symbolic of men's duties to protect and secure the well-being and honor of their families. Over and over, men protested having "their" chaste women occupy the same space as prostitutes. The mere presence of and presumably the knowledge of prostitution and its practices were enough to corrupt pure women and girls. Both young girls and married women were seen as incredibly vulnerable to the temptations of sexual transgression and sexual deviancy, and men were collectively responsible for protecting the purity of women. Men took it upon themselves to organize and demand action from the state against prostitutes. Masculinity, in a sense, rested on ensuring the purity of the public space occupied by women. Camron Amin has argued that the unveiling of Iranian women and the state enforcing policies of women's

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

reform infringed on the rights of men as fathers, brothers, and protectors of *namus*.¹³⁵ His analysis of the ways Reza Shah's modernization policies deprived men of their power over their personal and intimate lives appears poignant, as the collective action of the men here clearly demanded that state authorities share responsibility and protect "their women." It is important to recognize that while men were the public faces of such petitions and complaints, female householders may have also shared these grievances and resisted the presence of prostitutes in their neighborhoods.

On the other hand, while the visibility of prostitutes and prostitution was seen as a grave dilemma, prostitutes were generally not held accountable for their sexual actions and an attitude of sympathy dominated popular perception and policies towards prostitution. As indicated, residents merely demanded that prostitutes be removed from neighborhoods or relocated to the outskirts of cities. Men, or some men for that matter, it was assumed, would continue to seek sex outside of marriage.

Despite the fact that a very clear distinction existed between pure and unpure women, there is no indication that prostitutes were harmed by locals. For local residents, the physical presence of prostitutes was a constant reminder of sexual transgression and the possibility of the "corruption" of chaste women. As the petitions indicate, prostitutes often

¹³⁵ Camron Michael Amin, *The Making of Modern Iranian Woman*, 104.

lived among respectable families, which made it difficult for the police to gather enough evidence to prove their culpability. The intervention of the authorities and the police for the most part involved simply relocating women or fining them.

Over time, however, the continuous resident complaints against prostitution coupled with the solidification of the powers of the second Pahlavi regime resulted in harsher implementations of the law and crackdowns on prostitution. The complaints of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s are indicative of the ease with which prostitutes lived among the rest of society and the challenges that occurred when locals attempted to address this phenomenon. By the 1960s, however, the policy of relocation gave way to a more systematic policy of regulation and concentration. Officially sanctioned red-light districts or the concentration of female prostitutes in the outskirts of the city became a more favored approach. The geographical concentration of prostitutes also went hand in hand with a medical surveillance of their bodies. In Tehran, female prostitutes were required to carry health cards and undergo weekly health inspections. The prostitutes who worked outside of the official red-light district and those who did not carry health cards were brought to the police station and fined. It was often the women who could not pay their fines who were jailed.

The daily police logs and police records of Shiraz for 1964 and 1965 indicate that combating prostitution and particularly “houses of

prostitution” was increasingly on the police agenda. In his daily reports to the Governor of Fars Province, the head of the police department logged the daily arrests and investigations of the police force. The offenses ranged from robbery, murder, child-abandonment, begging, and auto collisions to establishing prostitution houses. Many daily reports contained accounts of the discovery of houses of prostitution and the arrest of sellers and buyers of sex.¹³⁶ The Shiraz case is particularly interesting since it clearly indicates that customers were also sent to court. While the ambiguity of the language and the absence of other sources increase the difficulty of studying prostitution in Shiraz, the mere fact of the reports indicates that halting prostitution and vice were clearly a priority on the police agenda.

The records give no indication of any citizen complaints or how the police came to discover these houses of prostitution. In addition to the daily reports, the police commissioner also provided biweekly summaries of all the crimes committed in Shiraz. In practically all of the bi-weekly reports, the discovery of “locations of vice” surpassed all other criminal categories except traffic violations. In addition to closing “locations of vice” the police also arrested what appear to have been streetwalkers, officially categorized as *zan-i vilgard* (vagrant women).

¹³⁶ “Guzarishat,” Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 293012829, 3,4,11,12, 15,17,21, 27, 28, 29, 35, 48, 55,56, 62-69, 76, 80; “Guzarishat,” Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 293/12825, 29, 48. 55, 69. These are just a sample of the daily and bi-weekly reports of the police department.

While in previous years in cities such as Zahidan, Shahr-i Za, Isfahan, and even Tehran conflicting policies and ambiguities in the law produced a more favorable environment in which prostitutes operated, by the 1960s, prostitution-related offenses made constant and daily appearances in police records of Shiraz, surpassing all offenses but traffic violations. Taken at face value, it would appear that vice crimes dominated the illegal life of Shiraz. However, it is safe to assume that the police either disproportionately focused on these crimes or exaggerated the extent of these discoveries to establish a staunch stance against vice and prostitution.

This newfound interest in combating vice and prostitution in Shiraz was also shared by authorities in Tabriz. The legacy of the walling of Shahr-i Nau in Tehran and the containment of prostitution and the enclosing of the red-light district discussed in detail in the previous chapter was taken as a model in Tabriz. In their effort to address prostitution in Tabriz, in 1966 the provincial government of Azerbaijan requested information and suggestions on combating prostitution from Tehran, referencing the example of the walling of Shahr-i Nau.¹³⁷ As with the example in Tehran, the decision had been made to contain prostitutes and to create a red-light district by constructing a wall around certain neighborhoods and separating prostitutes from the rest of

¹³⁷ “‘Avariz Zamin, Kunfirans-i Shahr-daran-i Paytakht-hayi Jahan, Farmandaran-i Azarbayjan-i Sharqi, Mahsur Shudan-i Shahr-i Nau,” Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 340000234, 76.

society. Provincial cities were well aware and invested in Tehran's regulatory measures. When Azerbaijan's request for information went unanswered, the minister of state (*vazir-i kishvar*) personally wrote to the mayoral office of Tehran and instructed the mayor to write a report on the walling of Shahr-i Nau.¹³⁸ A week later, on the 27th of February 1966, the mayor of Tehran wrote a report highlighting the process that led to the fortification and enclosure of the red-light district in Tehran.¹³⁹ The citizen complaints and the attention generated in newspapers from those petitions and letters were cited as the main reasons the city finally allocated the necessary funds for building a wall that surrounded the living environment of the prostitutes and the subsequent forcing of prostitutes within those walls. That residents of urban centers who shared public spaces with prostitutes, perplexed by the influx of immigration and industrialization, petitioned to remove and relocate these women is nothing new. Today, residents of various cities that tolerate and regulate red-light districts continue to picket and petition to have female sex workers removed from their neighborhoods.¹⁴⁰ In contemporary Iran under the Islamic Republic, prostitution remains illegal and criminalized.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁴⁰ Phil Hubbard, "Sexuality, Immorality and the City: Red-Light Districts and the Marginalisation of Female Street Prostitutes," *Gender, Place and Culture* 5, no. 1 (1998): 65.

Navigating State and Society

This gradual shift towards a more systematic policy of regulation carried grave consequences for the women involved in the commercial sex trade. The walling of the red-light district in Tehran institutionalized the control of women and outlined and demarcated the boundaries of respectability and honor for other women. For those engaged in sex work within the red-light district, prostitution became a more permanent identity since working in Shahr-i Nau made it difficult for women to alternate between identities and placed prostitutes at the mercy of pimps and madams. While streetwalking had been illegal, the stricter enforcement of the law not only made it more difficult for women to work but increasingly made it physically dangerous for women, and many were forced to forgo autonomy in return for safety when they entered Shahr-i Nau, a trend that is typical of sex work in other geographies.¹⁴¹ The medical surveillance of women, and not men, further contributed to the policing of female sexuality, which became part of the process of saving fallen women and the envisioning of new ideas of womanhood and the modern Iranian family.

As part of the government's expanding control over prostitution in the 1960s, the regulation and containment of female prostitutes was accompanied by an attempt to scientifically study and address

¹⁴¹ Regarding the United States, see Mara Keire, *For Business and Pleasure: Red-Light Districts and the Regulation of Vice in the United States, 1890-1933* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 45.

prostitution. In 1968, Sattareh Farman-Farmaian, the pioneer Iranian social worker, was commissioned by the minister of state to study prostitutes in the city of Tehran.¹⁴² Her groundbreaking work on prostitution in Tehran was the product of 1548 interviews with prostitutes across Tehran. While her research will be discussed in detail in the next chapters, it is important to mention that it was conducted within the context of the increasing policing of prostitutes.

A temporary return to the petitions discussed earlier and the authorities' responses to them disclose the guarded ways in which authorities approached the relocation of prostitutes and the recourses available to the women involved in the sex trade. In addition to the petitions and complaint letters, court records provide an invaluable glimpse into the lives of prostitutes during this period. While scant, court records indicate that women were certainly taken to court on charges of establishing and maintaining houses of prostitution, it is difficult to locate records indicating that the sexual act itself was policed. The penalty for establishing houses of prostitution was either imprisonment or fines or a combination of both. Yet the expectation was that women would be fined for their transgressions, and imprisonment appeared as a harsh sentence. Women in Babul, Mashhad, and Tabriz appealed their verdicts when it included prison time. Citing old age, dependent care, and repentance women appealed sentences that would imprison them

¹⁴² From a prominent aristocratic family, she studied social work at the University of Southern California. She will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

and instead argued that the monetary penalties were more suitable punishments or asked for forgiveness altogether. The sentencing period often ranged from one to six months and generally carried a penalty of 250 riyals. On appeal however, these punishments were often substantially reduced.¹⁴³

In September 1951, the fifty-year-old Sakinih was arrested for pimping in Tabriz. As a repeat offender, she received the maximum penalty, six months' imprisonment and 250 riyals in fines with an additional 1000 riyals for court costs. In a telegraph to the Shah, she pleaded for forgiveness in her case and asked that justice be served. After repeated correspondences between the judicial and appeals courts in Tehran and Tabriz, on March 1952, the attorney general in Tabriz agreed to have her sentence revoked, though she had already been released into the care of a guarantor (*kafil*). Sakinih had been arrested in her home by the police as a result of complaints since she was housing two other women, who presumably were the prostitutes. The presence of an "unknown" man in the house of a repeat offender when the police investigated was clearly a red flag for the authorities.

The lack of sufficient court cases makes it difficult to draw conclusions regarding the ways prostitutes and pimps were prosecuted. Placed alongside inter-governmental memos that illustrate the hesitancy

¹⁴³ "Ta'sis-i Khanih-i Fisad," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 298000085, 1-6; "Muvafiqat va Taqazayi 'Afv-i Yiki az Ahali-i Tabriz," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 298003508, 1-12; "Dadkhast Farjami Muttahamih az Yik Mah Zindan," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 29807108, 1-7.

of accusing and removing women who were suspected or accused of prostitution, and repeated petitions and complaints by residents against prostitutes, it is possible to conclude that prostitutes enjoyed relative freedoms, lived within the fabric of society, and had access to the law and legal protections.

To summarize the discussion thus far, the success of citizen complaints coupled with the strengthening of the state established a more systematic policy on prostitution, the culmination of which can be sought in the walling of the red-light district in Tehran and the requirement that prostitutes carry health cards. The daily police logs in Shiraz in the mid-1960s, the efforts of authorities in Tabriz to model Tehran's example and to confine prostitutes within walled quarters, and efforts to scientifically study and understand prostitution all point to the adoption of a systematic and institutional regulation of prostitution. This shift to systematic regulation and geographical concentration appeased the anxieties of local residents, made sex safer for men, increased the power of the police and allowed female social workers and representatives from women's organizations admission into problematic space and to encroach on the lives of prostitutes.

For the women engaged in commercial sex in Iran, however, the consequences of regulation were mixed and often contradictory. Broader geographic scholarship on prostitution has highlighted the often destructive and dehumanizing consequences of regulation. In Italy where

a systematic structure of regulating prostitution was enforced by the police for close to a century until 1958, the “morals squads” acted aggressively and unscrupulously, targeting not only streetwalkers but lower class women more broadly.¹⁴⁴ As in other places, in Italy, regulation policies were part of the drive for national unification and the creation of a stable and modern state. For women employed in the sex trade this entailed arrests that were frequent and often arbitrary, and for the female poor it constituted vulnerability to a powerful mechanism of harassment.¹⁴⁵ Under certain economic and social circumstances, regulation fostered much harsher conditions for women. The situation of female prostitutes in Russia was grim, as women working in regulated brothels lived under oppressive social and dangerous medical conditions¹⁴⁶ rarely benefiting financially from their work.¹⁴⁷ Women working outside regulated brothels in Russia, by comparison, had much more flexibility and, one assumes, autonomy over their earnings.¹⁴⁸ What follows addresses the consequences of regulation for female prostitutes in Iran.

Making a Living with Their Bodies: Prostitutes in the 1970s

Regulation coupled with the paternalistic nature of society meant that women rarely benefited from the illicit sexual economy. Instead, they

¹⁴⁴ Mary Gibson, *Prostitution and the State in Italy* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999), 129-131.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 133 and 148.

¹⁴⁶ Laurie Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters*, 149.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 155-157.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

were often forced to choose between safety and autonomy. The red-light district was a place of adult male entertainment and women working there carried social stigmas that were difficult to escape. Streetwalking on the other hand allowed women to separate their work as prostitutes from their social and communal lives. The investigation of about 150 life stories of prostitutes published by the magazine *Ittila 'at-i Banuwan* during the 1970s reveals informative details about the life of prostitutes across Iran.¹⁴⁹ Certainly these life-stories cannot be read as transparent windows onto female prostitutes' experiences but they deserve careful and critical analysis as much as any other source with more access to formal political and social power structures.

The empirical limits of studying the personal and social lives of women working in the alternative market economy of the sex industry are well established. This challenge has contributed to a broad historiography of prostitution that is characteristically focused on the symbolic and discursive meaning of prostitution and on the social structure, political circumstances, and legal parameters that affected society. In the process, the voices and daily lived experiences of the subjects of study, prostitutes and their customers that is, have often only been glanced at. Some historians, of course, have made concerted efforts to locate the voice of one of the most subaltern of subjects, yet locating

¹⁴⁹ *Ittila 'at-i Banuwan* (women's information) was one of the two leading women's magazines in Iran during this period.

the voice of sex workers among the already slim sources on prostitution remains challenging.¹⁵⁰

It follows that this study also suffers from this peril. The collection of life-stories of prostitutes published in the leading Iranian women's magazine of the 1970s provides guideposts to examine the social and personal lives of female prostitutes. These stories are mediated through educated female reformers who quite conceivably transferred their middle and upper class sentiments and ideals into the writing of these stories. As chapter four will demonstrate, the stories, as a whole, ultimately served to embody all that was wrong with Iranian family practices. Despite their limitations, however, the life-stories are a welcome supplement that often corroborate findings from police records and government documents when one removes their concerns with the origins and causes of prostitution. As such, I have avoided their discussion of "becoming."

The value and strength of the life-stories are achieved through the collection as a whole, rather than by the individual stories. At times published in interview format and at times as one long story, they highlight networks of prostitution across Iran and the ease with which women moved across them. Practically all the stories heavily focus on the downfalls of the women and the factors that contributed to their

¹⁵⁰ Patrick Dunae suggest taking a fresh investigative approach to census data to locate prostitutes. See Patrick Dunae, "Sex, Charades, and Census Records: Locating Female Sex Trade Workers in a Victorian City," *Social History* 42, no. 84 (November 2009), 269.

disgrace, beginning from birth. Rather than focusing on such subjective topics that carried loaded lessons about acceptable gender roles while assigning fault for the plight of prostitutes, I have chosen to focus on patterns that emerge about the women's experiences as prostitutes and their social interactions in the sex industry. Of course, the women telling their stories may have chosen to conform to anticipated expectations of interviewers but both interviewer and interviewee played a role in circulating conceptions of prostitution. Like other historical sources, these stories are nuanced and one must be circumspect in utilizing them. As with many milieus defined by sex and money, one might reasonably expect to encounter some misrepresentation. As Maria Luddy has observed, "our views on the nineteenth- and twentieth-century prostitute come from those who feared, despised, pitied or tolerated her."¹⁵¹ The life-stories published a *Banuvan* present the possibility of offering the perspective of their tellers albeit through a narrow and mediated channel.

According to the information available for the 1970s, women working as prostitutes easily and often moved from city to city for multiple reasons. They moved in search of better working conditions, to get away from abusers, to avoid shame to themselves or their families, to follow or find a loved one, and at times they were forcibly moved or sold to new owners. Travelling from Ahwaz, Abadan, Bandar Abbas, and

¹⁵¹ Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society, 1800-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 8.

Kermanshah to Tabriz, Isfahan, Rasht and Tehran, their movement highlights a network of prostitution across Iran and the availability of collective information in sharing suitable locations for work. Many women were informed by friends who had previously worked in other cities or forced by pimps and lovers to travel.

By the 1970s, the term *Shahr-i Nau*, which was once the name of a neighborhood in Tehran, had come to signify the red-light district in other cities, and women mentioned working in *Shahr-i Nau-i Tabriz*, *Shahr-i Nau-i Kermanshah*, and *Shahr-i Nau-i Bandar Abbas*; arriving in new cities without money or family, prostitutes often knew where to search for work and clients. Tired of working in the red-light district in the small city of Kermanshah, one prostitute decided to try her luck elsewhere, especially in larger cities. “From my fellow (*hamshahri*) prostitutes in Kermanshah, I had got the address of the *Shahr-i Nau* in Tehran,” she said. “One of them wrote the name of *Vajihih Turk* (*Vajihih*, the Turk), her address, and her house number in a withered (*muchalih*) sheet of paper, so I could go to her if I became troubled (*darmandih*) In Tehran.”¹⁵² Immediately after arriving in Tehran, she visited *Vajihih’s* house and began work there as a Kermanshahi (from Kermanshah) prostitute.

Using the resources available to them, they often travelled by bus or hitchhiked with truck drivers. Ahwaz enjoyed a lucrative sex industry

¹⁵² “Farib Khurdiha,” *Ittila‘at-i Banuwan*, August 30, 1972, 75.

dominated by madams, and conditions there were the harshest for prostitutes. The women involved in the sex industry in Ahwaz were, according to the interviews, mostly forced into selling their bodies or held against their will and imprisoned when they came searching for work. Lone female travelers were often the most vulnerable. The paternalistic nature of society made lone women easy targets and runaway girls were often mistaken for prostitutes or assumed to be sexually available, even when they denied such allegations. Virginity itself was a form of protection for many girls, and non-virgin women outside of marriage, widows and divorcees that is, were considered sexually dangerous and available and therefore especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Working within Tehran's red-light district, also named the *Qal'ih* (fortress), created a more permanent identity as a prostitute.¹⁵³ Streetwalking on the other hand allowed women a more elastic identity. Streetwalkers often led double lives, one when living among their community and neighbors and one when on outings in search of customers. For those streetwalkers without continuous male guardianship, the ambiguity surrounding their lives at times raised suspicion. Yet many of the women portrayed streetwalking as a way to make ends meet or to temporarily overcome difficult economic times. Often, when they were able to make more permanent arrangements for

¹⁵³ The prostitutes interviewed in *Banuvan* referred to the red-light district both as Shahr-i Nau and *Qal'ih*.

cohabitation with a particular man they would cease work, and return to streetwalking only when the relationship ended.

Streetwalking was the more autonomous form of sexual work. The women were able to choose where and when to work; they had more choice over their customers and maintained a state of semi-respectability. What is more, if they had children, ailing parents, or young siblings, they could live with and care for them. On the other hand, streetwalking was extremely dangerous. Women were beaten, raped, robbed and not paid and left without any legal recourse against their attackers since streetwalking was illegal and prosecuted.¹⁵⁴ Fariba's story serves as a typical example. The police prevented her work in Shahr-i Nau since she did not possess a health certificate, forcing her to switch to streetwalking. According to her, "I don't have any security in the streets. None of the street-women are immune from customers. Some of them take us to the desert and by intimidation, beating and insults coerce us to undress. Then they take our clothes and leave us naked. Some take our money."¹⁵⁵ Left without legal protections, female streetwalkers sought to reduce harm in various ways. Some refused to board cars with multiple passengers; others, like Akhtar, worked in duets to ensure their safety and reduce violence against themselves.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, December 13, 1972, 10; "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, January 9, 1974, 69; "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, October 29, 1975, 57.

¹⁵⁵ "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, June 12, 1974, 69.

¹⁵⁶ "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, May 24, 1972, 75; "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, April 17, 1974, 63.

Left at the mercy of drunks, vagrants, thieves and men attempting to “cleanse” the city, some surrendered autonomy for safety and chose to work in Shahr-i Nau. For women working in Shahr-i Nau, safety from customers was generally guaranteed, as both pimps and the police provided protection. More established women were able to work in Shahr-i Nau while living on the streets surrounding the walled red-light district. Many others, however, worked and lived in the same place and navigated the complexities of life where drugs, pimps, and madams were prevalent. Younger girls and newcomers to the city were particularly vulnerable to monetary exploitation. Though youth increased the price of sexual services, many of the younger women did not reap the fees for their services. Youth and inexperience often went hand in hand with a lack of information about the networks and structure of the red-light district. In addition to the prostitutes, *sardastih*s (madams) and *baj girs* (pimps) were established members of the sex industry. Unlike streetwalkers, prostitutes in Shahr-i Nau were able to engage with the legal system and often sought help from the police in dealing with abusive pimps, boyfriends (*rafiq*), madams, and even family members who came to their rescue.¹⁵⁷ In so doing, they managed to exceed the socio-spatial confinement imposed on them by the state.

¹⁵⁷ “Farib Khurdiha,” *Ittila‘at-i Banuwan*, May 22, 1974, 69; “Farib Khurdiha,” *Ittila‘at-i Banuwan*, October 1, 1975, 57; Farib Khurdiha,” *Ittila‘at-i Banuwan*, November 5, 1975, 57; Farib Khurdiha,” *Ittila‘at-i Banuwan*, November 26, 1975, 65.

Information and advice on navigating life in the Shahr-i Nau and even as streetwalkers often came from other women. Prostitutes in Shahr-i Nau were the most valuable sources of support and information to each other. They provided information on everything from childbirth, abortion, physical health, legal advice and love. Nargis, a young girl who was sold to a madam (*sardastih*) in Shahr-i Nau, was advised by an older woman working under the same madam to demand that her wages be paid directly to her by threatening to report the lack of payment to the police. The threat worked and she was able to garner part of her wages.¹⁵⁸ The women encouraged each other to continue their pregnancies, provided information on abortion locations when necessary, helped each other through emotional suffering when they abandoned their children, consoled each other when grieving the death of a child, cared for each other in sickness and aided those in abusive relationships. “I became pregnant and tried to abort the child a few times, but was unsuccessful,” Shahnaz told. “My coworkers said if I tried any harder to get rid of the baby, I would lose my own life. Out of concern for my own health, I kept the baby.” Once the child was born, her coworkers helped find a location to leave the baby (*sari rah*). “I don’t know what happened to her,” she continued. “It was a girl. I regret abandoning the child now. I don’t know what happened to it. If it is dead

¹⁵⁸ “Farib Khurdiha,” *Ittila‘at-i Banuwan*, May 22, 1974, 69.

or alive. My punishment is that I cannot become a mother anymore and have not been pregnant again.”¹⁵⁹

The key, however, to working in *Qal'ih* was having a health card, a luxury that many women did not have. A significant portion of the interviewed women mentioned having been arrested for not carrying a health card. Some were unable to obtain health cards because they did not possess any form of identification, particularly birth certificates (*shinasnamih*). The women rarely mention being infected with sexually transmitted disease, but it is also possible to assume that some were forced out of work when they became infected. This, however, did not stop women without health cards from working in the red-light district, which can also point to the general lack of concern among customers regarding venereal disease or an unfounded optimism that women working in Shahr-i Nau were inspected regularly. While the government launched a vehement campaign to prevent “unhealthy” women from working in the sex industry, the continuity of customers regardless of health certificates, along with the stream of customers for streetwalkers, indicates that for frequenters of Shahr-i Nau and men purchasing sex, sexual health was not on the agenda. Women working without health cards were only arrested when police conducted searches, and many continued to work in the red-light district until they were inspected by authorities.

¹⁵⁹ “Farib Khurdiha,” *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, April 24, 1974, 69.

In addition to streetwalking and working in the red-light district, women engaged in the sex industry in other ways. Farman-Farmaian's detailed study of sex work in Tehran identifies four types of prostitutes in Tehran: sex workers in *Qal'ih*, streetwalkers, women working in bars and cafes, and those living and working in slums.¹⁶⁰ The interviews in *Ittila'at-i Banuwan* confirm that in addition to street walkers and workers in *Qal'ih*, women working in Tehran's bars and cafes were also involved in the sex industry. Working as dancers, singers, and servers, some of these women engaged in commercial sex as an additional source of income. Other women worked as call girls. They often had handlers who would arrange their meetings at designated locations and for specific prices. These encounters often involved being driven by a chauffeur or being picked up and dropped off at designated meeting places.

Women easily managed to move between different types of sex work in Tehran. Women moved from working in bars to streetwalking, entered *Qal'ih* when they were caught, left *Qal'ih* when they could not produce health certificates, and returned to streetwalking.¹⁶¹ Those who could obtain health certificates, however, predominantly chose to work in the red-light district. Security was clearly a significant concern and with the lack of any form of protection on the streets, streetwalkers were easy and frequent targets. Married at the age of 12 and divorced shortly after,

¹⁶⁰ Sattareh Farman-Farmaian, *Piramin-i Ruspigari dar Shahr-i Tehran*.

¹⁶¹ "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, October 25, 1972, 67; "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, June 26, 1974, 72; "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, August 6, 1975, 60

Iran worked both inside *Qal'ih* and as a streetwalker. She recalled her conversation with other prostitutes about the advantages and disadvantages of each as such, “even though income generated from working in *Qal'ih* was less than walking the streets, at least there was security and nobody bothers a prostitute because she is not alone and the police are always vigilant about customers’ behavior.”¹⁶²

In addition, women within the red-light district did not have to tolerate the sting of the stigma associated with sex work. Iran’s life story clearly highlights this. The women interviewed clearly understood and often internalized the shame associated with their work. When asked about marriage, prostitutes wondered why anyone would marry them when there were so many “honorable” women available (*In hamih dukhtar-i najib hast*).¹⁶³ Some, like Parvin, emphasized that they were “still hopeful about God’s mercy” or, like ‘Azimat, stated that “with all my filth, I still take refuge with my God.”¹⁶⁴ Religiosity did not make a recurring appearance in the interviews, yet when it did, it was often in the form of abstaining from work during times of mourning (presumably in Muharram and Ramadan) or vowing to travel to Mashhad for pilgrimage or mentioning past pilgrimages to Mashhad.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² “Farib Khurdiha,” *Ittila’at-i Banuwan*, October 3, 1973, 73.

¹⁶³ “Farib Khurdiha,” *Ittila’at-i Banuwan*, May 1, 1974, 70.

¹⁶⁴ “Farib Khurdiha,” *Ittila’at-i Banuwan*, October 29, 1972, 69; “Farib Khurdiha,” *Ittila’at-i Banuwan*, December 2, 1972, 95.

¹⁶⁵ “Farib Khurdiha,” *Ittila’at-i Banuwan*, July 12, 1972, 66; “Farib Khurdiha,” *Ittila’at-i Banuwan*, December 20, 1972, 94; “Farib Khurdiha,” *Ittila’at-i Banuwan*, January 24, 1973, 36.

For women engaged in the sex industry, sex work was a difficult endeavor. It entailed physical dangers, emotional pain, health risks, and legal repercussions when working without health certificates. While those working with health cards enjoyed legal protections against pimps, madams, and other abusers, for many, regulation often exacerbated their predicaments. Yet many women continued to choose sex work as an alternative to other forms of menial labor, begging, and abusive relationships. The structural forces shaping the lives of women, namely paternalism and sexual double standards, made it difficult for single women to have respectable social standings. Single women outside of the boundaries of family had few options for sustenance, and prostitution was certainly a feasible solution for many. Even then, the continued association with a male friend or sexual partner secured the safety of women and increased their respectability. While such associations had the added benefit of protecting women from outside advances and violence, they often left women at the mercy of a single man, but women attempted to use the state as a protector when necessary. The women working in Shahr-i Nau sought police and court protections against boyfriends (*rafiq*) who reaped the benefits of their work and madams who mistreated them.

In sum, regulation stripped sex workers outside of the red-light district from the protections of the law and left them especially vulnerable to violence as they attempted to elude the law and avoid

penalties. Women working in Shahr-i Nau who carried health cards on the other hand enjoyed the protection of the law and waged complaints against pimps and those who took advantage of them. However, they often carried less autonomy over their lives and regularly dealt with pimps and madams who confiscated their wages and exploited them.

Hidden from Foreign Men

The last section of this chapter revisits the issue of visibility and places prostitution within the larger context of Iran's international image and national identity. As outlined earlier in the chapter, the undesired visibility of prostitution shaped citizen complaints and the outgrowth of the subsequent policy of regulation and containment. The frequent arrests of streetwalkers displayed yet another evidence of this practice. It was the visibility rather than the immorality of prostitution and particularly its visibility in the gaze of respectable women and girls that shaped the policy of regulation. The concentration of the illicit sex industry and prostitutes within the walled quarters of the red-light districts gave men access to sex while also safeguarding other women and denying them access to it. The correspondence between the Iranian council in Iraq and the foreign minister's office in Tehran, however, reveals that in the eyes of Iranian officials, Iranian women were considered as informal ambassadors of the Iranian people and the nation while abroad. When reports of the trafficking of Iranian women to Iraq for work in the sex industry emerged, Iranian officials on both sides of the

border began a quest to save the Iranian women involved in illicit sex in Iraq, and more importantly to hamper the ability of any woman travelling without guardians to Iraq.

The transportation of women from Iran to Iraq took place via Mahabad to Erbil or via Khurram Shahr to Baghdad and Karbala.¹⁶⁶ In May 1951, the Iranian council in Iraq wrote to the foreign minister's office, alarmed at the presence of Iranian women in Iraq without guardians who were a source of "disgrace and disrespect to Iran and Iranians."¹⁶⁷ The Council stated that Iranians in Iraq had contacted them and displayed disgust at the "shameful" behavior of the women. Humiliated by the action of the women, Iranians in Iraq had stated that "we cannot witness, with our own eyes, that these women of Iran be in relations with a foreign man at every minute." Claiming that the women caused disgrace and torment, they offered to have the women sent back to Iran at their own expense.¹⁶⁸ The shame associated with the "lewd" behavior of the women cannot be overstated. In repeated letters, Iranian authorities in Iran and Iraq warned that these behaviors were against the high status of Iranians and caused humiliation for fellow citizens.¹⁶⁹

Perceived as threatening Iran's national image and the honor of individual Iranians, the government strove to limit the movement of all

¹⁶⁶ "Qachaq-i Zanan-i Irani va Furush-i Anha dar 'Araq," Iranian National Archives, 290003204, 25-45; "Guzarishat-i Ruzanih Idarat-i Zhandarmili Tehran va Shahristanha," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 240028036, 203.

¹⁶⁷ "Guzarish-i 'Amal-i Manafi 'Iffat Zanan-i Irani dar 'Araq," Iranian National Archives, Tehran, 2900000878, 1-20.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Iranian women across the border to Iraq. The minister of state sent decrees to all border crossings and police stations ordering them to be extra vigilant about the movement of Iranian women. It also ordered the foreign ministry to refrain from issuing passports to single women or those in the company of suspicious men. What is more, it attempted to hinder the marriage of Iranian women to Iraqi citizens, since these men were considered as the mediators in deceiving and selling the women in Iraq after marrying them or promising marriage. The visibility of Iranian women engaged in “sullied” and “corrupt” behavior abroad generated immediate action. The purity of the Iranian nation and the reputation of its citizens internationally depended on the chastity of women’s bodies abroad. Women were regarded as national property, and in the same ways female prostitutes “disgraced” their families and brought shame to their fathers, brothers, and uncles, Iranian women servicing Arab men shamed the nation as a whole. The conflicting attitudes to the sexual availability of Iranian women for Arab men and foreign soldiers during World War II raises interesting questions about race and the significance of the physical location where women’s bodies were bought and sold.

Conclusion

The modern history of Iran is replete with state-centered approaches and top to bottom paradigms, ones in which the state acts as the major shaping agent in the lives of Iranians and Iranian politics and history. An investigation of petition writings against prostitution across

Iran, however, reveals the ways in which local politics and individual citizens influenced national policy across Iran. During the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s the solution to the “problem” of prostitution often involved the informal removal or relocation of suspected and accused women. Those fined, and on rare occasions jailed, for the most part appear to have been repeat offenders and brothel holders. It was the visibility of prostitution, rather than the sexual act itself that was policed and prosecuted. The continued citizen complaints coupled with the strengthening of the second Pahlavi regime over time resulted in the systematic regulation and the surveillance of the bodies of the women involved in the sex trade in the 1960s and 1970s.

Regulation enforced gender ideologies. It further separated “respectable” women from “impure” and “fallen” women, and increasingly made it difficult and physically dangerous for prostitutes outside of the red-light district to work and care for themselves, and in this, it created a more permanent, and less fluid, identity as prostitutes for women working in the red-light district. The demand for sex outside of marriage, for men, was taken for granted. Women on the other hand needed protection from the mere visibility of female sexual transgression. Masculinity was intertwined with men’s ability to protect women, and male relatives and the state carried the responsibility of ensuring the purity of women, or at least, the purity of some women. The state also became the vanguard of Iranian morality and honor since the purity and

reputation of Iran and Iranians rested on the bodies of Iranian women and their engagement with objectionable men. The male pursuit of sex for pay was regarded normal and understandable; yet the visibility of prostitution to “respectable” women was exceedingly problematic.

PART II. Picturing the Prostitute: Controlling the Image

Chapter 3: Prostitution through the Lens of Others: Visual Representations of Iranian Prostitutes in the 1970s

Introduction

As the previous two chapters have discussed, the growth and spatial ordering of Shahr-i Nau were tantamount to the physical confinement and spatial isolation of the bodies of female prostitutes in Iran. The policing of these women's mobility went hand in hand with an informal toleration of sexual commerce. This systematic state policing of female prostitutes that heavily focused on visibility, ironically, took place in the midst of the flourishing of visual representations of female prostitutes that were controlled and channeled by the state. As female prostitutes were confined to the red-light district, visual representations and imagery of their existence were disseminated across Iran through movies and still images.

During this period, visual representation of Iranian prostitutes were abundant, and Iranian cinema profoundly concerned itself with depicting and representing women engaged in multiple avenues of the sex industry. Visual imagery was an integral component in the construction of the meaning of sexuality for Iranian society and the Iranian public during this period. These media used visual material to document and represent the meaning of sexuality both for men and women, to assign moral judgment to a spectrum of sexual behaviors, and to convey political and social messages over these representations. These

visual images of prostitutes are culturally and historically significant precisely because they are embedded in and with social practices and power relations.

As a study of prostitutes' presence in public culture, this chapter attempts to utilize visual depictions of prostitutes in Tehran during the 1970s to garner some information on the personal and social lives of the women working in the red-light district, while simultaneously setting forth and analyzing the visual representations of prostitution that the Iranian public consumed during the same period. The chapter stems from the assumption that the meaning and social effects of visual images and the information they can generate are made at three different sites: the production site, the site of the image itself, and the site of its audiencing, with various modalities to each of these sites.¹⁷⁰ The chapter concerns itself with investigating the meanings and social significance of these visual images both at the site of the image itself and at audiencing, which includes the range of economic, social, and political relations, institutions, and practices that surround visual images and through which they are seen and used.

In the process, it advocates for the use of photographs as possible historical documents in the writing of social and personal history in the Middle East, particularly in the absence of personal narratives of

¹⁷⁰ Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: an Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2012), ch. 2.

subaltern groups such as prostitutes. In addition, by taking a closer look at the entertainment industry in Iran during the 1970s, the chapter raises concerns about the category of “prostitute” itself and the difficulty associated with writing such history.

Photographs and Tehran’s Red-light District

A young, innocent-looking girl with short, dark wavy hair kneels on a bed covered with old, ragged sheets. Wearing a black long-sleeve knit shirt and a white mini-skirt, her hands rest on her bare legs as she sits against a shabby, worn-out wall that dominates most of the view. With painted nails, gold bracelets, and slippers, she looks directly at the camera. Plastered on the wall to her left is a poster of a semi-nude woman emerging from cliff-side waters with an arched back, hands raised to her hair in a sexual pose. Both flaunt slightly parted lips, the girl in a resigned pose and the woman in an openly seductive one.¹⁷¹

This girl was a prostitute in Tehran’s red-light district (Shahr-i Nau) in the 1970s, and the woman in the poster, what appears to be a stock image “blonde bombshell.”¹⁷² The girl working in Shahr-i Nau was photographed by Kaveh Golestan, the famed Iranian photojournalist, as part of his series on prostitutes in Shahr-i Nau between 1975-1977. With over 30 published photos of prostitutes and pimps, Golestan’s photos

¹⁷¹ For Golestan’s photographs discussed in this dissertation see: Hengameh Golestan and Malu Halasa, eds., *Kaveh Golestan: Recording Truth in Iran* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2007).

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 34.

portray some of the most powerful and arguably realistic representations of sex workers in Tehran during the 1970s.

The son of the prominent Iranian novelist and documentary filmmaker Ebrahim Golestan, Kaveh Golestan was a photojournalist and freelance filmmaker critical of the Shah's regime and later of the Islamic Republic. He worked for BBC and CNN and captured many of the events of the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War on film. His photos of the Iranian Revolution won him the Pulitzer Prize. Born in 1950, he died in 2003, when he stepped on a land mine in Iraq. Much like the prominent American documentary photographer Lewis Hine, he saw the camera as an instrument of social reform.¹⁷³

From 1975 through 1977 Kaveh Golestan captured the lives of Iranian prostitutes living in Shahr-i Nau on camera. The photos in this collection, part of a series titled *Ruspi, Kargar va Majnoon*, depict the lives of Iranian prostitutes, laborers, and the mentally challenged. In 1977, the photos were displayed at an exhibition at Tehran University, but the exhibition was shut down by authorities after a week for portraying and dispersing a negative image of the country.¹⁷⁴ Included

¹⁷³ Hojat Sepahvand, "Defining Moments," in *Kaveh Golestan: Recording the Truth in Iran*, eds. Hengameh Golestan and Malu Halasa (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 22-23. For more on Lewis Hine see: Peter Seixas, "Lewis Hine: from 'Social' to 'interpretive' Photographer," *American Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (Autumn 1987): 381-409. For Lewis Hine as an instrument of social change see: Verna Curtis and Stanley Mallach, *Photography and Reform: Lewis Hine and the National Child Labor Committee* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Art Museum, 1984).

¹⁷⁴ Hengameh Golestan and Mehrak Golestani, "Biography," in *Kaveh Golestan: Recording the Truth in Iran*, eds. Hengameh Golestan and Malu Halasa (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 160.

with photos of young prostitutes were touching images of mentally challenged children chained to radiators and overburdened workers with blisters and scars. Both the collection as a whole and the individual pictures provide information for a discussion on prostitution in modern Iranian history. Additionally, juxtaposed with the sexualized representation of prostitution in cinematic features, the relaxed images of the women Golestan provides become more distinctive.

On an obvious level, Golestan's pictures provide documentation for an otherwise, literally, erased period of Iranian history and population, and one way of reading them is as documentary evidence. In the mayhem of the anti-Shah Revolution in 1979, Tehran's red-light district was burnt down to the ground, bulldozed, and its inhabitants arrested or evacuated.¹⁷⁵ As mentioned elsewhere in this dissertation, Shahr-i Nau had practically been a city within a city, with its own stores, clinics, and walled gates. The photos provide a glimpse of this destroyed segregated quarter. As a collection, the photographs can tell the story of this sub-city. Golestan photographed the women in their rooms, in their waiting areas, in their courtyards, and in the streets.

Based on these photos it is possible to go some distance toward recreating the environment in which these women worked. Of course, this must be done with tremendous caution. As Pierre Bourdieu has suggested in his introduction to *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*: "One

¹⁷⁵ "Bulldozers Smash Tehran Bordellos," *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 1980, B5.

might say of photography what Hegel said of philosophy: ‘No other art of science is subjected to this last degree of scorn, to the supposition that we are masters of it without ado.’”¹⁷⁶ When it comes to these images, we can only speculate about what has been included in the frame and what excluded, what images have been reproduced and what images repressed.

In a tentative vein, if these photographs reflect the realities that these women lived, the material environment displayed suggests that the lives of these women were not that different from many other women during the same period. A number of the women are photographed in homely circumstances affirming the connections between sensuality and domesticity in the sex industry. In one photograph, a woman is seen standing close to a refrigerator, tea brewing on the samovar, and dishes scattered around the room.¹⁷⁷

While the public areas clearly display the use of electric appliances, the situation is somewhat different in the individual rooms of the prostitutes. In many of the rooms an electric fan is visible somewhere near the bed, hinting at the fact that the photos were probably taken in the summer. The point here is to suggest that the material lives of female prostitutes working in Shahr-i Nau was not that separate from other working class women, despite continuous effort to conflate the meager

¹⁷⁶ Pierre, Bourdieu et al., *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (Stanford: University of California Press, 1990), 5.

¹⁷⁷ For the photographs see *Ibid.*, 43.

and difficult living conditions of the women with their perceived moral decadence and degeneration. In the absence of scholarly work on working class families and women during this period, tentative conclusions can be drawn based on comparisons of photographs.

These photos also shed light on the women themselves and have the potential to provide information about social relationships in the red-light district. In almost all of the photos where women are visibly photographed, the women are sporting gold jewelry in the form of necklaces, bracelets, and anklets as well as gold teeth. Earrings were rare in the photos and were mainly worn by older, perhaps more established, women. Most of the gold, however, is displayed in the form of bracelets. Younger girls often wore thinner (less expensive) gold bracelets. The women either did not have access to banks or did not trust the banks as repositories for their savings.¹⁷⁸ The inaccessibility of banks to these women, their lack of trust in the banking system, and the

¹⁷⁸ While data on historical gold consumption patterns in Iran are difficult to come by, according to a study conducted by the Grendon International Research and commissioned by the World Gold Council, in 2004, gold jewelry consumption estimates placed Iran as the world's sixth largest gold-jewelry-consuming country in the world, after India, US, China, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. The historic preference of gold over other forms of investment by poor individuals from developing countries has previously been established. In India for example, poor peasants with little access to and no trust in banks and financial markets are the main consumers of gold. The immediate liquidity of gold and ability to use it as insurance for loans plays another important factor in preferring it. See: "Treasure Chest: India's Lust for Gold," *The Economist*, January 12, 2013, accessed April 5, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/finance-and-economics/21569455-love-gold-becomes-macroeconomic-problem-treasure-chest>; "Why Do Indians Love Gold?" *The Economist*, November 20, 2013, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2013/11/economist-explains-11>

desire to keep their savings nearby all point to some degree of autonomy exercised by the women.

On the other hand, it also corroborates the discussion on security in Shahr-i Nau put forth in the previous chapter. That is, it highlights some level of security in the red-light district for the women since they all chose to publicly display their savings and assets, which could also be an indication of status. As discussed in the previous chapter, robbery and the stealing of money and clothes were often an enormous dilemma for female streetwalkers in Tehran. The women working in the red-light district, on the other hand, confidently displayed their belongings. However, as mentioned, most of the gold came in the form of bracelets, which would be the safest form of investment in gold as they are arguably the most difficult to steal.

One of the photographs in the collection captures the actual health certificate of a prostitute.¹⁷⁹ In this photo, an older woman is portrayed in her room holding up her health certificate (*kart-i bihdasht*) to the camera, providing access to this otherwise unreachable historical document. Health cards were essential for continued work in the red-light district, and women who provided sexual services without health cards were fined or jailed if they could not pay.

¹⁷⁹ See figure 4.

The upper left corner of the document reveals a much younger image of the woman and bears the seal of the Iranian Health Ministry.¹⁸⁰ It was issued by the Center for Fighting Sexually Transmitted Disease, south-city branch. This suggests not only that such a center under the supervision of the Health Ministry actually existed but that there may have been multiple centers as the one issued to this woman was from the south-city branch. The health certificate had been issued around 1957 and is perhaps the earliest evidence of sexual-health inspections of prostitutes by Iranian authorities.

While intergovernmental memos recommending or instructing the epidemiological surveillance of prostitutes in Iran survive, no other actual proof of such surveillance has been located in the archives. Secured in a transparent plastic cover, the health certificate also bears multiple stamps certifying this woman's sexual health and availability. It reads, "The holder of this card with the abovementioned identification and picture has been inspected for sexually transmitted disease on the dates mentioned below and on the back of this card and is healthy."¹⁸¹ The dated stamps indicate that weekly checkups were required for the women and specify the level and frequency of state surveillance of women's bodies. The fact that prostitutes were required to receive weekly health checks to guarantee their sexual health substantiates findings in

¹⁸⁰ Hengameh Golestan and Malu Halasa, eds., *Kaveh Golestan*, 35.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

the previous chapters regarding the level of state surveillance and regulation of prostitution in Iran during this period.

Little has been said about the customers who frequented these women. In his description of the collection, Golestan asserts that the customers of these women were mainly laborers who had migrated to the capital.¹⁸² However, obtaining information about the customers has proven difficult. Men were rarely exposed in the photos and, on occasion, only photographed if they were pimps.¹⁸³

Throughout the collection of the photographs, the women present themselves in a variety of ways and poses. Some women openly and comfortably pose for the camera while others retain a reserved or ambivalent look. Rather than being passive and invisible, many engage directly with the camera and photographer and comfortably participate in the production of their own images. They display their personal and collective surroundings with a particular ease that can speak to a trust between the photographer and the subject. Not all women display the comfort and ease exhibited in some of the photographs. For some, remorse or shame permeates the photograph. The variegated nature of the visual imagery of these women is quite telling. At this site of production where the first step in the production of meaning of the visual takes place, these women could be considered active, if at least present,

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁸³ Malu Halasa and Maziar Bahari, eds., *Transit Tehran: Young Iran and its Inspirations*, (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 2009), 147.

participants in the production of their own visual imagery, a factor that in turn contributes to the meaning of these images and their reception by various audiences.

These observations are certainly not to say that there is a “correct” answer to the question of “what does this image mean?” Indeed, there is no law guaranteeing that images will have or ever had “one true” meaning or that the meaning of images will not change over time. What is being done here is interpretative work based on plausible assumptions and not right or wrong. It also follows that Golestan’s locus as the medium for channeling these meanings and his personal agendas must not be overlooked. Photography in its various manifestations—be it documentary, art, scientific or personal expression—is intricately tied to histories of colonialism, resistance, identity, and power structures.¹⁸⁴

The revelation of the women working in Shahr-i Nau as consumers of popular culture constitutes another striking feature of Golestan’s photos. Over ten photographs depicting prostitutes in the common waiting area and their individual rooms illustrate the adornment of the walls with posters of Iranian as well as Western celebrities. The waiting area of some of the houses photographed, where customers would prepay and receive tokens (*zhitun*) for services, was particularly replete with posters of celebrities. These large rooms housed a table behind which the

¹⁸⁴ Carla Williams and Deborah Willis, *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002) 3-5.

madam or owner of the brothel would sit and conduct the monetary transactions preceding the sexual liaison. Between 15 to 20 seats, positioned in rows and against walls, were available for customers to wait and for prostitutes to linger and interact.¹⁸⁵ The posters on the walls included images of scenery, animals, and child models alongside famed Iranian cinema and music celebrities such as Behrouz Vossoughi, Dariush Ighbali, and Shohreh Aghdashloo. In the individual rooms of prostitutes which Golestan photographed, although some rooms had empty walls, others were decorated with posters of celebrities, often the only other item present in the room in addition to the bed, fan, trashcan, and tissue box. If the posters are any indication of the women's own taste and choice, the prostitutes of Shahr-i Nau were consumers of Iranian and Western popular culture and the lives of these celebrities apparently loomed large in their imagination and aspirations.

The interview in *Ittila'at-i Banuwan* with the streetwalker Manizhih published in March 1973 serves as a telling, albeit unusual, case suggesting one of such feelings. Manizhih discussed her infatuation with Naser Malek-Motiee, the Iranian superstar who often played thugs, *lutis* (tough-guys) and pimps. Illiterate, she first saw his photo in a magazine when she traveled to Tehran and remained in the city to work as a maid. From then on, she stated, her only dream was to meet with him in person as she continued to collect and cherish all the photos of him that

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 39-41.

she could obtain. Only weeks before the interview took place, she had given birth to a baby girl whom she had placed in an orphanage (*parvarishgah*) with the help of a social worker. As she was unable to obtain a birth certificate and officially name the baby girl, she had pleaded with the social worker to name her Nasirih (feminine of Nasir).¹⁸⁶

Manizhih's story and Golestan's photos provide an unusually personal and raw glimpse into the lives of the women working in the sex industry in Tehran during this period and illustrate their familiarity with and even veneration of popular actors, actresses, and singers. They were, like many other Iranians during this period, consumers of the movie industry and attendees at cinemas. Some of these women clearly cherished Iranian celebrities and perhaps identified with them. They were movie-goers and there is no indication that the photos they displayed in their personal rooms and the waiting area of the red-light district were not their personal taste and choice.

Appropriating Prostitutes: Iranian Cinema and the Harlot

Despite the seemingly innocuous nature and content of Golestan's photographs, his photos were heavily censored and removed from public consumption. As the abovementioned reading suggests, the photographs were by no means obscene and the female subjects were politically inactive. Banned from exhibiting his collection of photos at Tehran University presumably by the Iranian secret police (*Saziman-i Ittila'at va*

¹⁸⁶ "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, March 14, 1973, 80.

Amniyat-i Kishvar) known as SAVAK, Golestan exhibited his photos on the sidewalk across the street from the University to students and the public alike. Shortly thereafter, he was forced to move the exhibition to a private gallery in Tehran. Much like the documentarian, Kamran Shirdel, who had filmed the women of the red-light district earlier and had his film confiscated by the SAVAK, Golestan's photos were perceived as threatening by the government and treated as such. These visual representations of the women in the sex industry, then, became political threats to the regime. The presence of these images in the public eye challenged the State's allowable image of prostitution. The censoring of these photos was part of maintaining and controlling a specific image of prostitution.

During the same period that Golestan photographed the women of the red-light district, prostitution became a prominent trope in Iranian cinema and dozens of movies thematically revolved around prostitutes. The absurdity of seeing one's profession and "self" represented on screen in such imbued visual images consumed by masses of the Iranian population must have had some resonance with female sex workers in Iran. While the red-light district remained a gated community and the women employed within it secluded, the growing and popular medium of cinema actively and repeatedly displayed the life, work, and identity of these public women for popular consumption. In the process, it generated meanings of sexuality that were taken in by its audience.

By the 1970s in Iran, depicting the character of prostitutes from red-light districts, café girls, and high-end call girls had become an established and conventional practice in film narratives. In the atmosphere of tight censorship, the permissiveness of these movies, suggests the understanding of prostitution and prostitutes that were tolerable and accepted by the state. Numerous popular movies revolved around a female character engaged in either direct sex work or erotic work such as dancing and singing in cafés. Interestingly, prostitutes working in red-light districts were by and large depicted as naïve victims restricted and constrained by the wickedness of a male pimp and yearning for redemption through true love and marriage, while the depiction of café girls was more varied. While a textual reading of a sample of Iranian movies demonstrates the intricate appropriation of the character of “the prostitute” in numerous films in Iran, a contextual discussion of cinema and movie-going provides the necessary background to the discussion.

By the 1970s, Iranian women had become permanent elements in cinema both as actresses and consumers of movies, while their role as producers, directors, and cinema-owners was nominal or non-existent. As Hamid Naficy has noted in his comprehensive volumes on Iranian cinema, while women were barred from cinemas during the Qajar period for fear that they would become contaminated, and while during the first Pahlavi period they were legally yet grudgingly admitted to movie houses,

by the second Pahlavi period, they had become central to the cinema and to the film industry. In other words, it took “a dynastic political shift favoring modernity and westernization to finally succeed in tenuously constructing women as consumers of the movies.”¹⁸⁷ Sentiments regarding female movie-going, however, continued to be uneasy at best, and women attending movies without families were often suspected of inappropriate behavior. The social taboo regarding female movie-going in the 1970s especially concerned single women’s attendance. Movie-going during this period was a highly social and familial affair and unaccompanied single women at movies were exceptionally suspected of immoral behavior.¹⁸⁸

Movie-going was also class based, and both class and gender influenced attendance at cinemas. Lower-class male youth went to the movies most frequently. In comparison to men, women in general went to the movies much less, although educated women attended more frequently.¹⁸⁹ Considering the high rates of female illiteracy during this period, it is safe to assume that the educated women to whom Naficy refers were middle, if not upper, class. Educated women attended the movies more, while educated men attended the movies less. Female movie-going during the 1970s remained taboo among the lower classes

¹⁸⁷ Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema: The Artisanal Era, 1897-1941* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 276.

¹⁸⁸ Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema: The Industrialization Years, 1941-1978* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 162.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

and among more traditional Muslims.¹⁹⁰ The mixed-gender nature of movie-houses, the exposed bodies of female stars, and movie plots revolving around themes of love and seduction contributed to this taboo and the disapproval regarding female attendance.

Despite this, movie-going continued to remain a favorite pastime event. The rapid population rise across Iran during the 1960s and 1970s and the constant flow of migrants to Tehran went hand in hand with a dramatic increase in the opening of new movie-houses, the production of Iranian movies, and the dubbing of American, Indian, and Italian films.¹⁹¹ 42,658,000 movie tickets were sold in Tehran in 1973, an average of 11 viewings per person.¹⁹² Of the 432 movie houses nationwide in 1973-1974, 122 were located in Tehran, followed by other provincial capital cities.

During the 1970s, movie-going became the cheapest form of mass entertainment as the Pahlavi government kept ticket prices low, striving to appease the potentially volatile lower classes.¹⁹³ In 1973-1974, the Ministry of Culture and Arts issued 2,042 exhibition permits for documentary, educational, and fiction films. Feature movies accounted for 917 of these films and 495 permits were for first-time screenings and 422 for repeat showing.¹⁹⁴ The state maintained a strong grip on

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁹¹ For population increase across Iran see table 1; for population rise in Tehran see table 2.

¹⁹² Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema: The Industrialization Years*, 156.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 158-159

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

ensorship. As Naficy notes, the growing authoritarianism of Mohammad Reza Shah's regime went hand in hand with an increase in the paternalistic tendencies of the censorship apparatuses, and censorship became a means to ensure a politically correct and submissive cinema. The result was two simultaneous developments. The first was the production of more violent and sexually charged but politically safe, escapist, and melodramatic commercial movies, such as the tough-guy films which often portrayed prostitutes. The other was the growth in the production of new-wave films by a new generation of filmmakers, leading to the materialization of a small but progressive dissident cinema.¹⁹⁵

It was within this climate of censorship and increased sexualization of movies that a growing number of Iranian feature films began featuring and utilizing the theme of the prostitute. A comprehensive reading of synopses of Iranian movies produced during this period highlights the increasing utilization of themes related to prostitution and café girls.¹⁹⁶ By the 1970s, many movies either directly or indirectly revolved around the sexual selling of women's bodies and themes of purity, redemption, and love. The commercial film industry during the 1970s in Iran was predominantly star-driven and the star system was highly genre-driven. While some women were serious actors selective about roles, others were cast in subsidiary roles, dancing and

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁹⁶ For the synopses, see Abbas Baharlu, *Filmshinakht-i Iran: Filmshinasi-i Sinamayi Iran, 1352-1357* (Tehran:Daftar-i Pazhuhishhayi Farhangi, 2002) and Jamal Omid, *Farhang-i Filmhayi Sinamayi Iran, 1351-1365* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Nigah, 2011).

singing for a male audience. The fame of these stars derived more from their sexual appeal than their acting abilities.¹⁹⁷

The portrayals of prostitutes during this period were direct creations of male imagination. In Iran, as elsewhere in the Middle East, changing social identities and practices were crucially connected to mechanisms of visual representation.¹⁹⁸ During this period, two parallel depictions of illicit female sexuality emerged. The first depicted women working specifically as sex workers in red-light districts or in houses of prostitution and selling their bodies for money. The casting of such characters went hand in hand with the presence of a male figure, the pimp. In such movies, this ruthless, heartless, and violent figure often prevented the prostitute from leaving her life as a sex worker and pursuing her “pure” love interest. In addition to the male pimp/antagonist, such movies included another male star often in love with the prostitute. He saw beyond her carnal “sins” and sought to redeem her through marriage. The second depiction of transgressive female sexuality revolved around the female dancer and singer working in cafés. Historically, women working in cafes and cabarets often supplemented their wage income with sexual services.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema: The Industrialization Years*, 208.

¹⁹⁸ Lucie Ryzova, “I Am a Whore but I Will Be a Good Mother: On the Production and Consumption of the Female Body in Modern Egypt,” *Arab Studies Journal* 2, vol 12/13 (2004-2005): 82.

¹⁹⁹ Mara Keire, *For Business and Pleasure*, 100.

In the movies, these women walked a fine line between prostitute and entertainer.²⁰⁰ Their character, however, was not afforded the same level of sympathy reserved for prostitutes working in the red-light district or under the rule of pimps. Even though café girls were depicted as falling into prostitution or engaging in sex for monetary exchange, the attitude towards them was more varied. At times they were characterized as being under the repressive rule of a male café owner or lover while other movies characterized them as seductive temptresses destroying the sanctity of families. Café girls were often considered responsible for their own fate and free in selecting their professions. The agency they demonstrated in their lives and the choice to become the object of male desire contributed to the mistrust and suspicion that was directed at them.

A few of the movies centered on prostitutes and the physical space of the red-light district, including: *Atash*, *Dishnih*, *Himmat*, *Vasitiha*, *Faryad Zir-i Ab*, *Ghurbatiha*, *Tuti*, *Dar Shahr Khabari Nist*, *Baluch*, *Badkaran* and *Ab-i Tawbih*. While depictions of the physical environment of the red-light districts in movies during this period carried striking similarities to Golestan's photos discussed earlier, they did not evoke the same dark, gloomy, filthy, and soiled atmosphere.

²⁰⁰ For anthropological studies on the relationship between dancing girls and prostitution, see: Fouzia Saeed, *Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Louise Brow, *The Dancing Girls of Lahore: Selling Love and Saving Dreams in Pakistan's Ancient Pleasure District*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005).

One of the numerous movies portraying a prostitute as a central character, *Vasitiha* (Intermediaries) is the story of an addict prostitute, Muhtaram, working in the red-light district who is approached by a young university student, Hamid, who is conducting field research for his thesis on prostitution. His humane respect and non-sexual encounters with her embolden her to escape her pimp and madam. The room in which she services clients displays striking similarities to Golestan's photos. A simple, unfurnished room, its walls are decorated with posters depicting people, presumably celebrities. After escaping life in the red-light district, Muhtaram begins living with Hamid. His room is adorned with a large poster of Marlon Brando in *The Godfather*. As a newly "respectable" woman, she begins working in a factory where she is harassed by male co-workers and courted by the rich *kar khanih dar* (factory owner), Mukhtar, who carries on numerous sexual liaisons with multiple women. Her repeated rejections lead Mukhtar to understand her value and propose marriage to her. She eventually accepts his offer, leaving behind Hamid and her old life. Mukhtar's opulent, lascivious, and crude masculinity is starkly contrasted with Hamid's simple, erudite, and gentle masculinity. Each man represents a version of Iranian masculinity. While both are intrigued and involved with the former prostitute and addict, Hamid's intentions, despite his knowledge of her past, are benevolent while Mukhtar's remain carnal. As the makings of

male imagination, movies involving prostitutes played out male anxieties about masculinity and its ideal forms during the 1970s.²⁰¹

The transgression of sex and class gave the prostitute a recognizable place within established social structures as she serviced the sexual needs of the upper class. Muhtaram's transgression of class and her effortless, even if innocent, entrance into high society was destined for disaster. Her newfound happiness is short lived when her past comes back to haunt her in a dramatic turn of events. Her previous pimp learns of her newfound wealth and collaborates with the high-end madam who previously serviced Mukhtar to humiliate her. The pimp blackmails Muhtaram into a last sexual encounter, while the madam persuades her husband to visit a call girl, setting them up to meet each other and learn of each others' secrets. Muhtaram decides to come clean to her husband about her past and abandons her meeting, yet Mukhtar goes to the meeting anticipating an encounter with a prostitute, which is set up in a lavish mansion. Discovering that her husband had not forgone his womanizing habits, Muhtaram leaves in a dramatic scene, presumably returning to the penniless Hamid, who had been the "real" man all along.²⁰²

In the last scene between Mukhtar and Muhtaram, she cries that she was intending to reveal her past to him and to ask for his ultimate forgiveness by allowing him to sacrifice her life in order to wash away her

²⁰¹ Prior to 1979, only a single feature film was directed by a female.

²⁰² *Vasitiha*, directed by Hasan Muhammad Zadih (Tehran: RB Studio, 1977).

sins. The cleansing of sexual sins through a symbolic martyrdom made repeat appearances in movies about prostitution during this period. The two options for the redemption of prostitutes remained marriage and death, which makes one wonder whether marriage was seen as an end to female sexuality. In many of the movies, wives were portrayed as docile and asexual. It also speaks to the sanctity of motherhood and the imagined purity necessary to raise Iranian children. Of the prostitutes depicted in the movies, none were mothers.

While the red-light district was both real and well represented in popular culture, one can only speculate about the effect of the red-light district on masculine identity during this period. Physical spaces like social structures can shape specific ways of being masculine and understanding masculinity. Male social networks in the form of schools, barracks, factories, and sports arenas have the potential of impacting male identity. Much has been writing about the intersection of the geography of red-light district and the creation of the culture of slumming and the sporting class at the turn of the twentieth century and beyond, which ultimately immensely altered the nature of leisure in the United States.²⁰³ In Iran, movies addressing prostitution during this period were as much about masculinity as they were about sexual norms and gender relations. The pure, kindhearted, hardworking, and educated

²⁰³ Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 113-114; on the sporting culture see: Mara Keire, *For Business and Pleasure*, 39.

Hamid epitomized a desired masculinity. While strong and able-bodied in protecting and financially supporting Muhtaram, his modest finances were no comparison to Mukhtar's extravagant lifestyle. His honesty, patience and intellect, however, were a substitute for the inherited wealth Mukhtar flaunted and misused.

Throughout the majority of movies in the 1970s dealing with prostitution, marriage remained the key to redemption and escape from the degradation of prostitution, and compassionate marriage was the ideal arena for this mode of sexual desire to be met. *Vasittha* was unusual in that it pitted the young, poor, student against not only the cruel pimp but also the rich and middle-aged factory owner. Many other movies revolved around the love affair between the prostitute and a naïve, good-hearted, young man. The pimp and at times the madam as his collaborator were the villains, the barrier between prostitutes and love and by extension redemption. Despite the "shameful" actions associated with their bodily flesh, the prostitutes' spirit and heart were pure, and in search of redemption through true love.

A characteristic example of the pure-hearted prostitute, *Dishnih* follows the story of Banafshih, who had repeatedly sought to flee the red-light district with men who promised to marry and care for her. Each time, however, they stole her savings and abandoned her, forcing her to return to work in the red-light district, where Mammad Aqa intimidated and subdued the working girls with the threat of violence. As the movie

depicts, Banafshih's main fault was her inability to read masculinity correctly and to find the right man who would marry and care for her, hence ensuring her place within normative femininity. She epitomized the importance of choosing men, for marriage, wisely and the consequences that arose from failing to do so, as she was robbed, raped, and forced to reenter the red-light district each time she misread the promises of men. Marriage and male protection were repeatedly set forth as the solution to numerous acts of sexual and physical violence against women, while the domestication of female sexuality remained a repeated theme.

Banafshih's newest client, Abbas Chakhan (Abbas, the liar), promises to marry her and to move her to a substantial home that he characterized as having a yard and two rooms with the drawing of a fish on the walls. While run-ins with the law, imprisonment, and other plot twistings delay Abbas and Banafshih's plans, they finally reunite and Abbas takes Banafshih to the new home he has provided for her so they can become a family. It is there that Mammad Aqa once again appears and stabs them both, before being killed by Abbas. As Banafshih and Abbas lie bleeding in the yard of their new home, they are symbolically purified by the water surrounding them and miraculously survive the attack. Redemption from sexual impurity then is achieved through a near death and sacrificial experience in the movie. The last scene reveals a possibly pregnant Banafshih visiting Abbas in prison as he completes

his sentence for the murder of Mammad Aqa.²⁰⁴ Her clothing also undergoes transformation and is modified as she dons a colorful chador during her visit. Banafshih is redeemed through marriage and saved from death, while Abbas becomes a man and a hero by saving her even if it means being behind bars. The theme of the “good” man and “bad” man made repeated appearances in movies during this period. While the latter saved women through marriage and protection, the former abused her through sexual exploitation for monetary gains.

Not all movies entailed a happy ending for the character of the prostitute and death remained a central theme. *Dar Shahr Khabari Nist* (There is Nothing Going on in the City) takes the entangled themes of marriage and prostitution a step further. Here the prostitute is hired not for sex but to play the role of wife to a bachelor as he reunites with his mother and their village. As a young man from the village, ‘Ali had come to Tehran years ago in hope of a better life and had bragged in repeated letters to his mother about his marvelous city life and beautiful wife. Now on her deathbed, the mother’s last request was to meet her daughter-in-law. Attempting to grant his dying mother’s last wish, a broke ‘Ali hires a prostitute to impersonate his non-existent wife. While she is a prostitute, Ashraf’s only wish is to marry and become a “true” wife, and she wholeheartedly embraces this new role, even though ‘Ali does not appreciate or accept her as more than a woman for hire. Instead, during

²⁰⁴ *Dishnih*, directed by Firydun Gulih (Tehran: Siira Film, 1972).

the trip he falls in love with a “westernized” woman, who turns out to be an opportunist and a thief. Halfway through the trip to the village, he rejects Ashraf and leaves her with a group of men who take advantage of her. When he finally reaches his village and visits his mother after subplots of being arrested along the way and having his car stolen, it becomes obvious that Ashraf has already reached the village and cared for his ailing mother.

Ashraf’s drastic transformation from prostitute to wife in the village, where ‘Ali’s mother announces her approval, goes hand in hand with a dramatic transformation in clothing. Ashraf has discarded her revealing and sexualized outfits to dress in traditional and reserved clothing. This change in clothing signals the clear distinction between prostitute and ordinary women and works to define normative femininity. This transformation from sexual to docile and domesticated, in other movies, also went hand in hand with changes in clothing and demeanor. It is only through her role as caretaker to ‘Ali’s ailing mother and her embrace of simple and conservative clothing that Ashraf is able to receive some recognition as a wife. While normative femininity was achieved by way of marriage and equated with the domestication of women, divergent femininity was sexual, impure, and unprotected. As ‘Ali begins to embrace and accept Ashraf as his wife, making her dreams come true,

her pimp arrives in the village to take her away. In the ensuing fight between 'Ali and the pimp, Ashraf is wounded and dies.²⁰⁵

Representing the kind-hearted and naïve yet sexual prostitute, Ashraf desperately longs for marriage and protection and goes to lengthy measures to convince 'Ali to recognize her as his “real” wife. Marriage brought not only respectability and social acceptance, in the male-operated movie industry, but also physical protection. As depicted in this movie, prostitution was sufficient grounds to legitimize rape. In one scene, 'Ali's friend and accomplice in his charade attempts to rape a resisting Ashraf. While 'Ali's intervention prevents the rape, his friend reminds him that Ashraf is not his “real” wife and simply an available prostitute.

Prostitutes were romanticized and sympathized with when they were captives of male pimps and applauded for seeking to escape their wretched plights by marrying a real “man.” Both physically and emotionally prostitutes were considered threatened not only by customers and pimps, but also by “decent” men who were confused by their profession and considered them sexually available. Marriage remained the solution to sexual danger for women. In movie depictions, not only did marriage bring respectability, financial security, and social recognition even for prostitutes, but it also became a physical protection from other men. In essence, the belonging to one man prevented and

²⁰⁵ *Dar Shahr Khabari Nist*, directed by Mahdi Fakhimzadieh (Tehran: Sazman-i Sinamayi-i Panasiat, 1977).

protected against the violence of other men. As in many Hollywood films of the same era, death and martyrdom remained the ultimate redemption.

While the details of the storylines and backgrounds of prostitutes differed from movie to movie, some central themes became prevalent. Depictions of prostitutes in movies revolved around finding true love and redemption through marriage, and a positive sympathetic attitude permeated their roles and characters. In many of the movies, prostitutes were depicted as forced into and kept in prostitution by pimps or by the necessity of caring for sick parents, for example Azar in *Faryad Zir-i Ab*, even though their true desire was to become wives and domesticated.²⁰⁶

The sympathetic portrayals bestowed on prostitutes working in red-light districts and those with pimps did not extend to café singers and dancers, though they were also staple characters in Iranian melodramas and detective movies during this period. In movies, café girls and entertainers often lured and seduced men and paved the path for their downward spiral. Their biggest sin, however, was threatening the sanctity of Iranian families and monogamous marriages. Already employed as singers and dancers, their sexual liaisons were not seen as a response to economic need but to maintain an indulgent lifestyle. The disdain for female profiteers from the sex industry is not unique to Iran and fits within broader sexual ideologies that considered women innately

²⁰⁶ *Faryad Zir-i Ab*, directed by Sirus Alvand (Tehran: Sazman-i Sinamayi-i Panasit, 1977).

virtuous. British colonialists were especially notorious for the considerable uneasiness they displayed towards courtesans that was partly reflective of their disdain for the wealth and power of these women.²⁰⁷

It is also likely that a class issue was at play. Many café goers were middle class or men of middling means. The red-light district, on the other hand, primarily served the lower classes. While the living quarters of red-light district prostitutes were minimal, ragged, and old-style, café girls carried on their “licentious” encounters in their modern apartments, surrounded by new furniture, paintings, and beautiful views. In a sense, they represented the biggest temptation to married men and the family institution while the customers of prostitutes in red-light districts were depicted as bachelors. The personal choice associated with their sexual “promiscuity” and availability clearly correlated with their negative portrayals in feature films during this period. In movies where “men of means” seduced women and girls, the downward spiral of women often included becoming café girls, singing, dancing, and serving drinks to male patrons. As supporting roles, the theme of the café girl easily allowed for the featuring of song-and-dance routines performed for the voyeuristic male gaze. In these scenes, the camera often isolated aspects of women’s bodies during featured performances and focused exclusively on women’s legs, hips, or breasts.

²⁰⁷ Philipa Levine, “A Multitude of Unchaste Women: Prostitution in the British Empire,” *Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 4 (2004): 162.

As mentioned above, female seduction was often linked with a woman's freedom of action and choices, and women free from the confines of red-light districts and the coercion of pimps became seducers. Almost unanimously, prostitutes from red-light districts and those under the rule of a ruthless male pimp were sympathized with and cast as deserving victims and captives in need of a savior. While not all café girls were cast as villains, those exhibiting the most agency in their life-choices and encounters noticeably became villains. These women chose their sexual partners and willingly participated in the relationship. One might even conclude that they represented the biggest fear associated with modernization, women outside the confines of family who generated income by exposing their bodies to men and casually engaging in sex for monetary benefits or personal desire. They threatened the family institution and Iranian masculinity by soliciting men outside of the confines and regulation of red-light districts, by exposing female sexuality in respectable neighborhoods, and by refusing to engage in "useful" economic activity.

In the movie *Rifaqat* (friendship), Habib, a repentant thief, is seduced by a café girl working with his previous employers in a scheme to bring him back to the profession. A married man, he abandons his wife to pursue a life with the singer/dancer even though she is in love with his enemy. The café girl is materially greedy and her life is surrounded with other criminal activity such as extortion and robbery.

After repeated callous acts and dramatic subplots, he mistakenly believes that his wife, whom he abandoned years before, has become a high-end prostitute. Despite abandoning her for a café girl, he harshly reprimands his wife, only repenting once he realizes she has remained “pure” and loyal.²⁰⁸ As in many other movies, the sexuality of café girls was problematic. They were temptresses paving the path for the downfall of family men by willfully engaging in relationships and carrying their relationships in relaxing and modern-looking apartment dwellings. Their agency often remained piecemeal, however, and directors struggled to cast them in leading roles, as they continued their shenanigans for the benefit of another male lover.

In *Dukhtar Nagu Bala Bigu* (Troublemaker Girl), Farhad, the son of a wealthy man, is courted and deceived by a café girl, Sitarih, whose plan is to steal his wealth and inheritance and begin a life with her lover. Unconvinced by his father’s repeated warnings, Farhad eventually comes to realize Sitarih’s true intentions when he accidentally overhears her conversation concerning plotting to seize his wealth.²⁰⁹ As with the depiction of café girls in the previous movie, café girls were considered willingly complicit in criminal activity and the deception of men and became polluting symbols.

²⁰⁸ *Rifaqat*, directed by Reza Safaii (Tehran: Sazman Sinamayi-i Shahr-i Farang, 1977).

²⁰⁹ *Dukhtar Nagu Bala Bigu*, directed by Jamshid Shibani (Tehran: Sazman-i Sinamayi-i Tasavir, 1975).

While in numerous movies the café girls seduce men to take advantage of them financially, in *Jahil va Raqqasih* (The Thug and the Dancer), the singer/dancer, Shirin, seduces and attempts to destroy the family life of the hero, Mahdi, merely because he offended her. In the movie, Shirin's ailing father had become suspicious of her activities and had asked his trusted confidant and friend, Mahdi, to monitor her behavior and whereabouts. While she is initially able to mislead and convince him that her late working hours result from her work as a nurse, he accidentally learns of her real profession, and in anger reprimands and scolds her for her behavior. Infuriated, she plots to seduce and humiliate him, eventually succeeding in becoming his mistress. As the ultimate villain and polluter of family men, she eventually asks him, a devoted family man, to leave his wife and children, therefore intentionally jeopardizing his family life and obligations and ruining his social standing.

While the movie subtly questions Mahdi's "affair" with Shirin, his affair is portrayed as understandable and unavoidable. In the wake of the sexual seduction of a sexually charged and experienced dancer, Mahdi's weakness becomes the only logical option. The mistress's ultimatum to choose between her and his family, on the other hand, is reprehensible and serves as his awakening. Once he contemplates leaving his devout wife and the mother of his children, his decision-making process

becomes the ultimate challenge, and is what eventually proves his masculinity.

As he measures the consequences of abandoning his family, he daydreams about his wife becoming a housemaid, his daughter a prostitute and his son abandoned. It is only through the concomitant heart attack of his beloved wife and the witnessing of the infidelity of his mistress that he learns his lesson and returns to his family.²¹⁰ It is not Mahdi's sexual infidelity that serves as the moral subplot for the movie; that a married man of means would be seduced by a sexual temptress was understandable in the minds of the makers of the movie, and presumably those who watched it. His masculinity and righteousness are measured by his emotional devotion to his wife and children, rather than his extra-marital affairs.

In this case, the café girl becomes the ultimate seductive villain, calculatedly seeking to destroy an esteemed family man by targeting and sabotaging his relationship with his chaste wife and children. In the movie, Shirin's work as a singer/dancer goes beyond bringing shame to her father, as she seeks to destroy the family life of others through her intentional seduction. Women's sexual powers were to be feared and tamed within marriage. Female seduction and sexual power were most untamed outside of marriage and posed a great threat to men as they rendered them vulnerable, particularly in carrying out their

²¹⁰ *Jahil va Raqqasih*, directed by Riza Safaii (Tehran: Sazman-i Sinamayi-i Shahr-i Farang, 1977).

responsibilities in protecting their families. Shirin's negative portrayal is intensified as she continues a sexual relationship with a fellow singer and lover as she seeks to destroy Mahdi's life. Female marital infidelity within marriage remained a taboo topic that was rarely addressed in movie plots. Contempt was directed not towards the sexually active but sexually assertive women.

Even at times when the relationship between café girls and the male hero is based on love, the liaison is volatile and often lethal. In the movie *Biganih* (The Stranger), Parviz is forced to abandon his newlywed chaste wife when he accidentally, in a fight, kills the owner of the café where his mistress sings and dances. As the two are in love with each other, the café girl convinces him to fake his death and relocate with her. When Parviz decides to return to his family and wife, his mistress fatally shoots him.²¹¹ While many women were portrayed for their engagement in the sexual economy, the lines between diseased predators and blameless victims were clear.

The moral message deciphered from a comparison of the portrayals of prostitutes and café girls in Iranian movies during this period was intended directly at men and sought to inculcate particular notions of masculinity and chivalry. Occasional infidelity and relationships with women exchanging sexual services for money remained a gray area if not an expectation of masculine behavior and deemed unavoidable, and

²¹¹ *Biganih*, directed by Jamshid Shibani (Tehran: Sazman-i Sinamayi-i Tasavir, 1973).

recognition of extra-marital affairs remained solely a male privilege. While the selling of sexual service remained taboo and immensely problematic and immoral, the buying of such services was regarded in popular culture as an expected element of masculine behavior. The purchasing of prostitutes' sexual services became questionable only when it jeopardized the family institution.

Women, nonetheless, needed protection, and men's responsibility and obligation to family and society were to ensure such protection. When guardians of family and society refused to be "real" men and were indifferent to protecting woman and ensuring chastity, women became prostitutes. If men protected women by way of marriage, women would not become prostitutes. In this equation, some women—those displayed in the public eye as singers and dancers reaping the financial benefits of their debauchery—were seductresses jeopardizing the institution of marriage and the purity of families. The terminology for female dancer, which was often used both in movies and colloquially to refer to women working in cafés, carried heavy negative connotations and became a cultural slur, perhaps corresponding to the derogatory "slut" in American English. Also referred to as bar-woman (*Zan-i Bar*), in many movies, the agency of café girls in the seductions remained questionable, and at times this seduction was for the benefit of a male antagonist. As though struggling to recognize female sexual agency, many movies depicted, in a

subsidiary role, a male anti-hero who was an accomplice in the scheme of seduction.

In popular movies during this period, a growing trend distinguished “destitute” prostitutes working in the red-light district from café girls dancing and singing in all-male entertainment spheres and providing selective sexual services. Depictions of female sex workers in red-light districts and public houses in Iranian movies carried notable similarities to Kaveh Golestan’s photos of women in Tehran’s red-light district. Both the photos of Golestan and the characterization of prostitutes in popular movies promoted sympathy towards female sex workers employed in red-light districts, but not to café girls. In popular perceptions as illustrated through movies, red-light districts were repositories for alleviating male sexual desire and the women working there were destitute, under the violence of a male pimp, or without alternative options for survival. Café girls were depicted as engaging in sexual and erotic work for financial benefits. The comfortable, and at times opulent, living quarters they occupied particularly served not only to service the sexual needs of men but also their desire for intimacy, and non-sexual comfort. As mistresses living among “respectable” space, they were deemed more threatening to the institution of family and masculinity, which explains their ambivalent characterization and varied depictions of movies during this period. This of course was not unique to Iran.

The uneasy placement of café girls within the binary of prostitute and wife fits neatly within broader scholarship on the problematic of the entrance of women into public space by way of employment in all male entertainment venues. This dilemma of identifying women is well established, and groups women unable to fit neatly within binaries of magdalen and madonna often contributed to social anxieties as their image produced new cultural and social norms.²¹²

Conclusion

The information and evidence from Golestan's collection of photographs on the social and personal lives of prostitutes during the 1970s in Tehran are highly suggestive and gathered at the production site with the subjects of the photographs at least in part engaged in the creation of their own visual imagery. These photos tell us about the women who occupied Tehran's red-light-district, and something about their physical surroundings, their aspirations and idols and the lifestyle they lived. In effect the photos become a humanizing force.

We know little about the immediate impact Golestan's photos had on the public audience who witnessed them at the time, as they were censored. Yet, the reach of Golestan's images, and whatever meaning he intended for them and their evolving nature continues to grow. The Foam Photography Museum in Amsterdam exhibited, for the first time,

²¹² Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 173.

Golestan's complete collection of photos of female prostitutes in Tehran in the summer of 2014.²¹³ The *Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris* (The Paris Museum of Modern Art) also showcased Golestan's photographs as part of a larger exhibit on Iranian photographers.²¹⁴ The visual legacy of Golestan's photos and his social and political message resonate today and continue to grow.

Golestan's photos are also quite notable for the evidence they provide about the consumption of popular culture by prostitutes and their clients. Images of Iranian and at times Hollywood celebrities were clearly incorporated by prostitutes working in the red-light district in Tehran. Simultaneously, the entertainment industry in Iran during the 1970s increasingly featured prostitutes and women working in the sex industry as central themes. Despite the heavy censorship imposed at the time, these visual representations of prostitutes were not only not targeted, but publicly displayed through repeat showings in cinemas across the country. In the process, they influenced, and possibly shaped, the meaning of sexuality for large groups of Iranians and marked boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behavior for Iranians, male and female. For the historian, they provide informative insights into the social messages on sexuality that were both generated and consumed by Iranians in this period. Furthermore, in controlling the image of the

²¹³ See: Foam, "Kaveh Golestan-The Citadel," <http://www.foam.org/visit-foam/calendar/2014-exhibitions/kaveh-golestan-the-citadel>

²¹⁴ Paris Museum of Modern Art, "Unedited History: Iran, 1960-2014," <http://www.mam.paris.fr/en/expositions/exposition-unedited-history>

prostitute and disseminating meaning over these images, these images were considered innocuous and tolerated by the state.

In movies, those women clearly belonging to the category of “prostitute” were wholly in search of redemption through marriage and in need of being saved by “real” men. The sympathy towards them stemmed from the assumption that they were victims and that they sought an escape. Café girls embodied a more fluid identity somewhere between dancer and prostitute, yet their erotic availability, their blatant presence in the public eye, and their ambiguous category made them more threatening and reduced sympathy and compassion towards them. The association of their sexual deviancy with their personal choice to become sexual objects promoted their rendering as active and willful seducers. Those who exhibited agency in their sexual work became scandalous, opportunist, and at times, criminal. What is more, the scattered nature of cafés across cities and their integration into the landscape of city life rendered the women working in these spaces more problematic. While houses of prostitution were concentrated in red-light districts in the outskirts of cities, the presence of cafés in “typical” neighborhoods was spatially threatening, especially for middling-class families, as the café clientele was principally, it appears, middling class.

Prostitutes were accepted in Iranian movies precisely because they were a separate category, both physically and symbolically, one in need of redemption by men through marriage. The mere possibility of

“passing” as respectable which was accessible to café girls, however, was threatening and problematic. The issue of space once again renders itself central to the study of prostitution in Iran during this period. Segregated in the red-light districts, popular perception deemed prostitutes undisruptive. Included and mingled with the remainder of society, the sexual work of women became seen as increasingly illicit and destructive. In many ways, the movies featuring prostitutes, dancers, and wives were more about men than women. In movies, some men lured, defiled, and terrorized women into promiscuity and prostitution, while “true” men rescued and redeemed them through marriage. While in popular movies during the 1970s marrying prostitutes and remaining monogamous became a stepping stone into becoming a man for single men, the challenge envisioned for married men was to remain loyal to their wives and to fulfill familial obligations by rejecting the temptations of café girls. For women, domestication was the road to nobility, respect, and true womanhood.

	1956 Census	1966 Census	1976 Census
Total Population	18,954,704	25,788,722	30,708,722
Urban (percent)	31.4	37.9	47.1
Rural (percent)	68.7	62.0	52.9

Table 1. Iran's Urban and Rural Population (1956-1976)

Source: Milani 1988, 121.

Note: due to rounding, the percentages do not exactly add up to 100 percent in the first two columns.

Year	Population	Year	Population
1891	160,000	1956	1,512,082
1922	210,000	1966	2,719,730
1932	310,319	1976	4,530,223
1937	425,000	1980	5,443,721
1940	700,000	1986	6,042,584
1946	880,000	1991	6,475,527

Table 2. A Century of Tehran's Population Based on National Censuses

Source: Naficy 2011, 155, abridged from Madanipoor.

Image removed due to copyright

Figure 4. “Health Certificates,” photo and copyright by Kaveh Golestan, c. 1975-1977.

Chapter 4: Degeneracy and Redemption: Ideal Families, the Women's Press, and the Salvation of Deceived Women

Introduction

The history of prostitution in modern Iran rests on a conglomeration of individuals, institutions, and groups that have shaped and affected both the discourse on prostitution and the physical life of those involved in the sex trade. The previous chapters have discussed prostitutes, pimps, government officials, filmmakers, members of the police force, male neighbors, and petition writers. Iranian women outside of the sex trade feature little in the previous chapters, particularly as arguments and conclusions have been constructed based on government memos, citizen petition letters, and feature films written and produced by men. What is absent are the ways in which Iranian women across the country perceived and responded to the issue of prostitution and how prostitution affected their lives. The absence of sufficient archival sources on prostitution written by women during the period covered by this dissertation creates difficulty in presenting conclusive arguments highlighting the interaction of Iranian women with prostitution. What the sources can bring to light, however, is the interaction of a certain segment of Iranian women with the issue of prostitution.

This chapter highlights the interaction of educated women from the modern middle/upper class with the “problem” of prostitution. In the

process, it highlights the central place of an invented notion of a healthy and ideal family in the imaginary of the modern elite women's conception of modernity. The family became a fundamental trope in the conception of a healthy Iran. During the two decades preceding the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the discourse surrounding the links between family and prostitution contributed to an elite form of women's rights activism that othered and alienated lower-class women while perpetuating paternalistic frameworks within society as women gained some legal rights. In the process, these women also became an integral element in the discourse that worked to control the image of prostitutes based on upper-middle class imagination.

The family was certainly also part of the aspirations, imagination, and hopes of prostitutes. For female prostitutes in Iran during this period, however, the ideal and class-based visions of family propagated by the women's movement and women's magazines did not necessarily translate into their worlds. Utilizing the women's press and scientific studies and discussions on prostitution from the 1960s and 1970s, this chapter charts how the concern about prostitution was part of a larger demand and quest for social reform that began and heavily rested on the family. Both the downfall and redemption of prostitutes were perceived as beginning with the family.

The Women's Press and the Model Iranian Woman

Two leading women's magazines during the 1960s and 1970s, *Ittila'at-i Banuwan* and *Zan-i Ruz*, dominated the women's press in Iran during this period. The lack of scholarship on the women's press in Iran during this period not to mention their minimal and supplementary use as historical evidence are quite astounding, despite the fact. I must add, that hundreds of uncatalogued editions of both *Zan-i Ruz* and *Ittila'at-i Banuwan* are available at the Library of Congress and elsewhere in the United States. In content and in presentation both weekly magazines shared similar characteristics and it has been difficult to measure their editorial differences. This chapter is primarily based on the latter, as *Ittila'at-i Banuwan* or Ladies' Information, often shortened to *Banuwan*, began featuring weekly *sarguzasht* (life-stories) of prostitutes, which continued for years. During the same period, *Banuwan* also interviewed men and women involved in "saving" prostitutes and the fight against prostitution across Iran.

The choice to focus on *Ittila'at-i Banuwan* is also partly reflective of that fact that I was granted unlimited access to hundreds of uncatalogued issues of the magazine for the years 1966-1975 at the Library of Congress where the journals were accessed. Unfortunately, I was not able to obtain the same scope and level of access to *Zan-i Ruz* and that magazine was made available to me in much more selective intervals. This is not to suggest that *Zan-i Ruz* had less material on

prostitution or temporary marriage. In fact, the issues consulted reveal that the magazine extensively covered debates on temporary marriage and discussed prostitution in different issues. The extensive and quite comprehensive search of *Ittila'at-i Banuwan* for the span of almost a decade, however, made it a more practical source for this dissertation.

It is useful here to provide a brief introduction to the magazine by way of a synopsis of the content and readership of *Banuwan* and the larger context within which interviews with female Iranian prostitutes were published.

Ittila'at-i Banuwan was part of the larger conglomerate of the *Ittila'at* news agency, which included the daily and prominent *Ittila'at* newspaper, the weekly *Ittila'at-i Haftigi* (weekly *Ittila'at*), *Ittila'at-i Dukhtaran va Pisanan* (*Ittila'at* for boys and girls), and *Ittila'at-i Banuwan* (*Ittila'at* for ladies). All of the above-mentioned weekly magazines were published under the rubric of the influential *Ittila'at* (literally meaning information) newspaper. *Ittila'at* itself was known to be the leading semi-official newspaper in Iran²¹⁵ and in the 1970s the head editor of *Banuwan* was chosen by the editorial board of the newspaper.²¹⁶ Despite this, the newspaper's influence over and editorial association with *Banuwan*

²¹⁵ Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 108; Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 225; Also see: Mina Majidian, "Ettla'at: A Descriptive Study of a Major Iranian Daily Newspaper, 1951-1978" (M.S. thesis, University of Utah, 1981).

²¹⁶ The reminiscences of Pari Abasalti-Mirhashem in an interview with Mahnaz Afkhami, April 16 1988, 11, in the Oral History of Iran Collection of the Foundation of Iranian Studies.

remain unclear. Few secondary sources make reference to *Banuwan* except in passing.

In the political arena *Banuwan* was pro-Pahlavi and secularist in its agenda, and by the 1970s, *Banuwan* turned into the main officially approved women's magazine in Iran.²¹⁷ Pari Abasalti-Mirhashem, who worked for the magazine from its inception in 1957 as a journalist for many years, was subsequently chosen to serve as the second editor of *Banuwan*. Abasalti-Mirhashem also served as a majlis representative for the Rastakhiz Party, representing Tehran, and was closely connected to the movement for women's rights in Iran during this period. The magazine was also closely linked to a civic association that provided benevolent work and offered exercise, cooking, driving, and many other courses for Iranian women. According to Abasalti-Mirhashem, this women's association was independent of the leading women's organization headed by Ashraf Pahlavi, the Shah's twin sister, although, as she mentions, it shared the same social and political goals.²¹⁸ The goal of the magazine was to raise awareness and to educate women. In the words of the magazine's editor, "First the women must be literate/educated...so then she can be a good woman, a good mother, a good daughter and a great wife."²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 137.

²¹⁸ The reminiscences of Pari Abasalti-Mirhashem in an interview with Mahnaz Afkhami, April 16 1988, 3-4, in the Oral History of Iran Collection of the Foundation of Iranian Studies.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

Self-proclaimed as the first continuous women's magazine in Iran, *Banuwan's* publication began in March 1957, and over time, both its content and shape changed.²²⁰ Initially the magazine began publishing weekly on Saturdays with about 30 pages in each issue. Over the course of ten years, however, the magazine grew to about 95 pages per issue and began to contain much advertisement. In addition, the magazine's publication date changed from Saturday to Wednesday, reflecting readers' requests claiming this would allow them to have access to the magazine over the Friday weekend and provide ample time to read *Banuwan* under "relaxed circumstances," as one reader put it. The magazine was printed on approximately ten-by-thirteen-inch sheets of paper, and, until 1974, the majority of the issues were printed on black and white paper, with the exception of the front and back covers, which generally contained a color portrait of a major actor/actress, singer, or member of the Pahlavi royal family. In 1974, there was a drastic shift in the presentation of the magazine as color photos, portraits, and advertisement began to appear extensively in the magazine. It is difficult to measure and construct an accurate image of the writers and readers of *Banuwan*, yet the content of the magazine itself provides clues about both the readers and writers of the magazine.

In order to have a better picture of the readers of *Banuwan*, it is important to have an initial understanding on the state of literacy in Iran

²²⁰ "Dar Bahar-i Hijdah Saligi," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, April 3, 1974, 3.

during this period. In 1966, an astounding 87.8 percent of Iranian females over the age of fifteen were illiterate.²²¹ The White Revolution in 1963 and the subsequent creation of the literacy corps (*Sipah-i Danish*) sought to reduce this rate by sending young female and male high school graduates to educate illiterate adults and children across Iran.²²² By 1976, the female illiteracy rate was reduced to 75.6 percent.²²³ Accordingly, it is possible to surmise that the magazine gained both popularity and readership as evidenced by the growth of the size of the magazine and the increased female literacy rate across Iran. In light of this information, the readership, reception, and influence of *Banuvan* must be understood in the context of the women it excluded and the minority it addressed. By the mid-1970s, only a quarter of Iranian women over the age of fifteen were potential consumers of the magazine and many had only recently become literate. Despite this potential capacity for a growing readership, the magazine's content, advertisement, and scope clearly delineate its idea and vision of Iranian womanhood and point to its limited readership.

Most issues of *Banuvan* begin with a major current social or legal topic. In 1967, the issue debated and discussed was the Family Protection Laws of 1967, which addressed divorce, child custody, and the

²²¹ UNESCO *Statistical Yearbook, 1970*, (Louvain, Belgium: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1971), 33.

²²² For a general overview of female illiteracy rates in Iran from 1950-1980 see figure 5.

²²³ World Bank Development Indicators. For a detailed summary of literacy rates in 1976 across Iran see figure 6.

minimum age of marriage.²²⁴ Many issues of the magazine discussed the benefits of raising the age of marriage and the effect it would have on girls and their educational advancement and health. The magazine endorsed the new laws, which increased the minimum age of marriage to fifteen, as heralding fundamental shifts in the lives of Iranian women and hailed Mohammad Reza Shah for having the foresight to introduce them.²²⁵ The magazine also covered speeches by Ashraf Pahlavi (the Shah's twin sister) discussing the importance of decreasing illiteracy among women and ensuring the implementation of the new Family Protection Laws. The magazine also published letters by readers which discussed the inadequacies of the new laws and their potential setbacks while demanding more reform.

Subsequent issues of the magazine featured articles on a range of social topics such as the handling of marriage proposals, sexual education in school curricula, the legalization of abortion, gender selection for parents, population control, female infidelity, women's inheritance rights, women's access to spousal wealth, and honor crimes.²²⁶ Some issues carried interviews with prominent Iranian women

²²⁴ "Taklif-i Zanha ra Rushan Kunid," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, August 15, 1973, 3; Mahin Khaminihyi, "Aqa Yik Zan Kafist," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, August 29, 1973, 3; Faryal Ilhami, "17 Diy Ruz-i Tavallud-i Zan-i Irani Ast," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, January 2, 1974, 6-7.

²²⁵ In 1975, an amendment to the Family Protection Laws of 1967 raised the minimum age of marriage to eighteen, but asked the family protection courts to consider applications from women over fifteen.

²²⁶ For example see, "Ba Amuzish-i Masa'il-i Jinsi dar Madaris Muvafiq Hastid?" *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, January 28, 1970, 18-19; "Bacchih-i Ziyadi va Khatar-i Infijar Jam'iyat," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, June 9, 1971, 6-7; Sudabih Qasimlu, "Siqt-i Janin: Azad

such as members of the royal family, members of the Parliament, and Deputy Ministers, who discussed the position of women in Iran and the changes in their lives and improvements in their rights under the guidance of the Pahlavis.²²⁷ The magazine's vision for the women's rights movement and the advancement of women mirrored state policies and initiatives, and readers' letters reflected this support and the appreciation for legal reform that targeted women and the family. Some readers, however, were dissatisfied with the slow process of reform and called for broader changes and focused their discussion on the difficulties with and challenges to implementing the new laws.

Banuwan also contained substantial information about health and particularly women's health. Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet's monograph on maternalism in Iran in the twentieth century has aptly analyzed the place of hygiene in conceptions of womanhood in Iran,²²⁸ and *Banuwan's* discussions on health and hygiene neatly correspond to her arguments despite the fact that Kashani-Sabet utilizes the daily newspaper *Ittila'at* instead of its women's magazine *Ittila'at-i Banuwan* as her source. The magazine featured articles on breast cancer and conducting personal breast examinations, the causes and effects of other cancers, numerous articles on birth control pills and birth control injections, weight loss

ya Mamnu'," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, September 8, 1971, 10-11. "Zan va Shuhar Bayad dar Darayi Khanivadih Sharik Bashand," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, August 8, 1973, 3; "Chira Zanan bih Shuharanishan Khiyanat Mikunand?" *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, November 7, 1973, 24.

²²⁷ Pari Abasalti, "Har Fardi dar Barabar-i Huquqi kih az Ijtima' Daryaft Midarad, Mas'uliyat va Vazifih-i ham Darad," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, October 16, 1974, 4-5.

²²⁸ Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Conceiving Citizens*, chapters 1, 4, and 9.

strategies and exercise, improving the quality of sex, and hair loss. Most issues also contained a section titled “the family doctor” which carried short informational excerpts on diseases such as influenza and tetanus and topics such as child thumb-sucking, and cravings during pregnancy. In an effort to improve women’s health and raise awareness about women’s access to prenatal care, the magazine pointed to the shortage of midwives for pregnant women in Iran and discussed the necessity of having medical personnel available in remote areas of the country.²²⁹ Modernity and health were intimately linked and understood as supplementing each other. Interestingly, there was little to no mention of sexually transmitted infections in the magazine during their period, even though the magazine extensively covered birth control methods and sexual gratification strategies.

Cinema, film, and music were other prominent components of *Banuvan*, and multiple pages were dedicated to movies and the personal lives of national and international actors and actresses. Every magazine featured a portrait of an actor/actress or singer along with an interview with him/her in the magazine. These included Iranian celebrities such as the prominent musicians Googoosh and Mahasti, the dancer Jamilih, and actors such as Behrouz Vossoughi. International celebrities included, among others, Elvis Presley, Jayne Mansfield, Claudia Cardinale, Omar Sharif, Clint Eastwood, and Elizabeth Taylor. *Banuvan*

²²⁹ “Kambud-i Mama,” *Ittila‘at-i Banuvan*, April 12, 1969, 22.

covered everything from their personal to their professional lives and discussed their current movies, child rearing strategies, love affairs, sexual predilections, and various drug addictions. The magazine also debated, at great length, the presentation of sex in Iranian movies and the use of sexual appeal and provocative dance by actresses to promote films.²³⁰ Sexual promiscuity was frowned upon and rejected, though Iranians debated, at length, what exactly constituted and defined promiscuity.

Banuwan and the women's press became a ground where notions of modern Iranian womanhood were debated. The magazine simultaneously served as the platform for advancing particular prescriptions of ideal women and families. In 1972, the magazine published interviews with prominent film producers and actresses about their thoughts on the production of "sexy movies."²³¹ It is unclear whether the production of pornographic movies was the point in question, but the debate about sex in cinema was certainly a prevalent one during this period. The inclusion of Iranian celebrities and their photographs also potentially opened the magazine to new consumers, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, by the popularity of actors and actresses even among prostitutes. Literacy was no longer the

²³⁰ Bizhan Imami, "Sansur-i Filmhayi Farsi va Zuuq-i Mardum," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, May 21, 1969, 25; "Siks Chashni-i Film-i Farsi," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, May 19, 1971, 10-11; Jalil Fayzallahi, "Namus Parasti va Giraiy-i Siks-i Dagh," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, November 13, 1974, 18-19.

²³¹ "Aya ba Tahiyiy-i Filmhayi Siksi dar Iran muvafiq Hastid?" *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, May 17, 1972, 14-15.

fundamental necessity for the consumption of the magazine and its message.

Comparable to its coverage of celebrities, the magazine also dedicated itself to fashion. Every issue published articles on new fashion styles from New York, Paris, and other European locales, complete with pictures of runways and models displaying clothes and accessories. Most issues also provided life-size patterns of the new styles along with sewing instructions, encouraging readers to utilize the patterns and to experiment with the new clothing styles.²³² Domesticity and the ability to sew and cook were certainly staple characteristics of this version of the “modern” Iranian woman, and the magazine sought to paint a modern woman who was distinctly Iranian, even while her clothing, health, and mannerisms visibly reflected Western standards. English fashion icons such as the British model Twiggy and her looks were extensively discussed in the magazine along with articles on why and how a certain look prevailed or faded in Iran. One article discussed at length why “sexy shorts” did not manage to prevail in the Iranian fashion arena as opposed to miniskirts, which had become very popular in Iran during this period.²³³

Occasionally, the magazine featured an article on the third Shi'i Imam, Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet, or on 'Ali, the Prophet's

²³² “Kargah-i Baftani,” *Ittila'at-i Banuvan*, December 20, 1972, 38.

²³³ “Chira Shurt Siksi dar Iran Shikast Khurd?” *Ittila'at-i Banuvan*, July 21, 1971, 12-13.

son-in-law and fourth Caliph. These articles generally corresponded to the month of Muharram, particularly the tenth day of this month, 'Ashura', or the month of Ramadan. In 1975, there was an increase in the coverage of religion in the magazine. In almost all issues from July to September 1975 the magazine published the travelogue of one of its journalists' pilgrimage to Shi'i holy city of Karbala.²³⁴ The magazine also published articles by an Islamic scholar regarding the benefits of fasting during Ramadan, women's clothing during hajj, and the 'ulama's stance on abortion. The reason behind the sudden increase in the coverage of religion remains ambiguous, yet the full-fledged emergence of a radically new notion of Shi'ism during the 1970s that associated Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet, in the battle of Karbala against the Muslim Caliph of his time with an anti-neo-colonial struggle must be taken into account.

The Iranian sociologist Ali Shariati was at the forefront of these new and combative understandings of Shi'i history.²³⁵ Not only did Shariati's message focus on male Shi'i heroes such as 'Ali and Husayn, but he also criticized the Western model of womanhood, claiming it fabricated women as objects for material and commercial benefits. At the

²³⁴ Parviz Iranzad, "Khanih-i Mard-i Namutanahi," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, September 10, 1975, 20-21; Parviz Iranzad, "Tuti'ih-i Yik Zan Bar Ziddi 'Ali," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, September 24, 1975, 16-17.

²³⁵ Ervand Abrahamian, "The Islamic Left: From Radicalism to Liberalism," in *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left*, ed. Stephanie Cronin (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 270-271. Also see: Kingshuk Chatterjee, *Ali Shariati and the Shaping of Political Islam in Iran* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).

same time, he severely criticized traditional understandings of womanhood that secluded women.²³⁶ The immense appeal of Shariati's message to students and the young served as a threat to the Pahlavi monarchy, and the increase in the coverage of religion in *Banuvan* must be understood in the context of competing visions of what it meant to be Iranian, Muslim, and "progressive." By the mid-1970s, *Banuvan* clearly sought to deliver its message as in harmony with religion. Whereas every fifteen to twenty issues may have featured an article on religion in the previous years, in 1975, almost every issue contained an article relating to religion.

During the same period, there was a spike in the magazine's coverage of the royal family and particularly the Empress Farah. 1975 coincided with the inauguration of the Rastakhiz (Resurrection) party in Iran. The establishment of the party under the Shah's auspices was a strategic move to quell rising political dissent. It replaced the parliamentary system with an all-encompassing single party system that held a monopoly on political activity in Iran, and all Iranians were obliged to belong to it.²³⁷ The new political system promised the "eschatological resurgence of a genuinely Iranian New Age" with the Shah as the political

²³⁶ Nikki Keddie, *Roots of Revolution: an Interpretive History of Modern Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 220.

²³⁷ H.E. Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism: the Liberation Movement of Iran under the Shah and Khomeini* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), 40. Also see: Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 149-154.

as well as the spiritual leader.²³⁸ In conjunction with the inauguration of the Rastakhiz Party, the Pahlavi regime launched a systematic campaign to control the clerical establishment, including their religious endowments and seminaries, while simultaneously working to create an official monarchist ideology.²³⁹ On the Shah's personal orders, a select group of intellectuals worked to propose an ideology that was rooted in Shi'i mysticism and Iranian authenticity. As mentioned, the sudden increase in the covering of religion in *Banuvan* may have been in line with official policies that sought to battle accusations that considered the Shah's modernization project as Westernized and anti-Islamic, sentiments that were catalysts for the anti-Shah Revolution in 1979.

Most issues of the magazine also featured articles on the position of women in different parts of the world and often included a comparison with the lives of Iranian women. These include articles on the lives of women in Afghanistan, Egypt, and Mexico, along with articles on Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir, the first female Minister in Uganda, and women holding political positions in Indonesia and Pakistan. *Banuvan* envisioned itself in solidarity with other women internationally and frequently compared the legal, educational, and social status of women in Iran to other women internationally. Women's "progress" became what measured Iran's international standing. The editors and writers of

²³⁸ Touraj Daryaei, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Iranian History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 361.

²³⁹ Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 444.

Banuwan sought to both situate Iran as an “advanced” nation and to draw inspiration from the changes in women’s legal and political situation across the globe. The magazine also strove to remain connected to social concerns and popular news from the United States and Europe and covered stories about the Amish in America and German Mennonites along with tabloid news from the United States including the events surrounding the kidnapping of the heiress Patty Hearst. In the pages of *Banuwan*, an important feature of the ideal Iranian woman was that she was informed on social issues across the globe and involved in the political struggle to improve women’s social and legal status in Iran.

In addition, many issues of *Banuwan* carried a section or two about women’s activities in different Iranian cities. They generally began with short news segments about women from various Iranian provinces such as the opening of new day care centers or schools for girls, and continued with a longer detailed article introducing a specific city and women’s social and economic activities in it, supplemented with photos. The notion of a unified Iran and a unanimous women’s movement that was inclusive of all Iranian women despite regional and ethnic backgrounds was central to the magazine’s message. The envisioned unifying forces that fostered the ideal Iranian woman included a dedication to family, education, and social responsibility. In essence, the magazine portrayed an Iran that despite regional differences and peculiarities aspired to a cohesive image of ideal womanhood. In the

same section, the magazine featured a segment titled *Dukhtaran-i Nimunih* (model or exemplary girls) which introduced one or two girls from various cities as examples to be emulated in that region. As educated girls with high ambitions benefitting from the changes in the legal status of Iranian women, they represented the future of Iran.

The real-life examples of exemplary women were supplemented with fictional serial stories that were at times scandalous and often ended with cliff-hangers. These fictional stories often centered on the social and emotional struggles of a female protagonist and included titles such as *A Stranger in Paris*, *A Shadow in the Rain*, *The Charm of a Look*, *I Was the Lover of These Men* and *Bonnie and Clyde*. Some were written by Iranian authors while others were translated from Western magazines. While beyond the scope of this dissertation, an analysis of how these fictional stories fit with the magazine's broader message to women, and men, would prove an informative study.

In addition to raising awareness and knowledge of local and international news, the magazine encouraged material consumption. In 1967, the magazine was filled with black and white advertisement for everything from hair care products to cigarettes. By 1974, the advertisements had turned into full-color ads, suggesting a move towards consumerism and a burgeoning marketing industry in Iran. The advertisements were both for Iranian and non-Iranian products, although non-Iranian products and international brands certainly

exhibited a larger presence in the magazine. The extensive advertisement of American, German, and British products situated Iran as a consumer in world markets and points to the preference for Western products in the consumption patterns of educated Iranian women.

Recent scholarship on Egypt has documented the significant role new patterns of consumerism and greater educational opportunities for women had in creating the “new Egyptian Woman.”²⁴⁰ In Egypt during the 1920s, advertisement of products ranging from Kodak cameras and Palmolive soap to newly opened schools served to situate women as the purchasing agents within families who carried the responsibility of reforming the nation.²⁴¹ In Iran, advertisements targeted at women were by no means a new phenomenon. The growth of a common global commercial culture that heavily rested on European and American products can be traced to the 1930s and was facilitated by the Pahlavi state’s women’s awakening project (*nahzat-i banuvan*), 1936-1941.²⁴² Early on after the women’s awakening project headed by Reza Shah and the unveiling of women in 1936, unveiled women began appearing regularly in advertisements, and the marketing of health and beauty products grew.²⁴³ The encouragement of these new patterns of

²⁴⁰ Mona Russell, *Creating the New Egyptian Woman: Consumerism, Education, and National Identity, 1863-1922* (Palgrave: New York, 2004).

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

²⁴² For detailed info on the women’s awakening project see Cameron Michael Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*.

²⁴³ Cameron Michael Amin, “Importing ‘Beauty Culture’ into Iran in the 1920s and 1930s: Mass Marketing Individualism in an Age of Anti-Imperialist Sacrifice,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, n. 1 (2004): 84-85.

consumption served to encourage a sense of personal freedom and increase women's physical appearance in public spaces.²⁴⁴ The women's press during the 1930s also participated in the campaign to envision a new look for the "new woman" by focusing on cosmetics, fashion, and Western dress.²⁴⁵ While a detailed study of the relationship between advertisement and the women's movement in the 1970s is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is safe to conclude that consumer culture and notions of modernity were intimately linked, and the advertisements in women's magazines worked to create the "modern" Iranian women through consumerism and consumption patterns. The advertisements in women's magazines also support the role of Iranian women as target consumers in the new urban labor market. Some of the international brands repeatedly advertised included: Marlboro and Philip Morris cigarettes, Nivea skin care products, Christian Dior clothing and cosmetics, Warner's undergarments, Blendax toothpaste, Pan American Airlines, Pepsi, Polaroid cameras, Revlon cosmetics, Kleenex, and Johnson's baby products.

The widespread alarm among the otherwise divided dissent movement in Iran during the 1960s and 1970s about Westernization or, as the prominent Iranian intellectual Jalal Al-e Ahmad coined,

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi, "Foreign Education, the Women's Press, and the Discourse of Scientific Domesticity in Early-Twentieth-Century Iran," in *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*, eds. Nikki Keddie and Rudi Matthee (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 192-193.

Westoxification (*Gharbzadigi*) was partly concerned with the dominance of Western culture and capitalism.²⁴⁶ As the Pahlavi monarchy increasingly aligned itself with the West and disallowed any form of political opposition, resistance to the West became the hallmark of the cultural landscape of the 1960s and 1970s.²⁴⁷ The extensive advertisement of Western products and fashion in women's magazines certainly served as a reminder of pervasive Western influence and fueled anxieties about American and European cultural dominance.

It is not feasible to draw concrete correlations between the effects of such advertisements in the women's press in Iran during the 1960s and 1970s and contemporary Iranian women's conception of product quality and desirability, yet to this day, in Iran, as in the U.S., Kleenex is synonymous with paper handkerchiefs and Pampers with infant diapers. Johnson's baby products are among the most desired baby items and Nivea lotions acclaimed as the finest skin care products. It is safe to say that the recurrence and constant advertisement in the women's magazine as far back as the 1970s influenced the consumption values and patterns of women in Iran today. In contrast, the kinds of locally produced Iranian products that were typically advertised tended to be low-market goods. Most advertisement for Iranian products was either

²⁴⁶ Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: the Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse: Syracuse university Press, 1996), 67-68.

²⁴⁷ Afshin Matin-Asgari, "From Social Democracy to Social Democracy: the Twentieth-Century Odyssey of the Iranian Left," in *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left*, ed. Stephanie Cronin (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 44.

for food products such as oil or dried greens or cleaning products such as Darya detergent or Gulnar soap. With the advertisement of European cosmetic brands and clothing, Pan Am Airlines, and international tourism, *Banuwan* was not striving to be a magazine for the destitute and the illiterate. At a time when many Iranians struggled financially and rapid urbanization changed major urban landscapes, the consumption of such luxury products was targeted at a minority segment of Iranian society.

In the pages of *Banuwan*, the ideal Iranian woman was educated and fashionable yet deeply grounded in gender roles and comforted by paternalism. She was highly literate and informed on international affairs, yet sewed and cooked avidly. She was fashionable and well dressed, yet her clothes were not too revealing. She adored entertainers yet honored national and international female leaders. She was either happily married or aspiring to marry. She belonged to a family and her social and personal life revolved heavily, if not exclusively, around the family. She travelled, took care of her health, and was a devoted consumer of international material goods. Her miniscule political activities praised the regime and sporadically questioned the adequacy and implementation of policies that pertained to women. Her political sphere only extended to matters central to women and families and was shaped by her civic responsibility towards Iranian women who did not enjoy the same rights granted to her by the Pahlavi regime. *Banuwan's*

conception of Iranian womanhood, and the topics it covered in the magazine, inadvertently allowed only a select group of Iranian women access to the public discourse it promoted. Along the same lines, charity and benevolent work that focused on the “backward” women who did not demonstrate similar ideals and enjoy similar circumstances became a hallmark of elite women’s social sphere. It not only allowed but justified the civic engagement of ideal women and shaped the apparatus of their social engagement.

Ideal Families and the “Othering” of Prostitutes

The imagination of ideal womanhood in *Banuvan* went hand in hand with the juxtaposition of “other” women. Women outside the prescribed parameters of ideal womanhood were envisioned as backwards, distraught, deceived, and miserable. The representation of prostitutes in *Banuvan* is indicative of this practice of othering. In June 1971, the magazine began its weekly publication of interviews with women who had entered into prostitution. Some of these were published in interview format with questions and answers while others were written in narrative format. The series was titled *Farib Khurdiha* (The Deceived). It collectively constructs a collage of the lives of prostitutes and the causes of prostitution in Iran as understood and perceived by the publishers and editors of *Banuvan*, to be shared with its readers. Inherent in all these life-stories were the lessons to be learned, by men

and women, and the practices to avoid, presumably in order to protect women and to prevent them from succumbing to prostitution.

These life-stories must be explored within the context of the modernization policies of the magazine and assumed as partial information. Rather than utilizing them to tell “truths” about the realities of the lives of prostitutes in Iran, in conjunction with other sources, they can provide a more comprehensive picture of the lives of prostitutes during this period and like any sources, they must be engaged with critically.

Week after week, the magazine offered the life-stories of female prostitutes and published photos of those interviewed. Unlike Golestan’s photos discussed previously, the *Banuvan* photos were by and large close-up portraits of the women’s faces, predominantly sad or covered-by-hands, without any background or additional detail. The main focus of these pieces was the early life of the women and their marriage encounters, with much less detail devoted to their actual lives as workers in the sex industry. They were, in effect, the stories of how women became prostitutes, and, in story after story, the women told of doomed childhoods, early marriages, and families and men who exploited them, themes that worked to criticize and chastise “backward” family practices in Iran. That literary narratives about female vice carry loaded social and political implications is no new observation. The white slavery narratives in England during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and in

the United States during the early decades of the twentieth century became a catalyst for changes in ideas and policies on prostitution, ultimately fostering a campaign against white slavery that aimed to protect a reformed version of the patriarchal family rather than one that focused on women's equal rights.²⁴⁸

In the roughly 150 life-stories of prostitutes published in *Banuwan* consulted for this chapter a number of practices surface repeatedly. The prostitutes interviewed by *Banuwan* shared similar backgrounds and key familial situations. Chief among these were poverty, being from villages or provinces, marriage at a young age, and a large age gap between husband and wife. The prostitutes' lives were told in a linear fashion and typically began with their childhood and went on to include their married life and subsequent prostitution. The message disseminated by the magazine was straightforward. Prostitutes were uneducated girls in poverty who, like Afsanih and Shahla, were married off at a young age to men many years their senior.²⁴⁹ They were betrayed by their families, who refused to protect and educate them. Forced into loveless marriages, some girls inevitably ran away; others endured years of hardship before obtaining a divorce. Yet divorce itself opened the road to deception and downfall for women. This message was a plea for a fundamental change in child-rearing practices, marriage customs, and intimate relationships.

²⁴⁸ Margit Stange, *Personal Property: Wives, White Slaves, and the Market in Women* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 122-127.

²⁴⁹ "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, July 4, 1973, 60-61; "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, July 4, 1973, 64.

Historians of prostitution in other regions have delineated the ways in which prostitution was identified and annexed to particular social and racial categories. Philippa Levine's work on the British Empire highlights the racial ways in which British colonial officials across the colonies viewed prostitution as the predicament of the "uncivilized" people and how prostitution served as a constant reminder and justification for the empire's civilizing mission.²⁵⁰ Donna Guy's scholarship on prostitution in Argentina finds that prostitution was identified with foreigners and Jews, and Laurie Bernstein's monograph on prostitution in imperial Russia reveals the identification of prostitution with "westernization" and Jews in Russia.²⁵¹ These studies demonstrate the explicitly racial ways in which prostitution was understood across geographic divides.

Judith Walkowitz's groundbreaking research on prostitution in Victorian society draws attention to the class-based identification of prostitution in Victorian society and illuminates the ostracizing effect Britain's Contagious Disease Acts of 1864 and 1866 had on working-class prostitutes. As she demonstrates, prostitution lost its fluidity, and working-class prostitutes lost the semi-respectable status they previously enjoyed within the working-class community.²⁵² No longer were women able to enter and exit prostitution as a temporary means of sustenance.

²⁵⁰ Philippa Levine, "A Multitude of Unchaste Women," 159-160.

²⁵¹ Donna Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires*, 19 and 124; Laurie Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters*, 161-166.

²⁵² Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 200-201.

Instead the entrance into prostitution solidified an identity that became difficult to escape.

In the eyes of elite women equipped with reformist agendas in Iran, prostitution was a class-based problem. While poverty was understood as a contributing factor, distinct family practices associated with illiteracy and poverty were more clearly linked to prostitution. In the context of official reforms that specifically targeted the family and marriage practices, prostitution became closely linked to outdated modes of family practice and marriage arrangements. Early marriage remained a central theme throughout the stories of prostitutes' lives and characterized the beginning of their downfall. Many of the stories described girls as young as 10, 11, and 12 marrying men decades their senior.²⁵³

The story of Zhila shares many similar themes set forth by other life-stories. Born in a provincial town, her education was abruptly ended at the seventh grade as her brother insisted girls must marry young and become the responsibility of their husbands since if they stayed with their paternal families, they would bring shame and trouble to the family. At her family's disposal, she was forced to marry a man many years her senior whose relative wealth had bought her family's approval. Faced with her husband's demands that she should toil in the fields, and fatigued and overburdened with the work, she returned to her paternal

²⁵³ "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, August 14, 1974, 68; "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, September 25, 1974, 70; "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, November 27, 1974, 62; "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, 13 March, 1974, 64.

home, only to find that she was no longer welcomed and was forced to return to her husband. Once back with her husband, she was severely beaten over the course of months as punishment for leaving. Six months later, she once again sought refuge in her paternal home, but was only allowed to stay temporarily. When coaxed to return to her husband, she threatened to commit suicide and was sent by her parents to live with relatives in another city so as to avoid embarrassment to the family.

Once in the city, she explained, she did not want to dress and live like a villager (*dahati*) but wanted to study and become educated. A few months after enrolling in eighth grade, she was located by her brother and forced to return home. As Zhila tells her story, this time she was imprisoned in the family basement by her parents until she would agree to return and live with her husband and only released after repeated mediation by extended-family members. Still under strict supervision, she befriended another girl, and at her suggestion ran away to Tehran. Zhila contended that she immediately grew tired and disillusioned with her idle life with her friends in Tehran and as a runaway sought the assistance of the police to help her return to her family. As her father and husband arrived to meet her in Tehran, both proclaimed they had decided to sever all ties with her, and her husband immediately divorced her. Rejected by her family and with no recourse, prostitution became the only available option, she argued.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, October 2, 1974, 37.

The inexperience and immaturity of girls married at an early age combined with families who refused to provide social and emotional support to women in time of distress made women vulnerable to abuse. Zhila's story was only one example. For some women, marriage at a young age entailed years of physical and emotional abuse by husbands who became pimps, refused to provide financial support for burgeoning families, and tormented women physically and emotionally. Other women simply refused to endure such marriages and ran away, opening the door to downfall in a society that rejected single women without the protection of families.

The modernist agenda regarded a healthy nuclear family as fundamental in avoiding female sexual transgression. Central to the family were parents who oversaw and valued their children's upbringing and their girls' education. The death of a parent often was seen as opening up the road to prostitution. In life-stories where the girl was not married at a young age, she had often lost a parent and was at the mercy of a step-father or step-mother. Step-mothers represented the most villainous of all persons discussed in these life-stories. In numerous stories, they orchestrated the "ruination" of their step-daughters and facilitated their downfall. Fathers were seen complicit in the injustice as they declined to protect their daughters and ensure their chastity by educating them and providing safe environments.

The breaking of nuclear families and the separation of parents were also described as significant contributors to girls' perceived downfall. For some prostitutes such as Shararih and Shu'lih the entrance into prostitution began after the divorce of their parents and the subsequent presence of step-mothers. Ubiquitously portrayed as wicked, the step-mothers forced the girls into early marriages with unsuitable men.²⁵⁵ For other prostitutes interviewed by *Banuwan*, the breaking of the family stemmed from the inability of large families to care for multiple children, their subsequent displacement with relatives, or the death of a mother due to repeated pregnancies.²⁵⁶ In other words, the family practices of prostitutes' nuclear families were placed under scrutiny, as a growing movement emphasized immediate family and its centrality in child-rearing and educating girls.

In the pages of *Banuwan*, the campaign to reduce prostitution and to facilitate the rehabilitation of prostitutes was aimed directly at the Iranian family. Family practices were seen as the underlying factor that contributed to the misery and downfall of women. In August 1972, *Banuwan* published an article titled, "What to Do with Runaways." A fifteen-year-old girl had taken refuge at the magazine after running away from Tabriz to Tehran. Although the girl was a victim of rape, her family had refused to acknowledge her claims and denied her accusations. In

²⁵⁵ "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, July 10, 1974, 69; "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, October 23, 1974, 62.

²⁵⁶ "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, March 6, 1974, 69.

the process of attempting to secure housing and shelter for the girl, the magazine conducted interviews with professionals to discuss the causes and solutions to running away. A female parliamentarian attributed the problem to parent's despotism in imposing their own ideals on children and ignoring children's desires and needs.

Huma Ruhi, a member of the Women's Capital Organization, attributed the problem to the lure of city life that conned "simple" girls from villages and provinces. Nusrat Kashanchi, a gynecologist, attributed the problem to the oppression of step-mothers, tyranny of parents, and early marriages. Lastly, a psychologist argued that the lack of freedom and deprivation led girls to be lured by the glamor of city life.²⁵⁷ If the details of the story are as told and the magazine indeed served as a refuge for runaways, it suggests not only a growing readership, but a sense of solidarity and expectation of assistance and protection from the magazine as the advocate of women's rights in Iran during this period, an image the magazine itself seems to have been comfortable promoting.

In the pages of the magazine, running away and prostitution were directly tied together and both directly related to familial practices deemed backward and outdated. The linking of these practices to female sexual transgression worked to raise inherent anxieties about changing gender roles and addressed attacks that questioned the reform policies of the Pahlavi state. While traditionalists and the 'ulama' accused the

²⁵⁷ "Ba Farariha Chi Kunim," *Ittila'at-i Banuvan*, September 11, 1972, 4-5.

Pahlavi state of morally corrupting women and society, modernist women's magazines such as *Banuvan* associated the misery, sexualization, and sexual exploitation of women with perceived backward and traditional family practices such as early marriage, large households, temporary marriages, and abusive men. In its quest for the advancement of women's rights in Iran, the women's press softly questioned the adequacy of the newly implemented reforms in family laws while it praised the Shah and Pahlavi state for promoting change and reform in the lives of women. Concurrently, it markedly linked the practices undergoing change to prostitution.

The publishing of repeated stories on prostitution in *Banuvan* must be understood in the context of the growing censorship of not only the rhetoric of political dissent in the 1960s and 1970s, but also of any form of visual, spoken, or written speech that tarnished the image of the state, questioned its reformist policies, or depicted misery and inequality in Iran. In 1966, the documentary film made by the prominent Iranian documentarian, Kamran Shirdel, depicting *Shahr-i Nau* was banned during filming and its raw footage said to have been destroyed by the Iranian secret police, SAVAK.

Ostensibly sponsored by the Women's Organization of Iran, which was nominally headed by the Shah's twin sister, Princess Ashraf Pahlavi, the film's tone and harsh displays of inequality resulted in its censoring and the prevention of filming and screening. Rather than praise the

activities of the Women's Organization of Iran in elevating the plight of prostitutes, the film poignantly visualized wretchedness in the red-light district.²⁵⁸ A decade later, in 1978, Kaveh Golestan's photograph exhibition of prostitutes, workers, and mentally-ill children displayed at Tehran University was shut down by authorities shortly after opening, forcing him to move the exhibition to an art gallery.²⁵⁹ The censorship of Shirdel's film and Golestan's photos of women in the red-light district is a stark contrast to *Banuvan's* published weekly interviews with prostitutes in the red-light district, streetwalkers, and café girls, carried out over years. One then concludes that the magazine's secured political position and patronage placed it beyond censorship or that the magazine promoted the official ideology and that its message appeared utterly apolitical and harmless.

Regardless, *Banuvan's* stance of associating prostitution with traditional and "backward" practices was in line with official reformist policies that heavily focused on the family and marriage practices. As an advocate of the women's rights movement in Iran, *Banuvan's* perpetual association of "shameful" and "unspeakable" female sexual behavior with perceived class-based familial practices inadvertently reinforced class divides and created groups of women who were considered in need of saving, redemption, and rescuing from families and men who neglected and exploited them hence instituting their initiation into prostitution.

²⁵⁸ Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema: The Artisanal Era*, 119-121.

²⁵⁹ Hengameh Golestan and Mehrak Golestani, "Biography," 160.

This class-based understanding of womanhood also necessitated the saving of “lower-class” women from themselves and infantilized them for lack of agency, autonomy, and intelligence, typical of top-down approaches to reform in the country as a whole. It also decriminalized prostitutes, making them victims rather than sinners or criminals. These depictions of prostitution are well situated within the broad historiography of middle and upper class reform concerning prostitution globally. Elite female reformers’ attempts to address prostitution in the United States and England were among the most well studied. Nineteenth and early twentieth century England witnessed considerable attention to prostitution by middle class female reformers who felt a deep concern for the moral salvation of prostitutes and who sought to reform and rescue individual prostitutes,²⁶⁰ ultimately working to control the lives of working class women. In the nineteenth century United States, moral reform work carried out by Protestant evangelicals provided women with the only respectable entrée into urban working-class life.²⁶¹

Elite Women and Problematic Space

The life-stories of women in *Banuvan* were essentially a vocal and clear call to action. Over the years, *Banuvan* interviewed doctors, police chiefs, psychologists, social workers, and members of the government in a quest to decipher the reasons behind prostitution and the ways to save

²⁶⁰ Paula Bartley, *Prostitution, Prevention and Reform in England 1860-1914* (London: Roughledge, 2000), 198.

²⁶¹ Chad Heap, *Slumming*, 4.

fallen women. The perceived emotional misery, financial poverty, and cultural depravity of women engaged in the sex trade promoted middle and upper-class women to act as saviors of working-class women. Prostitutes themselves were not included in the debates surrounding their future and plight. Instead, *Banuwan* served as their voice and warned its readers against practices that harbored prostitution. Treated as passive beings, these women were to be acted upon. The believed necessity to save uneducated, rural, working-class women who were victims of backward familial practices justified elite women's entrance into problematic space and granted them acceptable access to the red-light district and police stations and necessitated their interaction with fallen women. Highly educated, economically secure, and politically connected, these elite women closely resembled what has been described as the "modern middle class" in Iran.²⁶²

In June 1973, the magazine sent a reporter to the red-light district to interview madams and brothel owners in an effort to understand the barriers to saving prostitutes.²⁶³ The findings of the article were preceded by a call to the readers of the magazine to send in their suggestions and solutions to the problem of prostitution and particularly the strategies to save the women. The reporter, Sudabih Qasimlu, began her report by

²⁶² Cyrus Schayegh, *Who Is Knowledgeable Is Strong: Science, Class, and the Formation of Modern Iranian Society, 1900-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

²⁶³ Sudabih Qasimlu, "Aya Mishavad Farib Khurdiha ra Nijat Dad?" *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, June 13, 1973, 4.

announcing that she entered Shahr-i Nau accompanied by a police officer, alleviating potential concerns about her unaccompanied presence in Shahr-i Nau. Reflecting societies in other temporal times, in Iran sexual double standards still threatened to treat any woman who ventured into the red-light district as disreputable. The presence of a male protector, however, could alleviate these concerns, a trend that surfaces in various locals. In New York, women crossing into the slums or red-light districts even to participate in leisure activity sought to undertake such journeys only “in the company of men of upstanding character.”²⁶⁴ In Iran, apart from the female reformers who ventured into the red-light district, however, there is thus far no record to suggest that women not directly or indirectly employed in the sex commerce visited the red-light district and its establishments. Unlike the United States where women of various classes partook in public leisure activities in problematic spaces of red-light districts and working class neighborhoods, in Iran, these avenues continued to remain the male domain. Qasimlu’s report went on to include interviews with two brothel owners. The questions asked focused almost exclusively on the causes of prostitution and the dreadful plight of women living in the red-light district.

The report was quite rare in that it solicited information from members actively involved in the sex trade and voiced their concerns,

²⁶⁴ Chad Heap, *Slumming*, 109.

though none of the women working as prostitutes was consulted for solutions and thoughts. Mirroring claims that “illiterate girls from villages who didn’t have decent financial and familial situations” found their way to the red-light district, one of the madams, Sughra, argued that huge debts prevented prostitutes from leaving.²⁶⁵ Another, Pari, echoed the same ideas and believed that a cooperative lending fund would free many of the women.²⁶⁶ A “scientific” report with any member actively engaged in the sex industry such as the abovementioned was quite exceptional, and the article went on to interview the head of the police department responsible for order in Shahr-i Nau.

Captain Mahmudi maintained that marriage was the most viable solution for freeing prostitutes from Shahr-i Nau and providing them with a second chance. Since most of the women were illiterate or poorly literate, he claimed, they would not be able to find suitable employment and sufficient income to sustain themselves. While the economic situation of prostitutes in Tehran’s red-light district was not favorable or easy, there is no evidence to suggest they lived much different from women in other working-class neighborhoods. And, as previously highlighted, anti-prostitution petition writers and police records focused on the geographic location of prostitution and its potential moral hazards without explicit class-associated clarifications. The constant concern

²⁶⁵ Sudabih Qasimlu, “Aya Mishavad Farib Khurdiha ra Nijat Dad?” *Ittila‘at-i Banuwan*, June 13, 1973, 4.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

with prostitution and sympathy towards prostitutes coupled with a mission to save prostitutes created an imagined class of backward women. In the process, it encouraged and required the civic engagement of elite women.

A small alternative to the discourse of prostitution as victims did surface in the magazine in the form of readers' letters and commentaries. While sporadic and few and far between, these letters from readers spoke of prostitution as a moral problem and prostitutes as sinners and criminals, akin to thieves, drug dealers and looters.²⁶⁷ If these letters are taken at face value, some readers strongly objected to the magazine's benevolent attitude towards prostitutes and chastised the magazine for its sympathetic portrayals of female sex workers.

Labeling prostitutes as "weeds" and "poisons," one such reader asserted that the stories the women told to the interviewers of *Banuwan* were pure fiction and orchestrated to garner sympathy by depicting themselves as oppressed (*mazlum*) and deceived (*farib khurdiha*).²⁶⁸ Another reader specifically singled out girls and women who claimed to have been deceived by men promising long-term relationships and lasting friendships. These women, he argued, were so invested in "shameful" and anti-religious behavior that they befriended "any man" that crossed their path and lost "everything" to him. Ostensibly referring

²⁶⁷ "Darbarih Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, April 4, 1973, 80.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

to virginity, he concluded that the notion of girls' deception was a mere myth, used by women to justify and cover their actions and choices.²⁶⁹

Science and Prostitution

The women's rights movement and the struggle for the advancement of women in Iran were organized in the context of the state's modernization policies, and the social activities directed at prostitutes should be understood as part of the larger apparatus of modernization. In August 1968, the prominent Iranian social worker Sattareh Farman-Farmaian was commissioned by the Ministry of Interior to conduct research on prostitution, and her team of social workers began their extensive and elaborate documentation of prostitution across Tehran that culminated in the publication of a groundbreaking monograph titled "Regarding Prostitution in Tehran." While Farman-Farmaian's study provides extensive information about the background and lives of women in Tehran's red-light district, the publication of the study itself serves as a remarkable tribute to the activities and civic engagement of elite women in Tehran during this period.

The study should be understood in the context of a growing middle-class's relationship with science in Iran. As recent scholarship has underscored, the adoption of modern sciences in Iran played a significant role in the formation of the modern middle class, which

²⁶⁹ "Dukhtaran Kudishan Mikhahand kih Farib Bukhurand," *Ittila'at-i Banuvan*, July 3, 1974, 36.

distinguished itself from the traditional middle class and lower classes particularly by way of cultural practices and increased medicalization.²⁷⁰ The medicalization of modernity carried interesting ramifications for the remainder of Iranian society. Motivated by Western education and nationalism, the emerging modern middle class in Iran sought, along with the help of the state, to manage and accelerate modernity by insisting that crucial aspects of Iranian life such as marriage adhere to modern notions of health, medicine, and physical and mental wellbeing.²⁷¹ While Cyrus Schayegh has focused on and outlined the transformation of psychiatry and neurology and its effect on emerging notions of class in Iran, his arguments can be applied to the burgeoning of other sciences in Iran as well, particularly public health and social work. Science and education, in effect, became a dividing force between different classes of society in Iran during the twentieth century.

Celebrated as the pioneer of social work in Iran, Farman-Farmaian established the first school of social work in Iran in 1958, after completing her graduate studies in the United States and gaining work experience at the United Nations among other places.²⁷² The Tehran School of Social Work, where Farman-Farmaian served as director for over 20 years, served as a leading provider of welfare services throughout the country, and, among other services, directly targeted prostitutes.

²⁷⁰ Cyrus Schayegh, *Who is Knowledgeable is Strong*, 5.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 194.

²⁷² Mahasin Saleh, "Sattareh Farman-Farmaian," *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 23, no. 4 (2008): 398.

Based on 1,548 surveys and interviews with sex workers throughout the city, the study provides a wealth of information about the background and upbringing of sex workers and their familial situation before and after engagement with prostitution. The study sought to decipher the economic, social, and psychological contributors to prostitution in Tehran in hopes of “finding solutions to combat this social ill.”²⁷³ The ultimate goal of the study, according to Farman-Farmaian, was to facilitate the freedom of prostitutes from sex work and to reestablish their dignity while preventing the future spread of prostitution.²⁷⁴

In the process of achieving these goals, prostitutes’ rights and desires were certainly secondary if not overlooked, and the emerging agenda of social reform and change was forcibly undertaken. The study employed both men and women to carry out the various tasks associated with conducting interviews, documenting, editing, and printing. The study first bribed then legally compelled female sex workers to participate. The scientific surveying and studying of prostitution in Tehran for the sake of saving and freeing female sex workers were deemed important enough to merit the use of force and intimidation. Interviewers were stationed at police stations waiting for prostitutes to be apprehended. Once there, the monetary penalties for streetwalking or working without a health card were forgiven if the woman agreed to be interviewed. The study also made a systematic effort to interview all of

²⁷³ Sattareh Farman-Farmaian, *Piramun-i Ruspigari dar Shahr-i Tehran*, 11.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

the women working in the red-light district. While some women voluntarily cooperated, others refused. In their efforts to help working-class women and prostitutes characterized as oppressed and deceived into prostitution, social workers had the backing of the police force.

Prostitutes in the red-light district were hesitant to answer surveys, presumably as it took time and deterred prospective clients. In an effort to coax the women, each social worker was escorted by a police officer and invited prostitutes to answer the survey questions. More importantly, while social workers were present in the houses, clients were not to be accepted and allowed in the house. The surveying of prostitutes in the red-light district was to be followed by in-depth interviews in the coming months, and prostitutes were expected to report to the social workers during open hours.

Despite efforts to change the timing of the interviews during the day, over 300 women refused to report during the required hours for the follow-up interviews.²⁷⁵ As this shows, the presence of social workers studying the women in the red-light district was clearly not received with open arms by members of the sex industry, and it is possible to assume that some prostitutes were hostile or apathetic at best. To ensure that the remainder of the prostitutes in Shahr-i Nau were interviewed, every day the names of approximately fifty prostitutes would be handed to the police force. The police would in turn see to it that the prostitutes

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

reported to designated locations to be interviewed.²⁷⁶ The necessity of using the police force to secure the interviews with prostitutes further suggests the level of ambivalence or hesitancy on the part of sex workers. Social workers were clearly infringing on a space that was not theirs, and they distanced themselves and warded off any suggestion of impropriety by highlighting the presence of the police during visits to the red-light district. The fact that the study was commissioned by the Ministry of State weighed heavily in granting access to the walled red-light district and the appropriation of government security forces to see that all prostitutes and madams participated in the study.

The modernization policies of the Pahlavi state endorsed social reform practices that focused on the rural and urban working-class. These policies included reforms in education and health through the Health and Literacy Corps. Enrollment in kindergartens and elementary schools dramatically increased as did the number of doctors, nurses and medical clinics available.²⁷⁷ In essence, the image of the destitute, abused, and poor working-class prostitute was needed to legitimize the sweeping changes in laws affecting families and women.

While elite women such as those managing the women's press and conducting scientific research on and about working-class women legitimized their social and civic involvement by parading the conditions of working-class prostitutes, one cannot merely understand the

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁷⁷ Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 134.

relationship of elite women to working-class women as an elitist agenda to force and impose the modernization policies of the Shah's regime. Nor should the women's movement in Iran during this period be solely explained as a ploy in the sweeping modernization policies taking place. Rather, it is important to study such activities as power negotiations taking place and elite women's attempt to implement change in a political climate that greatly frowned upon real and imagined threats to its authority. The women's rights movement in Iran held close ties to the Pahlavi state and worked within the modernization policies of the Shah, yet to explain women's activities merely as a reflection of state policies simplifies the relationship. Instead, the women's rights movement in Iran in general and the elitist agenda directed at prostitutes were configured at the nexus of power, reform, and elitism.²⁷⁸

While *Banuwan* hailed the Royal Family as exemplars and dramatically praised the Shah for his modernization policies, it also addressed the inadequacies of the legal changes pertaining to women and criticized them for being symbolic and unimplemented. *Zan-i Ruz*, for its part, published numerous articles defending temporary marriage and establishing the 'ulama's position on women's rights in Islam by Murteza Mutahhari, which starkly contrasted with state policies and agendas.

²⁷⁸ Joanna de Groot, "Feminism in Another Language: Learning from 'Feminist' Histories of Iran and/or from Histories of Iranian 'Feminism' since 1830," *Women: a Cultural Review* 21, no. 3 (November 2010), 261; Mana Kia, "Negotiating Women's Rights: Activism, Class, and Modernization in Pahlavi Iran," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 25, no. 1 (2005): 221-244.

Sattareh Farman-Farmaian's personal experience also delineates one such negotiation. Although her study on prostitutes in Tehran was commissioned by the state and carried out with the backing of the police and the judicial establishment, the staff for the study and her work in Tehran's School of Social Work simultaneously operated outside the parameters and reach of the state.

In her memoir, Farman-Farmaian chronicles her meeting with the Shah to justify the existence of the School of Social Work and gain approval for its continued existence. As the daughter of Qajar aristocrats, Farman-Farmaian's feelings before the meeting with the Shah were characterized by a mixture of fear and slight resentment, and throughout the meeting, she meticulously chooses words and ideas so as not to offend the monarch and to gain his approval for her social service programs. "It was appalling to think that my next words could destroy the school," she recalled. After deciding to answer the questions as candidly and firmly as she could, she claimed, "I waited at the edge of my chair, prepared to rise and flee if he angrily dismissed me."²⁷⁹ She was pleasantly surprised at the small donation of the Shah, not for its monetary significance but for the stamp of approval it would afford her organization and for its "psychological value beyond price," as it allowed her to attract reluctant donors.²⁸⁰ Organizations conducting research

²⁷⁹ Sattareh Farman-Farmaian, *Daughter of Persia: a Woman's Journey from Her Father's Harem through the Islamic Revolution* (New York: Crown, 1992), 246.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 247-248.

and providing social service work on such a large scale throughout Tehran could function only with the approval of the state, but were not immune from being eliminated and looked at with suspicion by the regime and other elites. Acknowledging the authoritarian atmosphere of the time and the repressiveness of Iran's secret police, the SAVAK, Farman-Farmaian defended her decision to remain apolitical. "I knew that if I or any of my students became involved in political protest, the School would be closed at once and social workers, who were already viewed with mistrust by officials...would be labeled political troublemakers and refused jobs," she asserted in her memoir. Farman-Farmaian goes on to suggest that the lack of political involvement was a sacrifice the School and its members accepted in order to save Iran and the Iranian working-class: "without jobs or—worse yet—from exile or jail, I and my graduates could do nothing to help Iranians have better nutrition, better housing and sanitation, skills and incomes," she explained. "In horror, I imagined the commandos coming and firing on *my* students," she concluded.²⁸¹

Farman-Farmaian's personal account of the intricacies of navigating the political climate of the time to foster social change serves as a reminder that the women's movement, which as indicated by detailing *Banuwan*, heavily focused on social and legal reform in the family, negotiated with the state for survival. In the process, however, it

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 250.

used the objectification and othering of poor, uneducated, and working-class women to justify and validate its own existence. As highlighted previously in the discussion on prostitution and *Banuvan*, prostitution became linked to imagined “backward” Iranian family practices and was presented as the inevitable outcome of corrupt marriage customs that originated with the “unhealthy” family.

The surveys garnered for the publication of Farman-Farmaian’s study point to a more varied portrait of prostitution in the city of Tehran that does not neatly corroborate the claims set forth in *Banuvan*. The study concluded that despite the popular belief associating prostitution with village girls (*dahati*), the majority of prostitutes were brought up in cities and the largest percentage originated from central Iran, rather than provinces on the peripheries of the country.²⁸² What is more, of the 56 percent of prostitutes who grew up in biological two-parent households, 85.5 percent contended that their parents had good and healthy relationships, and 69.9 percent expressed that they were satisfied and pleased with their childhoods and upbringing.²⁸³

Despite the perpetual association of prostitution with poverty-stricken families, illiteracy, and early marriages in the women’s press, the largest dissatisfaction with childhoods was expressed by prostitutes who came from wealthy families.²⁸⁴ While a father’s polygamy was a

²⁸² Farman-Farmaian, *Piramin-i Ruspigari dar Shahr-i Tehran*, 121.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 129.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

recurring theme in the stories published in *Banuvan*, a mere 6.5 percent of prostitutes surveyed in the 1960s had polygamous fathers.²⁸⁵ The inconsistencies between Farman-Farmaian's comprehensive interviews for her study and *Banuvan*'s selective interviews for the stories it published confirms the magazine's agenda of inculcating in readers its "modernized" principles. In general these principles included industrialization, urbanization, and secularization. In regards to the family, the imagined "modern" Iranian family was urbanized, secularized, highly educated, and engaged in public and civil service.

In the pages of *Banuvan*, early marriages were presented as the prelude to prostitution. The surveys with Tehran's prostitutes suggest a more complex picture. Seventy-eight percent of the women surveyed had been married at one point, and 72.9 percent expressed that they were or had been unhappy with their marriages, while 27.1 percent expressed satisfaction with their marriages.²⁸⁶ The surveys on marital satisfaction did not differentiate between marriages before and after entering prostitution and did not specify the relationship between the age of marriage and satisfaction rates. Prostitutes used both official and unofficial marriage arrangements to validate their marriages. Of the 78 percent who claimed they were married, 59 percent had official and religious marriages, 32 percent had religious but non-official marriages (not registered with the state), and 9 percent had non-religious and non-

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 132 and 134.

official marriages, suggesting the variability of marriage arrangements among prostitutes.²⁸⁷ While *Banuvan* constantly linked prostitution to failed marriages at an early age, Farman-Farmaian’s study on prostitution does not support such claims.

The table below illustrates the reasons prostitutes cited for entrance into prostitution:²⁸⁸

Reasons for prostitution	Percentage
Deceived	37
Sold	26.8
Lack of means and guardian	20.1
Pleasure	4.6
Seeking wealth	2.6
Familial abandonment	1.9
Other	7
Total	100

Table 3. “Distribution of Prostitutes Based on Their Reason’s for Entering the Society of Prostitutes”

Borrowed from Farman-Farmaian, *Piramun-i Ruspigari*.

Despite the detailed breakdown of reasons, the explanation does little to clarify the circumstances that led women in Iran during this period to prostitution. The study does not explain any of the categories provided above and assumes the reader will understand the meanings and implications behind the reasons for prostitution cited by women in the red-light district. The study does indicate that 88.3 percent of prostitutes were illiterate, with illiteracy directly correlating with the women’s age. Older women were overwhelmingly illiterate, and literacy

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

²⁸⁸ Borrowed from *Ibid.*, 146.

was highest among streetwalkers, who were considerably younger than women in the red-light district, as age restrictions and the requirement of health certificates served as a deterrent for younger women to work in the red-light district.²⁸⁹

The selective nature of *Banuvan's* stories in exposing the roots of prostitution suggests an agenda that sought to change and mold Iranian family and marriage practices into educated upper/middle-class conceptions of Iranianness and modernity. While these prescriptions strongly echoed the modernization policies of the state, understanding the relationship between the state and the women's movement as power negotiations allows for another possible explanation. The stories of prostitutes in *Banuvan* encouraged the involvement of the state and subtly suggested the dissatisfaction of the magazine with the legal changes that had taken place. On a few occasions the magazine emphasized its dissatisfaction with the implementation of the laws, and its detailed coverage of prostitution may have served as a masked attempt to coax the state to increase its execution of the Family Protection Laws. Regardless of intentions, in the 1970s in Iran, the movement for the advancement of women's rights and improvement in their lives was plagued by classism.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 140 and 149.

Perpetuated Paternalism

The relationship of elite women and female reformers to prostitutes in Tehran which was partially channeled through the women's press and scientific studies was marked by an unequal power relationship. Prostitutes and their families, both before and after their entrance into the sex industry, represented to *Banuwan* and those in support of its modernization agendas all that was backward about Iran. These women were characterized as passive and submissive beings, without any form of agency and in need of saving. The solution to the problem of prostitution was identified with eradicating the supply aspect of the sex industry. The underlying assumption contended that educated and employed women from healthy natal families were immune to prostitution and sexual transgression. Both the cause for and solution to prostitution were placed with the family.

Banuwan published articles asking its readers to accept rehabilitated prostitutes and to provide families for them. In this process, the women's movement in Iran perpetuated the prevalent paternalistic attitudes of its time. For example, in an effort to humanize prostitutes, Farman-Farmaian emphasized prostitutes' roles as mothers and caretakers of abandoned children and asserted that most prostitutes sold themselves for their children.²⁹⁰ This information that Farman-Farmaian offered in an interview with *Banuwan* on her work with prostitutes

²⁹⁰ "Izdivajhayi Najur, Faqr va Bimari az Avamil Asasi Ruspigari Ast," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, October 29, 1969, 11.

becomes particularly important considering that her research indicated that 60 percent of the prostitutes interviewed had never been pregnant.²⁹¹ Of the remaining 40 percent who had been pregnant, only 42 percent had surviving children. The other pregnancies had either been terminated by abortion or miscarriages (39.3 percent), stillbirths (2.4 percent), or later deaths (16.3 percent).²⁹² Considering most prostitutes were not mothers caring for children, Farman-Farmaian's statement that prostitutes remained in their professions to support their children highlights the implication of describing prostitutes as victims. Motherhood became the justification and explanation for socially unacceptable actions and "immoral" and "degrading" behavior, in this case, the selling of female bodies for money.

Characterizing prostitutes as passive sexual beings who were always "deceived" or forced to sell their bodies for the benefit of their families maintained the cultural message that women were inherently more virtuous than men and their virtue reflected the honor of not only their family but also the Iranian nation. In essence, it demanded that women bear the moral responsibility and guardianship of society.

This urge to protect and rehabilitate "deceived" women directly targeted the imagined family practices that set elite women apart from the traditional and working-class women. In maintaining that women from "backward" families were vulnerable to prostitution and ultimate

²⁹¹ Farman-Farmaian, *Piramin-i Ruspigari dar Shahr-i Tehran*, 80 and 151.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 153.

ruin, the women's movement envisioned women solely within the purview of families. They merely campaigned for the replacement of one mode of paternalism with another. Women's social and economic activity external to the domains of family or without the desire to establish families remained unimagined. These reforming impulses also went to solidify class distinctions and validate the superior moral standards of elite women of educated urban families.

Conclusion

Despite the detailed portrayals of sexual transgression and downfall in the women's press, women were rarely held responsible for their own sexual activities, and prostitution was presented as the single unavoidable option for economically and emotionally destitute women. The repeated portrayals of prostitution as the problem of poor and provincial families practicing outdated modes of child rearing and outlooks on marriage created the justification for civic action and claims to moral responsibility and the quest for intervention by *Banuvan*. On numerous occasions, the magazine invited authorities to consider the plight of prostitutes and runaway girls; the latter were deemed especially susceptible to prostitution as running away was considered the gateway to prostitution. In this process of interviewing prostitutes and "experts," *Banuvan* portrayed itself as the voice of all destitute women who had no recourse against backward families and abusive men. The life-stories of prostitutes served not only to highlight and denounce the backward

familial practices that led to the supposed decay and corruption of girls and women and validate the social involvement of the magazine and women's organizations in Iran during this period, but it also perpetuated paternalistic attitudes prevalent during the time. Simply put, women who lost the guardianship of "healthy" families or originated from families that did not find suitable husbands for their daughters were seen as increasingly vulnerable to downfall and prostitution.

The published life-stories of prostitutes served partly as warnings regarding the appalling and miserable life of prostitutes, but taken together they represent the recipe for familial practices that caused prostitution. In other words, female prostitution was deemed the ultimate downfall for women and for their families, and particular practices within the family were considered directly resulting in prostitution. Read backwards, these stories preached the ideal Iranian family that was healthy and informed and subscribed to the state and official visions of modernity.

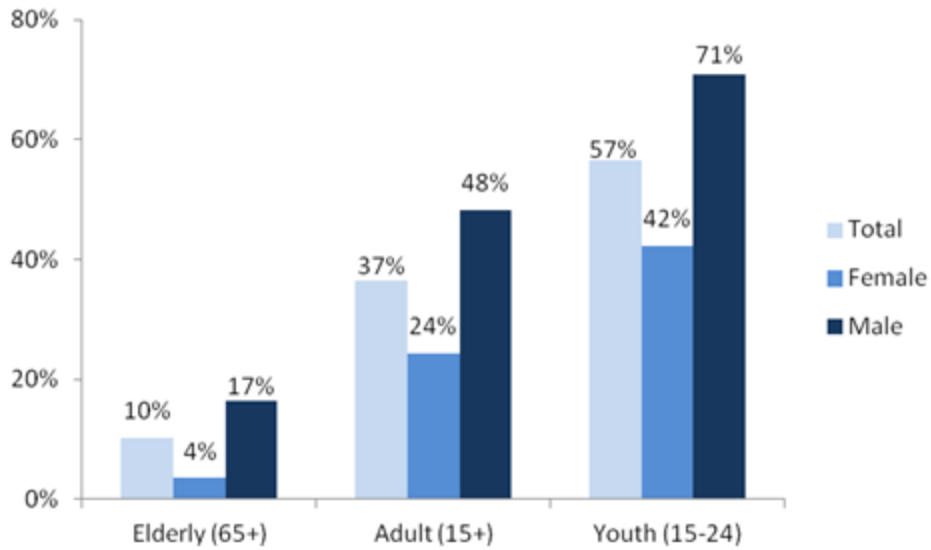


Figure 5. Literacy rates in Iran, 1976

Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators 2013.

Author's calculations on data compiled from: www.databank.worldbank.org

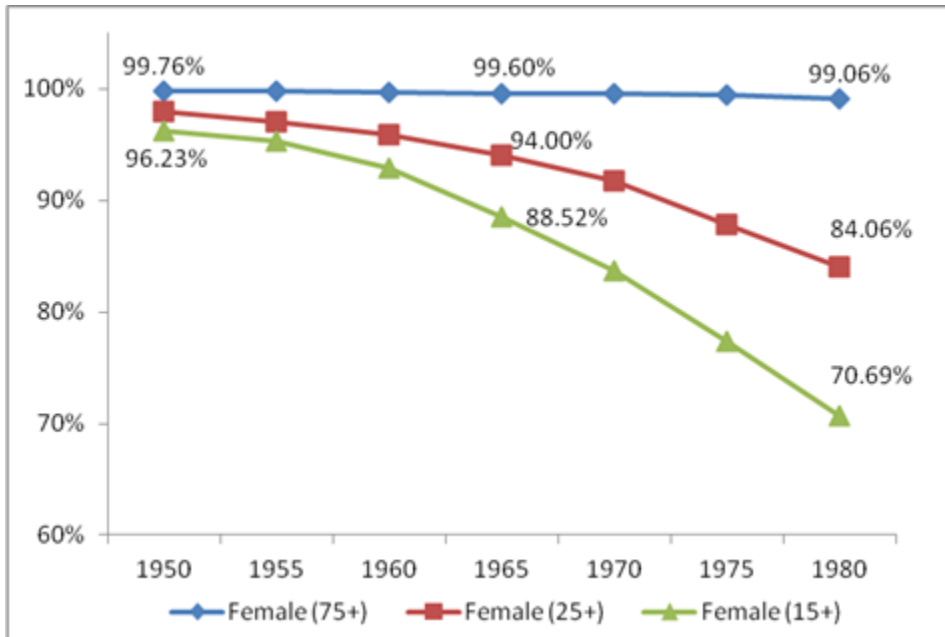


Figure 6. Percentage of Iranian woman with no schooling (1950-1980)

Source: Barro-Lee Educational Attainment Dataset.

Graph compiled from www.barrolee.com

PART III. Prostitution, Temporary Marriage, and Sexual Ideology

Chapter 5: Whores or Wives: Discourses on Prostitution in Modern Iran

Introduction

On January 29th 1979, Tehran witnessed an unusual scene. The red-light district went up flames after attacks of unknown assailants during the last days of the Shah's reign. By attacking fire trucks and creating roadblocks with the personal belongings of inhabitants of the district, the assailants blocked the path of fire trucks attempting to curb the fire and rescue the belongings of members of the vice district. Somehow, someone thought of getting the 'ulama' involved, and ultimately, that evening, the fire trucks were able to reach inside the red-light district and put out fires as members of 'ulama' accompanied the fire trucks to the red-light district. As the red-light district burned, one of the 'ulama' used a hand-held loudspeaker to calm the crowd and disperse assailants.²⁹³

The next day, as other urban spaces associated with vice were vandalized and burned, Ayatollah Mohammad Talighani, a senior and prominent member of the revolutionary movement, issued a statement condemning the attacks on Shahr-i Nau. Becoming the head of the Revolutionary Council appointed by Ayatollah Khomeini and the imam of Tehran's Friday Prayer following the victory of the Revolution, Talighani

²⁹³"Sangarbandi, Atashsuzi va Tazahurat dar Khiyabanhayi Tehran," *Keyhan*, January 30, 1979, 4.

steadfastly defended members of the red-light district in his statement and instructed “all faithful brothers” to refrain from attacking the red-light district and its inhabitants. Such attacks, he contended, were perpetrated by pimps and casino-owners in support of the Shah’s regime and intended to discredit the growing revolutionary movement.²⁹⁴ Regardless of this, much of Shahr-i Nau was destroyed and the physical manifestations of vice underwent dramatic change in the winter of 1979. Health checks, police encounters, female reformers, customers, and visual documentarians of the red-light district were replaced by unknown mobs vandalizing and burning Tehran’s red-light district and later by purity reformers eradicating the most physical urban manifestation of vice in Tehran. In the cacophony of revolutionary turmoil, inhabitants of the red-light district were easy prey, and shortly after the Revolution, sex outside marriage was outlawed and severely penalized. The market economy for sex, of course, did not go away, and the newly formed Islamic state was faced with providing solutions to cultural norms that had, albeit begrudgingly, accepted zoned prostitution.

The Revolution of 1979 disrupted much of the political developments in the region and carried considerable consequences internationally. Yet, its domestic social policies also created considerable change in the lives of Iranian men and women. In the process of solidifying its social power and legitimizing its claim to Iranian society,

²⁹⁴ “Ittila’iyi Ayatollah Talighani darbariyi Hamlih be Qal’ih-i Shahr-i Nau,” *Keyhan*, January 31, 1979, 3.

the Islamic government was soon faced with the challenges of the Iran-Iraq war. In an attempt to address the growing sexual demands associated with an increase in population and migration to cities, elements within the new Iranian power structure attempted to re-invent temporary marriage as a solution to growing concerns about public morality and social hygiene. Post-revolutionary Iran saw a reversal of the secular and religious trends prevalent during the Pahlavi regime, when the official public domain was mostly secular while the religious domain remained increasingly private. The shift in the public sphere after the Revolution and the dominance of religion in this domain has expanded the reach of religion and, surprisingly, has made issues previously taboo become public. Hence, sexuality has entered the political public discourse. In other words, the puritanical image of the Islamic Republic has become juxtaposed with public debates on female sexuality, prostitution, and sexual gratification.

This chapter takes a diachronic approach to the issue of temporary marriage and prostitution and compares the various discourses on prostitution during the second Pahlavi regime and post-Revolutionary Iran. It points out that studying prostitution within the modern Iranian context can expand the theoretical discussions on sexuality and sex work within feminist scholarship, contribute to discussions on Islamic modernity, and highlight the Islamic regime's attempt at re-inventing a little known religious tradition to fit modern times. In the process, it

brings together the emerging discourses on prostitution during the 1960s and 1970s within various structures of Iranian society, emphasizing the deep prevalent sympathy towards the character of “the prostitute.”

During the Pahlavi regime, the legitimacy of the modern state was closely connected to women’s progress. By the 1970s this attempt at modernizing women had expanded to include saving and electively modernizing “the prostitute.”

During the 1970s, the discourse on prostitution entered the public domain and became politicized as it tied closely with the regime’s efforts to modernize Iranian society by alleviating the plight of its women; similarly the issues of prostitution and also temporary marriage have gained public attention and political momentum in Iran’s post-Revolution Islamic government as they relate closely to Iran’s effort to develop socially and politically along Islamic lines. In post-Revolutionary Iran, *mut‘a*, temporary marriage, became an Islamic solution to a modern political problem. The chapter highlights competing notions of modernity in Iran during the second half of the twentieth century and the intimate association between prostitution and temporary marriage. The secular modernization of the Shah’s regime is juxtaposed with the religious modernization of the Islamic Republic.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁵ I would like to point out that I am well aware of and sensitive to the power of language in this context. Language can be limiting; while the terms “secular,” “religious,” and “modernization” carry loaded meanings, I am using them in order to establish a diachronic perspective. I do not intend any of the terms to carry positive or negative connotations.

The chapter concludes by taking on a separate yet pertinent approach by emphasizing the relevance of a study of prostitution in the Iranian context to feminist scholarship, as studies of prostitution in the Middle East have been absent from the larger feminist debate on sex work. The fact that individual prostitutes have different experiences in their lives across time and space has become evident by historical and contemporary scholarship, which seeks to move beyond a literature that depicts prostitutes as victims. The examples of temple prostitutes in India who gained autonomy and wealth, and high-status courtesans in Japan and China who were lovers and artisans demanding high payments, are a few of the cases that challenge the dominant debates on prostitution.²⁹⁶ The dissertation seeks to add the case of prostitution in Iran to this list. In the end, it destabilizes the “prostitute” and complicates established assumptions about the term and the phenomenon.

Prostitution and Secular Modernization

The history of Iran during the 1960s and 1970s is abundant with clashes between the state and the religious establishment. Nowhere is this clash more evident than in issues and reforms pertaining to women. As the political conflict between Mohammad Reza Shah and the clergy grew, women’s issues became a major battleground for collisions. While

²⁹⁶ Chilla Bulbeck, *Re-Orienting Western Feminism: Women’s Diversity in a Postcolonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 180.

the Shah's 1963 White Revolution became a turning point in Iranian industrial development and the expansion of its labor market, many of its policies also addressed gender issues. In 1963 women were granted suffrage. The family protection law of 1967, which was revised in 1975, addressed age restrictions on marriage, divorce, child custody, and polygamy, areas that resulted in continued friction with the religious establishment.

The Family Protection Law included conceptions of women as breadwinners by changing divorce and custody laws in favor of women. The changes in the law made it mandatory for female high school graduates to make a two-year commitment to the Women's Literacy or Health Corp program if they were unmarried and did not have dependents. Also, in 1970 an attempt was made to lift the required permission for the husband's approval in the wake of a married woman's travel. While this debate was introduced in the 1970s, it did not become law until 1976, and when it did, it merely lifted the requirement for multiple permissions and stipulated that a single permission would suffice for multiple exits from the country. As Parvin Paidar has observed, the aims of most of the legislation that was enacted in regards to women was in response to the requirements of a modern economy and society, yet they remained piecemeal, conservative, and firmly placed within male dominated social relations.²⁹⁷ In essence, the legitimacy of

²⁹⁷ Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 159.

the modern Iranian state became intertwined with the principle of women's progress, and the Shah strove to create conditions that would enhance women's position and create an aura of women's equality even though in actuality little substantial change was achieved.²⁹⁸

While some scholars have studied legislation regarding women's legal and economic position within Iranian family and society, little has been said about women's sexual character and the sexual atmosphere of the time.²⁹⁹ The late 1960s and 1970s witnessed a plethora of emerging direct and indirect discourses on prostitution within Iranian society. While during the 1950s and early 1960s prostitution was on the minds of Iranian citizens and visible in some neighborhoods, in the last years of the 1960s leading up until the Iranian Revolution, prostitution wholly entered the public domain and was displayed as a center subject within women's magazines, feature films, and short stories as well as within scientific discourse that sought to address, contain, and prevent prostitution as a degrading social evil threatening public morality and social hygiene.

Sattareh Farman-Farmaian author of the study into the situation of prostitution in Shahr-i Nau commissioned by the Interior Ministry and described in detail in the previous chapter³⁰⁰ herself represented the creation of the new Iranian woman. The daughter of a Qajar aristocrat,

²⁹⁸ Camron Michael Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*, 251.

²⁹⁹ For an exception see Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics*.

³⁰⁰ See page 205-206 of this dissertation for more details.

she was educated at the prominent American Bethel School and later sent to the United States, where she obtained her graduate degree in social work from the University of Southern California. She returned to Iran to open the first school of social work in the country.

Farman-Farmaian's study represents the government's attempt to expand its modernization project into various sectors of society, and in this process, prostitution becomes a viable subject of inquiry. The study is replete with charts, questionnaires, and references to modern survey techniques. Farman-Farmaian begins the book with a validation of the findings of the study by detailing the process of information gathering, the administrative chain of command, and the specific training each surveyor had to go through in order to become part of the program. There is a clear attempt throughout the study to signify and prove it as a major scientific contribution to the growing field of sociology and to make it relevant to concerns about public health.

Farman-Farmaian organized all her data in the form of charts and concluded that prostitutes roaming Tehran could be classified into five groups. The first and major group was represented by prostitutes in Shahr-i Nau. In essence, Shahr-i Nau represented a city within a city, with its own stores, theaters, police station, and entrance fee. Each prostitute had a room suitable to her stature where she entertained her customers. A plethora of middle-men and women existed who guided customers and provided them with necessities beyond sex. Farman-

Farmaian and her organization focused the majority of their efforts on the women in Shahr-i Nau who were officially registered and carried health cards. The study also acknowledges other forms of prostitution in Tehran including streetwalkers, high-class prostitutes working out of their homes who generally had pimps, café girls or prostitutes working in night clubs and bars, and finally the outcast women working in slums where drug smugglers, thieves, and other criminals spent time.³⁰¹

Prostitution, according to the conclusions of the study, was a result of illiteracy on the part of both the prostitute and her parents, failure in marriage resulting directly from marrying at a young age or a result of an age gap between the husband and wife. Both blame and solution were placed in the hands of the government.³⁰² The government was held accountable for the marriage choices and customs in the family and the high illiteracy rate among the Iranian population, and the expectation demanded that by legislating new laws and providing modern social structures the government would change the cultural atmosphere of the time and modernize Iranian women and by extension Iranian families.

This study's ultimate goal did not involve eradicating prostitution as a problem; rather, Farman-Farmaian asserted that even in the most developed countries prostitution remained an unavoidable problem, and as Iran was deemed on the road to progress, it was unrealistic to expect

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, Introduction.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 222.

the eradication of prostitution from Iranian life. What was required was an attempt to contain and curb prostitution and to prevent its spread.³⁰³ In this context, the solutions offered to the problem of prostitution included expanding literacy and culture among Iranian families and raising awareness about marriage and motherhood, all of which was placed in the hands of the government. However, a majority of the solutions offered also involved providing recourses for existing prostitutes, which included an increase in awareness on issues of sexual health and birth control measures.

By the late 1960s, the attempt to modernize Iranian women which began in the first half of the twentieth century with the expansion of education and the opening of the workforce to women had expanded to include a modernization reform in the sexual lives of Iranian women where clinical studies such as the aforementioned were encouraging pap smears, birth control shots, and abortion clinics along with attempts to provide the women with clean drinking water, electricity, and child care centers. According to Farman-Farmaian's study, sexual health education and pregnancy prevention were the most important factors that needed to be discussed and expanded. Print magazines were recommended as the appropriate medium to disperse this education and expand it within the general public.³⁰⁴

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 224.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

The two women's magazines of this time clearly reflect Farman-Farmaian's prescription that sexual health and pregnancy measures should be discussed in print media. *Ittila'at-i Banuvan* and *Zan-i Ruz*, the two leading women's magazines of pre-Revolutionary Iran, discussed a multitude of subjects pertaining to women. Farman-Farmaian, her study, and her organization make an appearance in *Banuvan* where she presented the findings of her study and the solutions to the problem of prostitution in the city of Tehran. In her interview, she reiterated much of the findings of her study but also proceeded to state that the new generation of Iranian youth needed to be educated in issues of sexuality, pregnancy prevention, and abortion along with an awareness about the importance of the family in the upbringing of children.³⁰⁵ What becomes apparent in her 1969 interview which also dominates other discussions of prostitution in these magazines is a sympathetic and benevolent approach towards prostitutes. Farman-Farmaian asserted that even though society does not appreciate what these women do, many of them were caring mothers who had legitimate children from their previous failed marriages and who tried to provide better opportunities for their children.³⁰⁶

This attitude of sympathy and victimization continues throughout the majority of the articles on prostitution in both of these magazines.

³⁰⁵ Sima Dabir Ashtiyani, "Izdivajhayi Najur, Faqr va Bimari az 'Avamil-i Asasi-i Ruspigari Ast," *Ittila'at-i Banuvan*, November 4, 1969, 11.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

The image presented of the prostitute is of one who has been deceived by her father or husband into a miserable situation and who has no escape and recourse since neither her family nor her society will accept her. In this predicament, the responsibility is placed on the government to protect the women and to simultaneously provide them with shelter and safety while raising cultural awareness and changing the negative practices that result in prostitution in the first place. The underlying assumption behind these solutions is that if and when Iranians forestall their corruptive practices relating to family relations and children's upbringing, prostitution and other social ills associated with it will disappear, and the government is the savior of women and the modernizer of Iranian society.

A major recurring theme present in stories about prostitutes is their forced marriage at a young age and their lack of choice in the process. While *Banuvan's* publication of prostitute's stories was previously discussed, *Zan-i Ruz* also ran a series of stories about fathers and husbands who sold their daughters. Muluk's story began when her addict father sold her to a seventy year-old man who took her to another city where she was forced to sell herself; repulsed by the situation, she ran away and a truck driver gave her rescue and married her. She later discovered that he too would pimp her out by finding her customers.³⁰⁷ Nineteen year-old Shirin told of her forced marriage at the age of fifteen

³⁰⁷ "Pidari Dukhtarash ra bih Dah Hizar Tuman Furukht," *Zan-i Ruz*, December 3, 1973, 15.

to a forty-five year-old man who became addicted to heroin and gambled his money away, and ended up in jail. In order to feed her children and pay off her husband's debts, she bedded her husband's debtor and ended up getting her husband out of jail. Once out of jail, her husband sold her to a café owner. She was forced to work in the café, but soon left it to work on the streets on her own as she could make more money this way.³⁰⁸

Other issues narrate the initiation into prostitution along similar lines: a women who was raped by her cousin and deserted by her family or a women who was found not to be a virgin by her unchosen husband who then prostitutes her as punishment for her perceived lack of virginity.³⁰⁹ In discovering the process by which women become prostitutes, the women become victims of a backward society that does not understand and acknowledge their most basic needs as human beings.

In both *Zan-i Ruz* and *Banuvan*, most of the discourse on prostitution rests on telling the *sarguzasht* or life-story of these women and presenting them in the image of an abused, neglected, deserted, and asexual woman who becomes victim to her husband's, father's, or mother's greed, addiction, wickedness, or vice. While the majority of the stories depict women who come from low-class backgrounds representing

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

³⁰⁹ "Zan Furushha: Sarguzasht-i Shuharani ki Zan-i Khud ra Furukhtant," *Zan-i Ruz*, November 7, 1973, 9.

the backwardness of Iranian society, *Banuwan* also tells the story of a woman whose mother left her unsupervised and encouraged her to adopt Western values by having a boyfriend and attending nightlong parties. In this story, the fifteen-year-old Muzhgan fell in love with the boy she was dating and wanted to marry him, yet the boy saw marriage and commitment as a backward practice and does not marry her. Without any form of supervision from her family and betrayed by her friends, she falls into a downward spiral.³¹⁰ While this story is a rarity among the other stories of chicanery and ignorance, it tells of a concern about the challenges of imitating modernity along Western lines and a blind adaptation of Western values.

While in post-Revolutionary Iran the West is seen and depicted as a model for emulation, it also contains elements within it that need to be feared and avoided. The ideal was to carve an Iranian version of modernity that resembled Western lines yet was distinctly Iranian and acknowledged Iranian pride and glory. An article published in 1971 in *Banuwan* clearly displayed this attempt to flaunt Iranian past glory and its claim to civilization. In an article about women's position in Iranian history, the article juxtaposed women's status in Iran with other civilizations throughout the same period. The argument made was that while Greek women were forced to prostitute themselves before marriage, while Babylonian women were forced to become temple prostitutes, while

³¹⁰ "Yik Sarguzasht-i Vaqi'i Tikan-Dahandih va Hiyrat-Angiz," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, September 1, 1971, 11.

Assyrian families would sell their daughters in open markets, and while Greek men could and would lend their wives to their friends, Iranian women had an opposite situation, one that was equal with men and exalted motherhood.³¹¹

A letter written by a male reader to the editor of *Zan-i Ruz* in 1978 displays the prevailing attitude towards prostitution expressed in these magazines. According to this letter, each and every person has a responsibility towards prostitutes. Parents should come out of ignorance and allow their children to marry at an older age. The writer argues that Iran's contemporary society is not the same as a century ago and parents should not worry if their daughters do not marry until the age of thirty. The reader goes on to emphasize that the government carried the main responsibility as it needed to provide institutions and factories where these women could work and support themselves.³¹²

The 1970s in Iran thus presents a decade where prostitution entered the public discourse and became a visible category in print media, cinematic movies, short stories, and photography. In the more public and state-controlled forums, prostitution was depicted in a positive light, while in personal and oppositional forums it was regarded quite differently. Along the same lines, Iranian cinema in the 1970s became deeply concerned with the question of identity and the conflict

³¹¹ "Khudfurushi-i Muqaddas dar Babil va Sitayish-i Madar dar Iran," *Zan-i Ruz*, August 28, 1971, 13 and 110.

³¹² Ahmad 'Izzati Pur, "Ruspian ra Nijat Bidahid," *Zan-i Ruz*, June 24, 1978, 61.

between tradition and modernity. A central question and component of cinematic movies revolved around deciphering what being Iranian meant and who could represent Iranian society.³¹³ Both cheap dramatic films and artistic hits address prostitution in one form or another.

The 1978 movie *Sutah Dilan* (Desiderium) portrays Aqdas, a high-end call-girl who falls in love with a mentally challenged boy.³¹⁴ The film's main characters, a prostitute and a mentally ill man, and the doomed love between them raised questions about propriety, romance, and honesty, while it also brought to the forefront ostracized elements within the Iranian society. *Raqqasih-i Shahr* (The City's Dancer) depicts a dancer/prostitute who ultimately abandons the love of her life so he could remain reunited with his wife and family.³¹⁵ *Ruspi* (the Prostitute) portrays the sacrifice a prostitute makes in order to save her lover's life from another man pursuing her. She deserts her lover in order to ensure his safety.³¹⁶

The recurring theme in these movies is an ideal of true and pure love which is achieved through sacrifice, pain, and marriage. While the prostitutes represent outcasts to society, they are those in possession of true and pure love, and they are defined in a positive light where they are redeemed by modern notions of love and through marriage. The two

³¹³ Hamid Reza Sadr, *Iranian Cinema: a Political History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 152.

³¹⁴ *Sutah Dilan*, directed by 'Ali Hatami (Tehran: Sazman-i Sinama'i-i Iran, 1978).

³¹⁵ *Raqqasih-i Shahr*, directed by Shapur Gharib (Tehran: Us Film 1970).

³¹⁶ *Ruspi*, directed by Abbas Shabaviz (Tehran: Istadiyu Misaqiyi, 1969).

previous movies also illustrate concerns with new notions of modernity that extended to women and particularly centered on the body. The exposed body of the women and the voyeurism inherent in the nature of their singing, dancing, and sexually charged performance points to concerns and at times clashes about what the modern Iranian woman, prostitute or not, could and should be.

While cinematic features portrayed a romanticized notion of prostitution and advocated for true love through marriage, real-life portrayals of prostitutes depicted a gloomy and dark atmosphere in the lives of prostitutes, as Golestan's photos of prostitutes in Shahr-i Nau recorded.³¹⁷ Golestan's criticism of the Shah's regime and his multiple conflicts with members of the SAVAK (Iranian secret police) serve to prove that the images of prostitution that he captured and displayed were ones that threatened the regime's policies and its official view of what prostitution was and how it should be dealt with. Golestan's series on prostitution provides a more realistic face to prostitution in the city of Tehran, where he captured women living in austere surroundings and in miserable conditions. While the feeling conveyed by Golestan's photos is one of misery and filth, such negatives are avoided by the scientific study of Farman-Farmaian, the life stories of *Banuvan* and *Zan-i Ruz*, and the

³¹⁷ Kaveh Golestan was a photojournalist and freelance filmmaker critical of both the Shah and the Islamic Republic. He worked for the BBC and CNN and captured much of the events of the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War on film. His photos of the Iranian Revolution won him the Pulitzer Prize. Born in 1950, he died in 2003 stepping on a land mine in Iraq. A more detailed discussion of his photographs was given in chapter four.

romanticization of prostitution by cinematic movies. To Golestan, the real problems that should be the subject of investigation and depiction were syphilis, heroin addiction, violence and degradation.³¹⁸ He saw and captured the women where they were at that particular moment. In one telling photo, a prostitute is situated in her room which also serves as her work space.³¹⁹ The woman's face is covered with her hand which is sharply contrasted with the only embellishment on her wall, a torn poster of the classy and rich Aqdas from the film *Sutah Dilan*. The poster of Aqdas and the covered face of the prostitute side by side shatter the romantic image of prostitution presented in Iranian cinema. Golestan's individual lens into prostitution is free of the state's agenda and official discourse. Whether a depiction of all or some of the prostitutes in the city of Tehran, it was certainly an image that did not appear in more public forms of media. The unsavory realities of prostitutes' lives were not the subject that the Shah's regime sought to expose.

Prostitution and the Islamic Republic

On a November day in 1990, Iran's then president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani delivered a sermon from the pulpit of Tehran's Friday Prayers which stunned the audience and created much heated controversy in the press and public and private gatherings throughout the country in the following weeks. From the podium of one of the most

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

³¹⁹ See figure 7.

influential, if not the most influential, public forums in post-revolutionary Iran, Rafsanjani acknowledged and placed female sexuality within an Islamic framework. As a cleric, he began by explaining the role of sexuality in Islam: “Take for example the sexual instinct that God has given us. Some think that if we abstain from satisfying our needs and deprive ourselves from sexual gratification, then this is very good. Well, this is not so. It is wrong. It is anti-Islamic.”³²⁰ He then stated:

If we had a healthy society [i.e., truly Islamic] then the situation of all these widows [i.e., the women widowed in the Iran-Iraq war] would be very different. Then when they [widows] felt the [sexual] need, *niaz*, they could approach one of their friends or relatives from a position of confidence and invite him to marry them temporarily, *izdivaj-i mvaggat*. This they could do without fear of being shamed or ostracized by others.

Rafsanjani then moved beyond the benefits of temporary marriage for widows and expanded the blessings and benefits of temporary marriage to the rest of society:

Nowadays, in our [modern] society young people mature at the age of 15, and sexual needs are awakened in them.... Our college students are constantly exposed to the opposite sex in the schools, universities, parks, buses, bazaars and the workplace. They are continuously stimulated [by proximity with each other], but have no recourse. Who says this is right? Presently, in our society for our youth to remain pure and honorable, and to respect the societal norms [of chastity and virginity] implies remaining unsatisfied until they are 25 or 30 years old. They will have to deprive themselves of their natural desires. Deprivation is harmful. Who says this [deprivation] is correct? Well, God didn't say that this need should not be satisfied. The Prophet didn't say so. The Quran doesn't say so. The whole world doesn't say so either. Besides, if one is deprived, then harmful psychological and physical consequences will follow. Science has proven this. To fight nature is wrong.

Rafsanjani then went on to further shock the public by stating that young men and women who are shy about their encounter with

³²⁰ The translations provided here are taken from Shahla Haeri's article "Temporary Marriage and the State in Iran: An Islamic Discourse on Female Sexuality," *Social Research*, Vol. 59, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 201-202.

temporary marriage need not register it officially, but rather can perform it themselves and have a private contract. If the performance of the Arabic wording of the contract is too difficult, he suggested that they can recite the formula in Persian without the presence of a witness or mulla. Rafsanjani's provocative speech created uproar and heated arguments about the institution of temporary marriage, female sexuality, marital fidelity and stability, the sexuality of youth and, most importantly the virginity of girls, issues that as Shahla Haeri has mentioned had never before been "so publicly, intensely, and persistently" debated in the Iranian press.³²¹

While Rafsanjani's provocative prescriptions were calmed, and little was publicly said in this regard over the following decade, the pressing issue of sexuality by no means was missed by the new regime attempting to create and shape itself. The turn of the twenty-first century has seen a proliferation of debates about sexuality in Iran as prostitution has become more visible, though still outdated by the Islamic Republic, and women's issues more pressing. While Rafsanjani promoted temporary marriage in hopes that it would quell the sexual needs of Iranian youth, in the past few years, temporary marriage, or *sighih* as it is colloquially known in Iran, has also been offered as a solution to prostitution, a problem which the Islamic government has increasingly found difficult to address.

³²¹ Haeri, "Temporary Marriage and the State in Iran," 204.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran drastically changed the face of the public sphere and the social institutions and circumstances of society. Religion entered the public domain and the government attempted to introduce religion into all walks of life and to enforce the notion that Islam encompasses and answers every and all of society's needs. In other words, religion and politics became intertwined. The urgency of the Iran-Iraq War and the stiff atmosphere of the early years of the revolution did not allow for an open discussion on sexual issues, yet by the 1990s discussions of sexuality began to openly enter the public realm. In the past decade, discussions on prostitution and attempts at addressing this problem have proliferated, and a number of dissertations, conferences, articles, and seminars have been published and conducted to meet this growing concern.³²²

The proliferation of discussions on sexuality and by extension prostitution and *mut'a* should be placed within the context of significant social and political changes taking place both in governmental and public discourse in the past decade. Ervand Abrahamian eloquently describes this change. In looking at newspapers mushrooming in the late 1990s he charts the change in the whole tenor of public discussion. Whereas in the first two decades after the Revolution the key terms in

³²² The book *Ruspihari dar Iran* by Mahdi Muntazir Qa'm (Prostitution in Iran) provides a detailed comparison of research and dissertations written about prostitution in Iran and in the process introduces many of the dissertations and books written on this topic. It is interesting to note that almost all of those done pre-Revolution were from the 1970s; while the majority of those done after the Revolution grew out of the past decade.

public discourse had been “*emperialism*,” “*mostazafen*” (the oppressed), “*jehad*,” “*mojahed*” (fighter), “*shahed*” (martyr), “*khish*” (indigenous), “*enqelab*” (revolution), and “*gharbzadegi*” (westoxification), by the late 1990s they had been replaced with “*demokrasi*,” “*pluralism*,” “*moderniyat*,” “*azadi*” (liberty), “*barabari*” (equality), “*jam’eh-e madani*” (civil society), “*hoquq-e bashar*” (human rights), “*mosharekat-e siyasi*” (political participation), “*goft-e gou*” (dialogue), and “*shahrvandi*” (citizenship).³²³

This change in social and political discourse and the public sphere also translated into the opening of space for discussions of women’s issues and sexuality. The government and civil society not only attempted to modernize the Iranian political system, but also strove to modernize socially along Islamic lines. The novel and emerging discourse on prostitution in the Islamic Republic should be seen in this light. Therefore, the discussion of prostitution and *mut’a* is representative of the social and political changes taking place in Iran and can be seen in light of attempts to Islamically modernize.

The various causes and solutions offered regarding prostitution and the different strategies implemented point to the multitude of approaches present in Iranian society. These solutions range from legalizing prostitution and creating “chastity homes” to fierce crackdowns on prostitution and its propagators. In this process of creating and

³²³ Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 186.

establishing an Islamic state, *mut'a* or temporary marriage has been re-invented by elements within the religious structure to appease the growing concern not only about sexual demands of society but also prostitution. While the majority of individuals argue that *mut'a* can be used to solve the problem of prostitution, a small cohort have also attempted to use it as a method that prostitutes can utilize to their benefit.

Murteza Mutahhari's work on women's legal rights in Islam published in 1976 is a rare glimpse into the Islamic discourse on women predating the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Known as an ideological founder of the Islamic Republic, his numerous books include *Sexual Ethics in Islam*, *The Issue of Hijab*, *Man and his Destiny*, *A Critique of Marxism*, *Jurisprudence, and Its Principles* and *Essays in Philosophy*. In his book on women's legal position in Islam, he presented *mut'a* as a solution to society's sexual needs. Mutahhari argued that as permanent marriage was not accessible to the majority of the youth, they would become forced into either abstinence or sexual communism, both of which were undesirable. Temporary marriage however, he argued, served as the solution to quell the sexual needs of society.³²⁴

In this marriage between a married or unmarried man and a single, widowed, or divorced virgin or non-virgin woman, no witnesses other than the bride and groom are needed, and the marriage need not

³²⁴ Murteza Mutahhari, *Nizam-i Huquq-i Zan dar Islam*, new ed. (Tehran: Intisharat-i Sadra, 2000), 51.

be registered. What is fundamental to the marriage, however, is the clarification of how long the marriage should last and the amount of the *mahr* (bride price) to be paid to the woman at the beginning or at the completion of the marriage. This marriage can last from minutes to years and will become annulled when the specified timing is finished and does not require the process of *talaq* (divorce). Children born out of this union are legitimate and theoretically should have the same social standing as their siblings born out of a permanent marriage.³²⁵ In addition to the legitimacy of children, what marks temporary marriage as similar to permanent marriage is the requirement that upon the ending of the marriage contract, if coitus took place, women must observe a period of waiting, throughout which they are forbidden from marriage and by implication sexual relations. Within Shi'i theological studies there exists a debate about the specificity of certain aspects of temporary marriage and the form and shape it should take based on what is appropriate for that particular moment in time and space.

The mounting association between prostitution and temporary marriage that has increasingly grown after the Islamic Revolution was foreseen by Murteza Mutahhari. He adamantly rejected the notion circulated by *Zan-i Ruz* that equated *mut'a* with prostitution and contended that prostitution could be discerned in Europe and the United States, where women's sexuality was displayed in movies, theater, and

³²⁵ Mutahhari, 48-51.

advertisements.³²⁶ Mutahhari merely offered *mut'a* as an Islamic solution towards answering the sexual needs of the youth. At this point, it was not offered as a solution for women's sexual fulfillment or as a solution to prostitution. Mutahhari presented temporary marriage as a viable choice for individuals, both male and female, who could not secure permanent marriages because of financial or social reasons but who needed to satisfy their sexual and emotional needs.

While one could argue that implicitly Mutahhari prescribes temporary marriage as a solution to prostitution, no explicit connections or underlying hints are made at prostitution in his discussion of temporary marriage. *Mut'a* was a solution to fornication, not prostitution. His work posts a significant difference to later advocates of temporary marriage who introduced temporary marriage as a solution to prostitution while simultaneously and explicitly trying to distinguish it from prostitution.

As the Islamic Republic was forced to address public morality and social hygiene with growing concerns about prostitution and sexual visibility, it re-invented *mut'a* as a solution for prostitution. In the summer of 2006 the Management Institute of the Women's Seminaries' Office of Women's Studies and Research, a religious center closely tied to the government, published a book titled *Nizam-i Islami va mas'alih-i ruspigari* (The Islamic Government and the Issue of Prostitution). In a

³²⁶ Mutahhari, 56.

series of articles published by and interviews conducted with prominent male and female religious scholars, the book analyzed three main interconnected issues related to prostitution. It studied why women become prostitutes, what prostitution does to society, and the solutions to this growing problem. While the family and society at large are considered responsible for the downfall of these women, the issues within the family that exacerbate and promote prostitution seem different from those in the 1970s.

In addition to the nuclear family's role in the education of children, a considerable amount of blame is placed on the West and its "cultural invasion" and the inability of Iran achieve the goals of the Islamic Revolution.³²⁷ In other words, the

social and economic contributions to prostitution go hand in hand with an increase in Western values and consumption patterns to aggravate a problem that is destructive to the goals of the Revolution. In general, marriage is considered the solution to the problem of prostitution and a considerable amount of focus is placed on providing the monetary pre-conditions for permanent marriage. As in reality though, permanent marriage is not always achievable, temporary marriage becomes "the only Islamic option for sexual needs outside of

³²⁷ Ibrahim Shafi'i Sarvistani, "Nizam-i Islami va Ruspigari," in *Nizam-i Islami va Mas'alih-i Ruspigari: Majmu'ih-i Maqalat va Guftuguha* (Qum: Daftar-i Mutali'at va Tahqiqat-i Zanan, 2006), 18-19.

permanent marriage.”³²⁸ In addressing prostitution, the study also encouraged the Islamic Republic to formulate and codify a criminal legal code of conduct for the Islamic government.

In essence, addressing prostitution becomes part of a larger plan of sustaining and promoting an Islamic state. The discussion on prostitution highlights the religious establishment’s attempt to make itself relevant to the modern needs of society. The attempt at understanding and discussing prostitution demonstrates a larger effort to strengthen “applied studies” in the religious seminaries and to create a closer connection between the scientific studies in the *hawzah* (seminaries) and those of universities.³²⁹ In this process of making not only religion but also the religious institutions relevant to society’s problems, *mut‘a* is offered as recourse to prostitution. Other solutions offered included: increasing self-esteem and happiness in the women, encouraging participation in group efforts, creating opportunities for work, and creating fictive families.³³⁰

While in the 1970s a considerable amount of emphasis was placed on the dangers of the marriage of girls at a young age and while many stories of prostitution pointed to a girl’s young age at marriage or her age difference with her husband, the concern of many of these post-

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

³³⁰ Muhammad Riza Zibayi Nizhad, “Nigahi Digar bi Ruspigari: Illal, Payamadha va Ruykardha,” in *Nizam-i Islami va Mas’alih-i Ruspigari: Majmu‘ih-i Maqalat va Guftuguha* (Qum: Daftar-i Mutali‘at va Tahqiqat-i Zanan, 2006), 122-126.

Revolutionary writers is with a “crisis in marriage” as the age of marriage for the most part had been on the rise in Iran.³³¹ *Mut‘a* as a solution then needs to be seen in this context. Prostitution was considered a problem of single girls, and the increase in women’s criminality in general and prostitution in particular was seen as directly corresponding to single women’s increased age at their first marriage.³³²

Offering *mut‘a* as a solution to prostitution opened a huge amount of discussion and debate particularly after the Mayoral office of Tehran announced a new plan to deal with prostitution. Under the provisions of this plan, after spending time in prison for their crimes, prostitutes would enter social service programs where they would be educated about temporary marriage and receive an official health card. The main problem with the plan was the mandatory requirement of *‘iddih* or the three-month waiting period before remarrying. The proponents of the plan had speculated that if there was no chance of pregnancy then the women need not observe the three-month waiting period as it was merely there to detect the validity of blood line and heritage.³³³ While the plan never came to fruition as opposition to it was extremely high, it represents not only the ambiguities inherent in this form of marriage but also the fluidity of the Shi‘i government’s legal attitude in general.

³³¹ Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 285.

³³² Fariba ‘Alasvand, “Ruspigari, Vaqi‘iyatha va Bayadha,” in *Nizam-i Islami va Mas‘alih-i Ruspigari: Majmu‘ih-i Maqalat va Guftuguha* (Qum: Daftar-i Mutali‘at va Tahqiqat-i Zanan, 2006), 193.

³³³ Muhammad Riza Zibayi Nizhad, 93.

In order to present a more comprehensive understanding of the discourses on prostitution and *mut'a* in post-Revolutionary Iran, the discussions on prostitution within the religious establishment need to be compared with those discussed by other elements of Iranian society. An analysis of sources pertaining to prostitution in Iran demonstrates a growing scholarship on prostitution in universities and particularly in departments of public health and social work. In the book *Asibha-i Ijtima'i-i Iran* (Iran's Social Pathology/Ills), published by the Sociological Institute of Iran, a number of articles discussed issues ranging from street children, addiction, and unemployment. Prostitution also occupied a dominant section in this book, yet the discourse surrounding it remained increasingly distinct from that discussed above. The discussion of the three articles on prostitution in this book much more closely resemble the structure and findings of Farman-Farmaian's study done thirty years earlier. The focus of all three studies was predominantly deciphering the causes of prostitution and perhaps more importantly the specific upbringing of the prostitutes. Divorce, unemployment, and addiction surface as the main precursors to prostitution. Another issue that emerges is the sexual molestation of the prostitutes as children, something that remained absent from the previous study.³³⁴ Neither of the three articles mentioned temporary marriage as a solution or in

³³⁴ Shahin 'Ulyayi Zand, "Avamil-i Zaminih-Saz-i Tandadan-i Zanan bih Ruspigari," in *Asibhay-i Ijtima'i-i Iran: Majmu'ih-i Maqalat* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Agah, 2004), 288.

relation to prostitution, and in fact one article is critical of the government's policy of demolishing a main prostitution hub situated in the east of Tehran.³³⁵ The fact that these studies do not discuss temporary marriage in relation to prostitution should not necessarily suggest the absence of a discourse regarding it by other elements in Iranian society. In fact, as temporary marriage has entered official discourses on social and cultural building, some psychologists have written about its applicability, relevance, and harm.³³⁶

Parallel to the official discourses on prostitution, in recent years, the popular medium of cinema has created a broad space for discussions on the taboo topic of sexuality, albeit in implicit terms. A majority of Iranian movies discuss polygamy, cross-class and cross-age sexual and romantic relations, domestic violence, child custody, prostitution, and temporary marriage. Some movies in this genre depict older religious men pursuing younger secular women. Completely apathetic to religion, these women agree to temporary marriages without a belief in it in order to secure a financial advantage.³³⁷ Another popular movie centers on a religious married man contracting a temporary marriage with his friend's nurse.³³⁸ These movies have become a strategy for resisting an institution that refuses to admit to the double standards in its policies

³³⁵ Sa'ïd Karatha, "Ruspigari dar Mahallih-i Ghurbat," in *Asibhay-i Ijtima'i-i Iran: Majmu'ih-i Maqalat* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Agah, 2004), 326.

³³⁶ Tal'at Rafi'i, *Tahlili bar Ravanshinasi-i Zan dar Izdivaj-i Muvaqqat* (Tehran: Danjih, 2003).

³³⁷ *Dunya*, directed by Manuchihr Mussiri (Tehran: Payam-i Rushan, 2003).

³³⁸ *Shukaran*, directed by Behruz Afkhami (Tehran: Sazman-i Tusi'y-i Sinama'i-i Surih, 2001).

and the abuse of power harbored under the pretext of temporary marriage both towards the “temporary wife” and the permanent wife. In this context, the Islamic government has found itself dealing with a number of difficult questions. Is this marriage legal if the “temporary wife” is only consenting to it to entertain her customer? How does one consolidate the two perspectives? She sees him as a customer and he considers her a temporary wife. There are no easy answers, but these questions, and others similar to it, have raised concerns about the application of Shi‘i jurisprudence and law in the context of nation-states.

Feminist Scholarship, Islamic Modernity, and Prostitution

Thus far, the relationship between temporary marriage and prostitution has been discussed and each practice has been situated within a specific historical framework. The final objective of this chapter is to address the dialogue between feminist theory and prostitution and sex in the modern Shi‘i context. Postmodern feminist theory has seriously challenged binary oppositions and even questioned “women” as a viable subject of inquiry. Denise Riley’s discussion of the category “women” as feminism’s subject is particularly relevant to this study as her destabilization of the category “women” can be extended to the “prostitute” in Iran. Riley argues for a re-evaluation of feminism itself when she claims that “women” is an unstable category and that feminism is the site where this instability is played out. To prove her point, she charts a history of feminist thinking in Europe and illustrates

how the meaning of what “women” necessitated changed from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century and how these meanings no longer resembled each other. She explains the changing relationship between the sexed body and the soul over the course of the centuries and uses the change in this relationship to highlight the claim that the category women is “synchronically and diachronically erratic.”³³⁹

Using developments in feminist thought over the course of four centuries, Riley concludes that the category “women” produces a false and damaging sense of continuity, obscuring both the plurality and instability of this category across time. What “women” means and includes is formed in mobile moments and over time. As time is continuously changing, so is the category “women.” The study of “women” requires a historical explanation of that particular time and an attention to other categories such as class. Riley does not see this destabilization of “women” as a threat to feminism; rather, she argues that it is necessary for the goals of feminism. She warns against generalizations that reduce women to sexed bodies and “the dangerous intimacy between subjectification and subjection.”³⁴⁰ As the stakes are extremely high, she cautions against simplifications that undermine the entire integrity of feminism’s projects.

³³⁹ Denise Riley, *‘Am I that Name?’ Feminism and the Category of ‘Women’ in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) Ch. 2.

³⁴⁰ Riley, 17.

Along this line, I argue that the destabilization of “prostitution” will allow for a close examination of this topic across time, which is needed to reach an accurate understanding of prostitution in Iran. This is not an argument for uncovering the truth of what prostitution really is or has been. It is exactly the opposite. The meaning of prostitution and its ramifications are socially, culturally, and historically constructed. The meaning of prostitution cannot be separated from the broader contexts of its time. If the meaning of prostitution can differ so drastically in the second half of the twentieth century in Iran and is contingent upon the political situation of its time, then what can we expect when the time period is expanded? How has the meaning of temporary marriage evolved over time and how does this complicate any study of marriage or prostitution in Iranian history? This uncharacteristic position of the temporary wife, lingering on the margins of respectability, accepted as both prostitute and wife in one body and at one time, heralds a re-evaluation of feminist scholarship on prostitution. Studying prostitution in Iranian modern history requires what would go above and beyond traditional feminist theories on sexuality and requires a more diverse examination of this issue. It also entails a new theoretical framework which accounts for the peculiar situation in the Shi'i context.

There are two diametrically opposed views within feminist scholarship on prostitution. Traditionally, discussions on prostitution in Europe and the United States have looked at prostitution with an eye to

control it. The Victorian rhetoric of reform, the Contagious Disease Acts, and the legacy of Josephine Butler continue to carry resonance today.

The first feminist school of thought on prostitution argues that women's bodies have become sites of oppression and that the male purchase of female sexual acts is about power and not money. Therefore, all prostitution is the exploitation of women's bodies, with the underlying assumption that "women" indeed is a category that shares fundamental aspects in regard to mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Prostitution in this camp is equated with trafficking in persons, rape, genital mutilation, and battering. All the parties involved in it must be punished except the prostitute. She is portrayed as a victim who requires assistance in order to escape the terrible conditions of prostitution and must be allowed to set up a new life. With Kathleen Barry as a major representative, this camp sees all prostitution as degrading to all women since no woman would prostitute herself willingly if she had other options.³⁴¹ This approach is reflected not only in scholarship on sex work, but also deeply resonates with policy and advocacy that target women engaged in the sex industry.

Over time, another feminist perspective began to emerge, particularly from the global south and sex workers themselves, which offered a more nuanced approach to prostitution. It accepted that for many women, working in the sex industry meant exploitation and

³⁴¹ Kathleen Barry, *the Prostitution of Sexuality* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

oppression but argued that this situation was not that much different from what other women working in factories and as laborers faced. This position differentiates between forced and voluntary prostitution and was mainly developed by sex workers and activists from the sex workers' movement. A distinction is made between women who are deceived or coerced into becoming prostitutes and those who choose to enter the profession with the full knowledge that they will indeed be working as prostitutes. This view considers prostitution as a form of labor, chosen by women for the economic benefits it gives them. It is based on women's autonomous use of their bodies as a source of income and considers these women as sex workers; it strives for safer working conditions and for the unionization of sex work.

Historian Luise White argues that an understanding of prostitution should come from the labor process of this activity and not from moral reformers, and she claims that identifying prostitution as women's work has gone a long way in situating these women as wives, mothers, and lovers in their communities.³⁴² She further states: "It is possible that a part of ambivalence towards prostitutes is that they sell as transactions all that is legitimately available in marriage, and that they are paid out of male wages. Thus, prostitution exists in a direct relationship to wage labor and is domestic labor; it is illegal marriage."³⁴³

³⁴² Luise White, *The Comforts of Home*, 11.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

Regarding sex work in the Caribbean, Kamala Kempadoo argues that sex work must be acknowledged within the context of globalization. She insists on female agency and the recognition of the labor of prostitutes as work; however she contends that sex work must be understood in the context of international and racialized relations of power which work to sustain and nurture the First World by endorsing Western constructions of gender and refreshing Western bodies and productive labor through tourism and sex tourism.³⁴⁴ Taking the internal feminist debate on prostitution a step forward, Jo Doezema argues that the injured body of the Third World prostitute in international feminist debates on this subject serves as a powerful metaphor for advancing certain feminist interests, which cannot be assumed to represent the interest of Third World sex workers themselves.³⁴⁵ In other words, the impulse to construct a damaged “other” is the main justification for interventionist impulses.

Framing prostitution as inherently oppressive to women or as a voluntary profession is inadequate to account for the experience of women living under the rubric of Islamic law. Both are failed strategies which gain no advances for actual women choosing to labor as sex workers and labeling themselves as such under the Islamic Republic. Simultaneously, it excludes women who exchange sexual services for

³⁴⁴ Kamala Kempadoo, ed., *Sun, Sex, and Gold*, 27.

³⁴⁵ Jo Doezema, “Ouch! Western Feminists’ ‘Wounded Attachment’ to the Third World Prostitute,” *Feminist Review* 67 (Spring 2001), 16.

monetary gains but consider themselves wives. In essence, it assumes that “the prostitute” is a category that can be defined and one who is in need of help, that somehow prostitution, whether coerced or voluntary, provides women with an identity that separates them from the rest of “women.”

The situation of women engaged in sexual services for monetary gain in Iran serves to present another challenge to the category “women” discussed by Riley as it further destabilizes the category. In a society that punishes nonmarital sexual relations and fetishizes virginity, the framing of prostitutes as sex workers gains them no benefits, status, or rights and indeed only serves to make their situation more taxing. However, not all women fit neatly into the categories of “coerced prostitute” or “voluntary sex worker,” and many in the Iranian context do not see themselves as such. True, possibly many women and girls in Iran are and have been forced into prostitution or chose it as a viable work option. Yet women in Iran also choose to become temporary wives because it offers them financial gain as well as an aura of semi-respectability.

The question is: would these women choose to sell themselves for sexual services if it were not justifiable under Islamic law? While the last chapter chronicles the intimate relationship between prostitution and temporary marriage particularly in discourse but also in the actual lives of women, the answer to this question requires an extensive study that

will give voice to women who engage in temporary marriages in Shi'i communities. As one of the only studies on temporary marriage that gives voice to women engaged in a form of marriage imbued with cultural and moral ambivalences, Shahla Haeri's life-stories of temporary wives based on interviews conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s suggest the complex and unorthodox reasons women articulate for their marriages. Some of these reasons included sexual gratification, providing money for young dependents, and love.³⁴⁶

These stories suggest an understanding of temporary marriage that is somewhat aligned with the popular practice of "treating," or heterosexual barter, among the female working class in New York in the decade and a half before World War I. During this time, young women from the working classes exchanged sexual favors for tangible consumer goods or to gain entry into the expensive world of urban amusement. In her study of treating, the term used by working class women of New York in the early decades of the twentieth century to describe their actions, Elizabeth Clement argues that treating opened a new middle ground between prostitution and chastity as it allowed young women to avoid the label of prostitute while still engaging in sexual activities for material gain.³⁴⁷ In the process, this practice not only transformed courtship but also prostitution in American urban life by moving prostitution into the

³⁴⁶ Shahla Haeri, *Law of Desire*, 105-146.

³⁴⁷ Elizabeth Clement, *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 47.

margins of sanctioned American sexual culture.³⁴⁸ Proponents of temporary marriage, perhaps, also hope for such change.

Conclusion

The study of prostitution in Iran can provide constructive insights into larger political and social issues of its time. It highlights how discourses on prostitution during the 1960s and 1970s reveal an effort by the state and elements associated with it to modernize Iranian society by focusing on women as major contributors to society. In this process, prostitution, women's hygiene, and public health also become important points of inquiry which concern both the state and other public spaces.

In addition, the post-Revolutionary Islamic government's wrestling with the issue of prostitution and the offering of *mut'a* as a solution to it open space for a host of discussions on Islamic modernity and religious adaptation. The various and often contradictory solutions to prostitution and the paradoxical approaches to the institution and practice of temporary marriage within the religious establishment point directly to attempts to adapt Islam to meet the changing demands of a modern society. The Islamic government's attempt to remain what it claims its essence to be, Islamic that is, while responding to the challenges of governance is clearly detectable in its attempt to resolve the dilemma of prostitution. While this chapter only exposes the tip of the iceberg, the contrasting debates in Iran on female sexuality in general highlight the

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

structure of power within the Iranian government and its connection with and ambivalence towards a religious establishment that does not always follow the regime's official policy.

The multifaceted experience of women engaged in the sex economy in Iran for monetary benefits and other purposes as a destabilizing category must also be accounted for and acknowledged. While access to the voices of prostitutes and temporary wives in Iran has proved immensely difficult, their actions, choices, and agency must be recognized and accounted for despite the difficulty of securing such sources. Furthermore, new paradigms can be explored to frame the study of prostitution in Iran.

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Figure 7. "Portrait of a Woman," photo and copyright by Kaveh Golestan, c. 1975-1977.

Chapter 6: Matrimony and Mapping Unharnessed Desire: *Mut‘a* and Shi‘i Thought

Introduction

The podium of Tehran’s Friday prayer was not the only source of public state support for temporary marriage. In 1990, in yet another influential public state speech, Ayatollah Mishkini, the imam of Qum’s Friday prayers emphasized the importance of fighting vice. Highlighting that “sexual sins carried out by youth” were frequent and alarming, he concluded that temporary marriage was “the best solution to fight vice.”³⁴⁹ Mishkini’s advertisement of temporary marriage, however, went hand in hand with a call for state arrangements and incentives to ease the accessibility of permanent marriages. Only individuals who needed temporary marriage, he went on to declare, should engage in it, and when done, it needed to be carried out legally and in courts.³⁵⁰

The previous chapter chronicled some dominant discourses on prostitution and temporary marriage since the late 1960s in Iran and highlighted the delicate association between prostitution and temporary marriage in twentieth-century Iran. While the chapter introduces Ayatollah Mutahhari as the voice of the religious establishment in

³⁴⁹ “Ayatollah Mishkini: Izdivaj-i Muvagghat-i Qanuni Bihtarin Rah-i Mubarizi ba Fisad Ast,” *Keyhan*, December 8, 1990, 22.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

addressing sexuality in Islam and the intricacies of temporary marriage and prostitution, it does not take a broad approach to the question of sexuality in Shi'i thought across geographic and temporal space. This last chapter focuses on temporary marriage in Shi'i religious scholarly thought and delineates the complex and at times contradictory rhetoric surrounding temporary marriage. In the process, it explores the relationship between piety and sex in contemporary Shi'i theology as these theoretical frameworks have served to influence and dictate social policies and legal parameters serving to police sexuality in post-revolutionary Iran.

The chapter begins by discussing the delicate position that a support and embrace of temporary marriage places Shi'i jurists and scholars in vis-à-vis other schools of Islamic thought. The legitimacy and propagation of temporary marriage in Shi'i legal thought have become the grounds once again for many Sunni scholars to question and delegitimize Shi'i Islam as a false and corrupt version of Islam. Interestingly, the Sunni scholars' language in discrediting temporary marriage and the links they make between temporary marriage and prostitution were not far from what some opponents of temporary marriage in Iran voiced in the same period. The women's magazine *Zan-i Ruz* was especially critical of the practice. In the fall of 1966, a prominent judge and supporter of family reforms, Ibrahim Mahdavi, published a

piece on temporary marriage in *Zan-i Ruz*. In it, he contended that temporary marriage was in fact prostitution.³⁵¹

The second section of the chapter takes a closer look at a wide selection of opinions and edicts by Shi'i jurists and clerics on *izdivaji muvaqqat* (temporary marriage) as it is known in Persian and *nikah al-mut'a* (pleasure marriage) as it is formally known in Arabic and prostitution throughout the twentieth century. It concludes that despite regional differences and significant political and social changes throughout the twentieth century, Shi'i jurists' and scholars' views and teachings on sexuality have undergone little change. The modest efforts at change have often been piecemeal and have met with increasing resistance by a majority of Shi'i scholars. The chapter highlights the stagnant conceptualization of the practice of *mut'a* (pleasure) marriage over the twentieth century and highlights how Shi'i teachings concerning *mut'a* marriage and sexuality have been far from societal practices. Although the chapter is focused on theological thought, the case of *mut'a* marriage clearly delineates the disparities between the language of theology and the historical contextualization of social realities.

³⁵¹ Ibrahim Mahdavi Dadyar, "Nikah-i Munqati' Bayad az Qanun-i Madani Hazf va Naskh Shavad," *Zan-i Ruz*, 29 October, 1966, 9 and 71. See exchanges between Ayatollah Mutahhari and judge Ibrahim Mahdavi published in the magazine between October 1966 and December 1966.

Invitation to *Zina* and *Fahsha*: *Mut‘a* and Sunni Legal Thought

While in Western academia little scholarly attention has been devoted to the issue of temporary marriage, the issue, its legal parameters, its history, and its social and political implications have been vehemently debated between Sunni and Shi‘i Islamic scholars as well as laymen. Over the course of the twentieth century, prominent scholars from both sects of Islamic thought have steadfastly defended or fervently repudiated the practice, and *nikah al-mut‘a* has become a battleground for the struggle over religious legitimacy and political authority across the Middle East.

In the past two decades books in support of the practice have mushroomed across the Middle East in Arabic and Persian, while the Internet has become inundated with speeches and writings condemning the practice and denouncing Shi‘is for preaching it.³⁵² This explosion of discourse and disagreement regarding a union that has primarily been defined as a sexual relationship is by no means a new concern. While the rise of Iran as a Shi‘i state after the Revolution of 1979 and the political resurgence of Shi‘i Islam in Lebanon and Iraq undoubtedly contributed to anxieties about the influence and power of Shi‘is and the development of Shi‘i sympathies across the Middle East, *mut‘a* marriage had been an issue of concern for Sunni scholars for centuries before the political rise

³⁵² A simple, preliminary search of the terms *mut‘a* and *haram* on YouTube yields numerous speeches and listeners’ comments in Arabic and English condemning the practice.

of Shi'i Islam in the twentieth century. These writings on *mut'a*—the term most often used to refer to the practice by Sunni scholars—then become a window to understand the relationship between Sunni scholars and Shi'i Islam in the twentieth century and to contextualize the practice within the broader framework of Islamic legal and jurisprudential thought. More importantly for the purpose of this dissertation, these writings against temporary marriage, which equated the practice with sexual immorality and prostitution, served to influence Iranians' relationship to the practice.

In 1967, Muhammad al-Hamid (1910-1969), an associate of Hasan al-Banna (the founder and ideologue of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood) and a central ideological influence on the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and the founder of the Brotherhood in the Syrian city of Hamah,³⁵³ published the book *Nikah al-mut'a Haram fi al-Islam* (Pleasure Marriage is Prohibited in Islam).³⁵⁴ Al-Hamid was a prominent mosque preacher and teacher in the Syrian city of Hamah and has been credited with consolidating the branch of the Brotherhood in

³⁵³ Joshua Teitelbaum, "The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, 1945-1958: Founding, Social Origins, Ideology," *Middle East Journal* 65, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 215.

³⁵⁴ Muhammad al-Hamid, *Nikah al-mut'a Haram fi al-Islam* (Hama: *Maktabat Dar al-Da'wa*, 1967).

Hamah by bridging the Sufi-Salafi divide in the 1950s and synthesizing the two religious trends.³⁵⁵

According to al-Hamid, he wrote his book on *mut'a* in response to repeated questions and inquiries from professors and students studying in the West regarding the topic of *nikah al-mut'a*.³⁵⁶ Al-Hamid asserts that this new-found fascination and interest in *mut'a* were a result of concerted efforts to resurrect the practice and embellish it to lead astray students studying in the West.³⁵⁷ It is unclear whether the “our students” in the West whom al-Hamid specifically designates as the targets of the practice refers to Syrian, Arab, Sunni, or Muslim students in general. What is clear is that *mut'a* was perceived as an imminent threat to the morality of youth and particularly students. He explains the writing of the book as a personal religious obligation and encourages his colleagues to raise awareness regarding the “immoral” practice. Al-Hamid asserts that the practice “clearly in its essence is sexual immorality” despite other claims that mistakenly consider it a solution to and refuge from sexual misconduct.³⁵⁸ The culprits in propagating the practice are never clearly delineated and rather assumed throughout the book, though al-Hamid does indicate, in a number of passages, that *Imamiyya*

³⁵⁵ Itzhak Weismann, “The Politics of Popular Religion: Sufis, Salafis, and Muslim Brothers in 20th-Century Hamah,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37, no. 1 (Feb., 2005): 51-52.

³⁵⁶ Al-Hamid, 4.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

(Twelver) Shi'is are the only contemporary group allowing the marriage.³⁵⁹

The book employs the Qur'an, hadith, and a historical and jurisprudential narrative to repudiate this type of marriage and deem it forbidden in Islam. The debate among Muslim scholars as to the validity or invalidity of this practice is beyond the scope of this chapter. What remains relevant are the ways in which a marital union defined primarily in sexual terms occupied a central place in discussions of Islamic purity and authenticity. Al-Hamid preached and wrote at a time when secularism was perceived by the Muslim Brotherhood as an appalling threat to Muslim society, and he personally struggled with the influence of socialism in the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood in Hamah and across Syria.³⁶⁰ Yet, during the same period, he understood the practice of *nikah al-mut'a* as a threat to the purity of Muslim men. It is difficult to measure the extent of the actual practice in Syria, in other regions of the Arab world, or in the diaspora during the period that al-Hamid wrote, as no study has examined the actual practice outside of Iran. While al-Hamid's concern with the institution of *mut'a* grew out of questions directed at him about the practice, he also raised alarm regarding the burgeoning of books and written material on the topic.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁶⁰ Weismann, 52.

Al-Hamid was not alone in voicing his alarm against the practice of *mut'a* marriage by publishing a book condemning the practice, although his approach was quite rare in that only in passing did he identify Shi'is as culprits in propagating the practice. When 'Atiyah Muhammad Salim (1927-1999), an Egyptian who became a prominent judge in the city of Medina and lectured and held classes at the Masjid al-Nabawi,³⁶¹ published his monograph in repudiation of the marriage of *mut'a*, he attacked Shi'is for their refusal to ban the marriage and deem it un-Islamic. Al-Salim's position as a preacher in the largest and most holy site and mosque in Islam, second only to the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, bestowed on him widespread influence and authority. The introduction to Al-Salim's 1976 book attacks Shi'is for their unequivocal and longstanding hatred of 'Umar, the second Muslim Caliph, and culminates in naming 'Abdallah ibn Saba, a much contested Jewish convert of the seventh century,³⁶² as the founder of Shi'i Islam and in accusing Shi'i

³⁶¹ Some of 'Atiyah Muhammad Salim's sermons at the Nabawi Mosque can be accessed and heard on YouTube.

³⁶² Many contemporary and early Sunni scholars have attributed the origins of Shi'i Islam and its doctrines to 'Abd Allah ibn Saba, a seventh-century Jewish convert to Islam who has also been blamed for the killing of 'Uthman, the third Muslim Caliph. Shi'i scholars deny his existence or label him as an extremist. Contemporary Western academics debate his origins and existence. According to Marshal Hodgson, it is unclear what historical figure lay behind this personality and he concludes that ibn Saba may have been more than one figure. Bernard Lewis questions his historicity. Moojan Momen declares him semi-legendary. For more detailed information see: Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 103; Marshal Hodgson, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1st edition, s.v. "'Abd Allah b. Saba"; Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: the History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985), 46; William Tucker, *Mahdis and Millenarians: Shi'ite Extremists in Early Muslim Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 9-18.

jurisprudence as based on personal whims (*hawa*) and dishonesty (*tadli*).³⁶³

Muhammad Salim combines a discussion of Qur'an and hadith with an analysis of the social implication of the practice to deem it un-Islamic when he states that "saying that *mut'a* is permissible is a destruction of Islam's wisdom in marriage and a destruction of the backbone of the family and undermines the structure of society."³⁶⁴ Just as al-Hamid had claimed a decade earlier, he mentions the publication of books and the dissemination of information on the practice in magazines as a concern³⁶⁵ and attempts to address the issue in his book by providing a compilation of hadith on the topic of *mut'a* marriage and republishing an eleventh-century treatise that addressed and repudiated the practice.³⁶⁶

Prominent Sunni scholars took the initiative to label *mut'a* forbidden in Islam and illegal under the Islamic legal system. This is not to say that the official legal system of various Muslim countries outlawed the practice or had clear laws regarding the practice. In the case of Jordan, for example, under article 34 of The Law of Personal Status No.

³⁶³ 'Ali Al-Sayyid Subh al-Madani, Introduction to *Nikah al-mut'a 'Abr al-Tarikh: wa fihi Ilzam al-Shi'a bi Tahrimiha fi al-Shari'a*, by 'Atiyyah Muhammad Salim (Cairo: Matba'at al-Madani, 1976), 4-5.

³⁶⁴ 'Atiyyah Muhammad Salim, *Nikah al-mut'a 'Abr al-Tarikh: wa fihi Ilzam al-Shi'a bi Tahrimiha fi al-Shari'a* (Cairo: Matba'at al-Madani, 1976), 14.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁶⁶ The treatise republished in Salim's book is "Risalat Tahrim Nikah al-mut'a" by Nasr ibn Ibrahim al-Maqdisi.

61 of 1976, *mut'a* marriage in 1976 was categorized under “irregular marriages,” an ambiguous designation somewhere between the other two categories of “valid” and “void” marriages.³⁶⁷ Also, in Mandate Lebanon, the practice was recognized in the *Ja'fariyya* (Shi'i) court system, one of the religious court systems gaining legitimacy in 1926 under the French Mandate in Lebanon.³⁶⁸

The writings of Sunni scholars must be understood in the context of a struggle for Islamic legitimacy and authority over the hearts and minds of Muslims across the Middle East and beyond. While the official legal frameworks in place in the Middle East may or may not have reflected the writings of Sunni scholars, the case of *mut'a* marriage continued to remain a hotly contested topic. A further analysis of Sunni scholars' writings on the topic suggests that over the past three decades especially since the 1990s, the efforts against *mut'a* intensified and the language hardened into one attacking Shi'is for promoting sexual immorality and by extension social corruption and unrest.

While a concern with the growing exposure of *mut'a* was clearly on the minds of Sunni scholars in the 1960s and 1970s, the Islamic

³⁶⁷ Dawoud el-Alami, *Islamic Marriage and Divorce Laws of the Arab World* (London: CIMEL, 1996), 87-88. Based on article 32 of the Jordanian Personal Status law of 1976, “the marriage contract should be valid and its consequences shall result if all the basic principles and the other conditions are fulfilled therein.” According to article 33, a void marriage included, among other marriages, the “marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man.” Examples of other irregular marriages included marriages where “there are no witnesses to the marriage contract” or “if the marriage is contracted under duress.”

³⁶⁸ Max Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism: Law, Shi'ism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 172-174.

Revolution in Iran consolidated these anxieties, and shortly thereafter, Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini,³⁶⁹ the founder of the Islamic Republic, and Ayatollah Rafsanjani, Iran's president from 1989-1997, came under attack for promoting vice among Muslims in the Middle East and those in the diaspora. One author accused Shi'i religious leaders of "a frank invitation to adultery and immorality in the name of *mut'a*,"³⁷⁰ while another wondered whether Rafsanjani had moved Iran towards creating half a million "bastards" through his promoting of *mut'a*.³⁷¹ After the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the association between *mut'a* marriage and adultery, prostitution, and sexual immorality became a clear weapon to attack Shi'i Islam.

Mut'a became a site where anxieties concerning an orderly society, rampant sexuality, and Islamic authority intersected. Sunni scholars discredited the practice on religious grounds and also on the fear of the disorderly society it would generate. The arguments contending that temporary marriage would challenge the institution of the family and produce droves of illegitimate children paralleled anxieties that fed into concerns regarding maintaining a "pure" bloodline and children's purity. While the opposition to *mut'a* marriage by Sunni scholars was voiced

³⁶⁹ For some of Ayatollah Khomeini's views on women and marriage, see: Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: The Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, trans. Hamid Algar (London: Kegan Paul, 2002), 264.

³⁷⁰ Nizam al-Din Muhammad al-A'zami, introduction in *al-Shi'a wa al-mut'a*, by Muhammad Mal Allah (Dar al-Sahwa al-Islamiya, 1986), 3. The author of the book was a Bahraini scholar who became a preacher in the town of Hamad in Bahrain.

³⁷¹ Yusuf Jabir Al-Muhammadi, *Tahrim al-mut'a fi al-Kitab wa al-Sunna* (Riyadh: Y. J. al-Muhammadi, 1997), 53.

over a concern for sexual morality, it was by no means a concern for monogamy and fidelity as the same Sunni scholars who invalidated *mut'a* marriage, supported polygamy and acknowledged concubinage and female slavery as valid sexual unions under Islamic law. The discussion also leaves unanswered the issue of *nikah al-misyar* (travelling marriage), a practice similar to *nikah al-mut'a* that has gained popularity in the Gulf region and received state sanction in Saudi Arabia under Saudi-Wahhabi rule.³⁷²

The concern voiced by Sunni scholars appears to also reflect anxieties about the appeal of Shi'i Islam to "gullible" Sunni youth. The dissemination of written material on *mut'a* marriage in books and magazines was a constant concern repeatedly voiced by Sunni authors who wrote in opposition to the practice. As expressed by one author, promoting *mut'a* was "part of the plan to export the Iranian Revolution and Shi'ism by intelligence agencies with the goal of converting Sunnis to Shi'ism."³⁷³ Throughout the book, the author draws a clear distinction between *mut'a* as it was practiced and prescribed during the Prophet's time and shortly after his death, and the "corrupt" and "invented" version propagated by contemporary Shi'is. He concludes by equating the

³⁷² See: Tofol Jassim Al-Nasr, "Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Women and Misyar Marriage: Evolution and Progress in the Arabian Gulf," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 12, no. 3 (2011): 43-57.

³⁷³ Muhammad al-Salih al-Dawi, *Haqiqat al-Mut'a fi al-Islam : Arba'un Su'alan wa Jawaban 'an al-Mut'a* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2013), 9.

contemporary practice not only with adultery (*zina*) but also with prostitution (*baqa*) and the greatest sins.³⁷⁴

Mut'a marriage, in the minds of these Sunni scholars, manifested itself as the bait to lure Sunni adherents to Shi'i Islam and to gain Shi'i sympathies. There is no indication that in reality *mut'a* marriage served such purpose, and the hotly debated discussion surrounding temporary marriage in Iran and the extremely negative popular views associated with it and those who openly practiced it question the actual appeal of the practice among Shi'i believers. The assumed loss of virginity for girls as a result of the marriage (in its sexual form) and its close association with prostitution ensured that the practice remained a marginal practice in many Shi'i communities.

The books discussed above are by no means comprehensive of Sunni publications denouncing *mut'a* marriage. Rather, they merely represent a sample of the many publications in recent years that deal with the issue.³⁷⁵ This discussion also does not include magazine and newspaper articles on the topic, although Sunni authors repeatedly

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁷⁵ For some other examples see: Abu Sari Muhammad Abd al-Hadi, *Hukm al-Islam fi Zawaj al-Mut'a: ma'a Bayan Hukm al-Nikah al-Tahlil, al-Shaghar, al-Hiba, al-Nikah bidun Wali, al-Nikah min al-Zaniya, al-Zawaj al-'Urfi* (Cairo: al-Dar al-Dahabiyya, 1994); Harith Suhaymi, *Tawthiq al-Sunna: bayna al-Shi'a al-Imamiyya wa ahl al-Sunna fi Ahkam al-Imama wa Nikah al-Mut'a* (Cairo: Dar al-Salam, 2003); Ahmad Husari, *al-Nikah wa al-Qadaya al-Muta'alliqa bih* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyat al-Azhariyya, 1986); Muhammad Abd al-Rahman Shamila al-Ahdal, *Nikah al-mut'a Dirasa wa Tahqiq* (Damascus: Mu'assasat al-Khafaqin wa Maktabatiha, 1983); Yasir Husayn, *Zawaj al-Sirri fi Misr wa al-Khalij* (Cairo: al-Tahaddi fi Nashr wa al-'Ilm, 1999). For an Egyptian secular view on *mut'a* marriage see Faraj Fawda, *Zawaj al-mut'a* (Cairo: Dar al-Arabiyya, 1993).

made references to the promotion of the practice in magazines and, at times, they published responses to these articles.³⁷⁶ Numerous male, and to a lesser extent female, scholars from across the Middle East and from varying gradations of religious tendencies have taken it upon themselves to address the topic.³⁷⁷

In the recent decade, the practice gained such notoriety that it has become a focal point in discussing sectarian differences second only to the issue of *imama*, which is the ideological pillar of the Sunni-Shi'i divide.³⁷⁸ One author contended that *mut'a* and a claim to the household of the Prophet³⁷⁹ were used by Shi'is to promote Twelver (*Imamiyya*) Shi'ism, "particularly in Europe, the United States, and Southeast Asia."³⁸⁰ The intimate in this case was highly political and ushered in a heated sectarian debate that elevated an obscure and marginal marriage contract into a focal point for Sunni scholars to invalidate Shi'i Islam and to denounce Shi'is as sexually deviant and immoral. The Sunni dispute over the legitimacy of *mut'a* marriage was largely a theological discourse that focused on the "authentic" version of Islam. Most recently,

³⁷⁶ See for example the response of 'Abdallah ibn Zayd Al Mahmud, the head of religious courts in Qatar, to an article published by 'Abd al-Hamid Khaqani published in 'Abdallah ibn Zayd Al Mahmud, *Butlan Nikah al-mut'a bi Muqtada al-Dala'il min al-Kitab wa al-Sunna* (Qatar, 1981), 5.

³⁷⁷ Books against *mut'a* marriage were published in Egypt, Libya, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Syria.

³⁷⁸ Ahmad Harith Suhaymi, *Tawthiq al-Sunna: bayn al-Shi'a al-Imamiyya wa Ahl al-Sunna fi Ahkam al-Imama wa Nikah al-Mut'a* (Cairo: Dar al-Salam, 2003).

³⁷⁹ Shi'is place political legitimacy after the death of Prophet Muhammad in the hands of 'Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet, and his children. The Prophet's bloodline survives only through his daughter who was married to 'Ali. These descendants are seen as saints or highly venerated individuals in Islamic memory.

³⁸⁰ Ahmad Harith Suhaymi, *Tawthiq al-Sunna*, 9.

however, these theological debates have taken on a second dimension with the social implications and threats of *mut'a* marriage becoming a growing concern. Situating *mut'a* marriage in the larger framework of a sectarian religious debate allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the practice as it was understood and advanced by Shi'i scholars in the course of the twentieth century.

Justifications for *Mut'a*

Shi'i scholars were well aware of and attuned to diatribes against *mut'a* marriage and the delicate position it placed them in as proponents of an ambiguous and morally questionable marriage arrangement. Despite Sunni accusations of sexual immorality and misconduct, Shi'i scholars throughout the twentieth century steadfastly not only defended but also promoted the marriage as a God-sent solution to quell the sexual needs of society. Over the course of the twentieth century, the marriage became a defining element of Shi'i Islam and a unifying factor for Shi'i religious thought across political and national divides.

While individual legal cases and national laws pertaining to family politics are different across countries with substantial Shi'i populations and Shi'i communities, when the Shi'i doctrines have become applicable, as in the case of Iran where an apparatus for measuring the implementation of Shi'i family law exists, the theoretical framework that informs such laws has witnessed little change. That is to say, despite

national laws, the rulings of senior clerics on issues relating to the family have witnessed a slow process of change, although some scholars have reconsidered a few of their previous rulings relating to family law.³⁸¹

On the issue of sexuality, and particularly female sexuality, the clerical establishment has remained almost unanimous in its views and set forth an identical vision for Shi'i sexuality and maintained, over the course of the twentieth century, the legal rulings that would govern the lives of individuals living under Shi'i law and of Shi'i communities that adhere to and internalize such rulings. *Mut'a* marriage presents a novel case to study such laws and rulings. Both prominent mid-ranking clerics and senior scholars voiced an approbation of the institution of *mut'a* marriage in strikingly similar terms and based on similar understandings of gender relations and ideas about female and male sexuality. In other words, one can locate a Shi'i construction of sexual identity that transcends national boundaries and manifests itself in the form of a fierce defense of *nikah al-mut'a* through the adoption of repeated and recycled logical arguments.

This understanding of sexual identity places the issue of sexuality at the forefront of a concern over social disorder, makes sexual desire

³⁸¹ Ayatollah Sane'i's initial ruling regarding a wife's inheritance stated a wife would inherit the transferrable and the price of non-transferrable properties from her husband. In 2007, he changed this ruling stating that a wife inherited from all of her husband's properties and belongings, removing the provision regarding the price of non-transferrable properties. "Irs-i Zan", Irs Burdan-i Zuuji az Tamam Amval Zuuji, issued December 15, 2007, accessed December 4, 2013, <http://saanei.org/old/page.php?pg=showistifta&id=559&lang=fa>

almost exclusively a male prerogative, and in doing so, sets forth an understanding of masculine identity that is tied to male sexual gratification, and thus as a consequence views men as sexually insatiable. Female sexual identity is characterized as passive and dormant, and the application of *mut'a* marriage for women, when acknowledged, is understood in terms of financial benefits and emotional companionship. When female sexual desire is acknowledged, it is granted to women like widows and divorcees, who are assumed to have been awakened from sexual dormancy to sexual desire. This understanding in turn, essentially generates two separate classes of women: those desired for permanent marriage and those necessary for carrying out *mut'a* marriages.

Shi'i clerics justified *mut'a* on theological, social, and medical grounds. A significant aspect of the Shi'i discourse on temporary marriage has been devoted to justifying the practice on theological grounds. These early Shi'i scholars of the twentieth century characterized the Sunni attack on *mut'a* as an obstacle to pan-Islamic unity.³⁸² This focus on the theological debate surrounding the validity of the practice in Islam makes repeat appearances in the major publications on the issue of *mut'a* marriage throughout the twentieth century.

³⁸² Also see: Muhammad Ibrahim Al-Husayni, *Qati'at al-Kisam fi Istimrar al-mut'a fi Al-Islam* (Sidon: Matba'at al-'Irfan, 1925).

While a validation of the practice based on theological grounds continues to remain a staple aspect of the debate on *mut'a* marriage, in the second half of the twentieth century, a parallel discourse emerged that sought to justify the practice on social, practical, and medical grounds. Prominent among these non-theological claims was the classification of the marriage as a solution to the problem of *zina* or adultery. This argument was part of Ayatollah Murteza Mutahhari's explanation of the benefits of the practice. He, however, was not alone in explaining the marriage in such terms; his contemporaries in Iraq and Lebanon explained *mut'a* marriage in very similar terms. In 1961, Sayyid Husayn Yusuf Makki al-'Amili argued that *mut'a* was sent by God to preserve human morality and dignity and to prevent adultery and social and moral decadence.³⁸³

Other arguments assumed that the legality and propagation of *mut'a* marriage would obliterate adultery and obviate the issue of illegitimate children.³⁸⁴ This reasoning provided by Shi'i clerics was based on a particular understanding of human sexual identity. The above-mentioned writers named two categories of men as beneficiaries and targets for the practice: those who would not be able to secure permanent marriages because of financial or social burdens such as

³⁸³ Husayn Yusuf Makki al-'Amili, *al-Mut'a fi al-Islam : Dirasat Hawl Mashru'iyat al-Mut'a wa Baqa'uha* (Beirut: Dar al-Andulus, 1961), 13.

³⁸⁴ 'Izz al-Din Bahr al-'Ulum, *al-Zawaj fi al-Quran wa al-Sunna* (Beirut: Dar al-Zahra, 1978), 275.

students, and those men who were away from their wives, namely travelers and merchants.

Writing over the course of two decades, Shi'i scholars explained and defended *mut'a* along strikingly similar lines. Not only did they mirror each other's theological and social justifications for the marriage, but they also focused their efforts on medical and scientific justifications to prove the centrality of the marriage in creating a sexually satisfied society. Sexual deprivation, they argued, carried psychological and social damages and could end in suicide or madness for an individual.³⁸⁵ The importance of sexual satisfaction/release and the ineffectiveness of permanent marriage as a realistic solution for men, they further argued, were aptly supported by Bertrand Russell, the "Western philosopher."³⁸⁶ The claim that Russell had presented *mut'a* marriage as a solution to society's sexual needs served as a solidifying force in presenting the validity and importance of the marriage in addressing societal problems. Not only did the Qur'an, hadith, social realities, and moral responsibility explain the marriage, but Western scientific thought and philosophers had also endorsed this form of marriage as an effective solution to modern sexual problems.

³⁸⁵ Al-Hakim, *Zawaj Al-Muwaqqat*, 10.

³⁸⁶ Al-Hakim, 13; 'Amili, 14, Mutahhari, 52-53. Russell makes repeated appearances in the writings of Shi'i clerics in the second half of the twentieth century. For more information on Russell and his thought see: Bertrand Russell and Al Seckel, *Bertrand Russell on Ethics, Sex, and Marriage* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1987); Bertrand Russell, Louis Greenspan, and Stefan Andersson, *Russell on Religion: Selections from the Writings of Bertrand Russell* (London: Routledge, 1999).

In attempting to explain the social reasoning behind a divinely ordained practice, Shi'i clerics espoused an understanding of the nature of male sexual identity that deemed men not only inherently sexual but insatiably so. An orderly society was directly linked to male sexual satisfaction, and *mut'a* marriage was presented as a solution to quell the sexual needs of men. As prominent mid-ranking Shi'i clerics, the authors of the above-mentioned writings on the topic have carried considerable weight in the discourse of *mut'a* marriage. While in the past two decades an abundance of publications in Iran have continued to discuss and address the topic, the arguments set forth by the clerical establishment, as an institution, have remained identical and recycled over the years.³⁸⁷ The ideology behind a defense of *mut'a* marriage must be understood as an expression of Shi'i ideals on sexuality in Islam. These writings are significant indicators of the clerical establishment's take on male and female sexuality. However, one must acknowledge, they carried no binding religious authority for Shi'i believers who adhered to the legal rulings of the Shi'i maraji', the most senior and learned religious scholars who maintain a following and dictate Shi'i law.

³⁸⁷ For some recent books see: 'Ali 'Allamih Ha'iri, *Izdivaj-i Muvaqqat dar Huquq-i Iran* (Tehran: Nashr-i Khaqani, 2001); Hasan Sharifi, *Izdivaj-i Muvaqqat va Chalishha* (Qum: Markaz-i Chap va Nashr-i Daftar-i Tablighat-i Islami-i Hawzah-i 'Ilmiyah-i Qum, 2006); Majid Sharqi Shahri *Ta'sir-i Izdivaj-i Muvaqqat dar Kahish-i Jara'im-i Jinsi* (Mashhad: Nashr-i Khiyzeran, 2005); Muhammad Valujirdi, *Izdivaj-i Muvaqqat: Nikah-i Mut'a az Didgah-i Huquqi, Ijtima'i va Fiqhi-i Ahl-i Sunnat* (Tehran: Sitad-i Mantaqah-i Du Kishvari-i Sazman-i Tablighat-i Islami, 1992); Najm al-Din Tabasi, *Izdivaj-i Muvaqqat: dar Raftar va Guftar-i Sahabih va Tabi'in* (Qum: Dalil-i Ma, 2005).

Mut‘a and the Marja‘iyyat

To defend the piety and authenticity of Shi‘i Islam, prominent mid-ranking Shi‘i scholars employed both a historical narrative and social justification to validate the practice of *mut‘a*. What is more, they intertwined the religious and social explanations for *mut‘a* marriage with a scientific rationalization that took its credibility, ironically, from a British philosopher who defined himself as an atheist or agnostic based on circumstances.³⁸⁸ As these clerics elevated the practice of *mut‘a* marriage as a symbol of Islam’s ingenuity, longevity, and modern-day relevance, it fell to the senior Shi‘i scholars and sources of emulation, the maraji‘, to deliver the legal rulings surrounding the practice and to answer legal questions concerning it.

While the legal rulings surrounding *mut‘a* marriage are in many parameters similar to a permanent marriage, there are differences regarding inheritance, *mahr* (bride-gift), and *‘iddih* or the waiting period before a woman could remarry again. What is more, senior scholars issued slight variations of rulings in response to questions concerning *mut‘a*. Regarding the issue of inheritance for example, Ayatollah Khomeini, Ayatollah Kho‘i, Ayatollah Qulpaygani, Ayatollah Sistani, Ayatollah Safi, Ayatollah Tabrizi, and Ayatollah Khurasani, all grand Shi‘i maraji‘ of the twentieth century, maintained that in *mut‘a* marriage

³⁸⁸ Bertrand Russell, “Am I an Atheist or an Agnostic? A Plea for Tolerance in the Face of New Dogmas,” In *Bertrand Russell on God and Religion* ed. Al Seckel (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1986), 83-86.

“the wife does not inherit from the husband and the husband does not inherit from the wife.” Three of the aforementioned, however, included a provision that would entail inheritance if inheritance was included as a condition in the marriage contract. Ayatollah Sistani, on the other hand, established that “if inheritance was made a condition, by either party, the validity of such a condition is questionable [since both parties by definition of the *mut‘a* marriage do not inherit].³⁸⁹

As this example demonstrates, while all the senior maraji‘ are unanimous on the absence of the right to inheritance in temporary marriage, they issue slightly varying rulings on scenarios that can arise if an actual marriage contract included special provisions, such as one stipulating inheritance in the event of spousal death. These responses are traditionally born out of questions posed to the senior clerics.

What follows analyzes a number of questions regarding *mut‘a* marriage posed to three senior Shi‘i scholars, the Iranian Muhammad Taqi Bahjat (1913-2009), the Iraqi Ali Sistani (1930-present) and the Lebanese Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah (1935-2010).³⁹⁰ Rather than focus on the more conventional issues, namely inheritance, duration of marriage, bride-gift and the waiting period, the focus here is on less conventional questions regarding *mut‘a* marriage. These include the

³⁸⁹ Sayyid Hujjat Musavi Kho‘i, *Ahkam-i Izdivaj-i Da‘im va Muvaqqat: Mutabig ba Fatavayi Ayat ‘Izam va Maraji‘ Tqlid* (Qum: Tubayi Muhabbat, 2009), 183.

³⁹⁰ While Ayatollah Sistani is Iranian by birth, he is considered the preeminent leader of the Shi‘a of Iraq and the head of the Shi‘i religious seminaries of the country.

requirement for a father's permission in a virgin girl's marriage, the target population for *mut'a* marriage, and *mut'a* marriage with a prostitute. These maraji' have been selected to introduce a wide dimension to the topic of sexuality in Islam and to demonstrate that understanding senior Shi'i clerics' stand on sexuality must be understood in the context of a spectrum rather than a single ruling on the topic. While the spectrum can appear as quite broad, it continues to define human sexuality as a male right. Women who are contracted in *mut'a* marriage are understood as necessary for male sexual gratification. These answers demonstrate that while individual clerical rulings in response to specific questions on the topic can differ, as an establishment, senior Shi'i clerics define sexuality as a male right and necessity whereas they envision female sexuality as passive.

1. "Question: is *mut'a* prescribed for married men or for bachelors? Is it [allowed] when there is a [sexual] need, or is it permissible in the absence of a need?"
 "Answer according to Ayatollahs Bahjat and Sistani: Temporary marriage is not forbidden for any [man] and the limitations and conditions mentioned in the question do not apply."³⁹¹
2. "Question: is temporary marriage *makruh* (detestable) for a man whose [permanent] wife is present [available for sex]?"³⁹²
 "Answer by Ayatollah Bahjat: "There is no reason for its *kirahat* (detestability)."³⁹³

³⁹¹ Sayyid Hujjat Musavi Kho'i, *Ahkam-i Izdivaj-i Da'im va Muvaqqat*, 197.

³⁹² In Islamic jurisprudence, human actions are characterized into five categories: *haram* (sinful), *vajib* (required), *mubah* (neutral), *makruh* (detestable or recommended to avoid), *mustahab* (recommended). A person who abstains from a *makruh* act will be rewarded.

³⁹³ Sayyid Hujjat Musavi Kho'i, *Ahkam-i Izdivaj-i Da'im va Muvaqqat*, 164.

3. “Question: Is *mut‘a* marriage *makruh* for a man whose permanent marriage suffices his [need] and does not have a need for it?”

Answer according to Ayatollah Fadlallah: “The sayings of the Prophet and imams (*ahadith*) indicate that it is better for him to abstain from it [*mut‘a* marriage] in the absence of a [sexual] need.”³⁹⁴

Ayatollahs Sistani and Bahjat outright deny any precondition of sexual need for the validity of temporary marriage and for temporary marriage to be considered *makruh* or looked upon unfavorably in the absence of sexual need. Ayatollah Fadlallah also does not declare the marriage *makruh* in the absence of sexual need even as the questions specifically solicited such information. Instead, employing Qur’an and hadith, he provides suggestions that married men, who presumably have access to sex, avoid the practice.

While mid-ranking ‘ulama’ explained *mut‘a* marriage primarily in terms of its benefits for men who would otherwise be unable to secure permanent marriages, a significant cohort of Shi‘i maraji‘ issued edicts that maintained the validity and applicability of the marriage for any man, regardless of present or previous marriage arrangements or opportunities for permanent marriage. As the second question indicates, some Shi‘i believers toyed with the possibility of classifying *mut‘a* marriage for married men and those to whom its stated justifications would not apply, as *makruh* or preferable to refrain from. A majority of

³⁹⁴ “Ahkam al-Zawaj wa al-Talaq,” *al-Zawaj al-Muwaqqat: al-Mahiyya wa al-Shurut*, answered November 30, 2004, accessed December 4, 2013, <http://arabic.bayynat.org/ListingFAQ2.aspx?cid=274&Language=1>

the maraji‘ not only rule out this possibility but also indicate that such limitations do not apply to the marriage. Ayatollah Fadlallah diverges from the rest as he suggests the marriage is to be avoided in the absence of a sexual need for the man. While he does not categorically characterize the marriage under such conditions as *makruh* (detestable), he can be categorized separately from the remainder of the maraji‘ who categorically repudiate such restrictions to the marriage.

These rulings come in stark contrast to another edict issued by Ayatollah Bahjat and others, who maintain that “if a virgin girl has the option of a permanent marriage, it is not permissible for her father to marry her, temporarily, to anyone, because this marriage is not in her best interest.”³⁹⁵ These scholars firmly reject a *mut‘a* marriage for a virgin girl when permanent marriage is an option. The answer also points to another condition that would be necessary to validate the marriage, the necessity of a father’s permission for a virgin girl’s marriage. As the edict indicates, the theoretical girl in this scenario would not be the decision maker. Rather, her father, as the *vali* (custodian), is forbidden from contracting her in a temporary marriage, and her best interest is defined by entering a permanent marriage. For women, temporary marriage was prescribed only when virginity had been lost, as Ayatollah Rafsanjani had prescribed in his speech on widows.³⁹⁶ Simultaneously,

³⁹⁵ Sayyid Hujjat Musavi Kho‘i, *Ahkam-i Izdivaj-i Da‘im va Muvaqqat*, 176.

³⁹⁶ See chapter five for excerpts from his speech.

the underlying assumption suggested that masculinity was closely tied to sexuality. The need or *niyaz* of sex for men was natural and its satisfaction a divinely ordained right. Normative femininity was understood as sexually dormant, in need of protection, and aroused only through the loss of virginity by way of marriage. The protection of virginity and introduction into marriage were to be channeled through a father's permission.

In response to concerns over the possibility of adultery for a girl, however, the maraji' made an exception deeming the father's permission not necessary with specific conditions:

1. Question: If a girl and a boy fall into *haram* [sin] because of their parents' opposition [to marriage], can they marry temporarily without the permission of the girl's father?
Answer by Ayatollah Sistani: If they are compatible and of comparable status (*kuff*) and the girl's father disapproves of the marriage when it is in her best interest to marry [without a valid reason], his permission is not needed.³⁹⁷
2. Question: Is the temporary marriage of a Muslim virgin girl without the consent of her *wali* permissible? Specifically in the event the girl is concerned she will fall to *haram* [sin]?
Answer by Ayatollah Bahjat: It is not permitted. Yes, if the *wali* prevents the girl from marrying her *kuff* and this is against the girl's best interest (*maslahat*), only in this specific situation, his permission is not necessary.³⁹⁸
3. Is it permissible to temporarily marry a virgin girl, either Muslim or from the book [Christian or Jewish], without the permission of her father (*wali*)?"

³⁹⁷ Sayyid Hujjat Musavi Kho'i, *Fatawayi Hazrat-i Ayatollah al-'Uzma Sistani Darbariyi Ahkam-i Izdivaj-i Da'im va Muwaqqat* (Qum: Dar al-Nur, 2007), 102.

³⁹⁸ Sayyid Hujjat Musavi Kho'i, *Fatawayi Hazrat-i Ayatollah al-'Uzma Bahjat Darbariyi Ahkam-i Izdivaj-i Da'im va Muwaqqat* (Qum: Dar al-Fiyz, 2006), 120.

Answer by Ayatollah Fadlallah: It is permitted when she is mature (*rashidah*). She is cognizant in a way that she can defend herself from what is harmful to her and obtain what is beneficial for her.

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Both Ayatollah Sistani and Bahjat make three conditions required before waiving the permission of the father, in a specific theoretical case. Not only must there be an imminent danger of the girl falling into adultery, but her chosen spouse must be her equal, and her father's refusal of permission must be socially understood to be against her best interest.⁴⁰⁰ Among a dozen *maraji'*, Ayatollah Fadlallah is the only *marja'* who rejects the necessity for a *wali* when a girl is mature.

The condition of being equals set by Ayatollahs Bahjat and Sistani is in itself quite telling as a precondition to waive a father's permission. This precondition has been defined in a variety of ways and would include being equal religiously, socially, and even economically.⁴⁰¹ In other words, a father would have to prevent his daughter from marrying an appropriate suitor without any logical reasoning for the requirement of his permission to be waived. The issue of *kuff*, however, is absent from any discussion of male spousal choice. In hundreds of edicts consulted regarding temporary marriage, there is no requirement or

³⁹⁹ "Ahkam al-Zawaj wa al-Talaq," *al-Zawaj al-Muwaqqat: al-Isti'zan min Wali*, answered October 29, 2004, accessed December 4, 2013, <http://arabic.bayynat.org/ListingFAQ2.aspx?cid=276&Language=1>

⁴⁰⁰ Some *maraji'* include a provision that no other equal suitor for permanent or temporary marriage be available before the father's permission can be waived.

⁴⁰¹ Sayyid Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi, *Ahkam-i Khanivadih va Adab-i Izdivaj*, trans. Hamidrizza Azhir (Qum, Intisharat-i Muhibban-i Husayn), 257.

recommendation that men choose marriage partners that are their equals. Nowhere is the double standard for men and women regarding temporary marriage more apparent than in questions concerning *mut‘a* marriage with a prostitute:

1. Question: “Can one enter a temporary marriage with a prostitute?”
Answer by Ayatollah Bahjat: Yes, it is permissible, but it is *makruh* in the absence of repentance.”⁴⁰²
2. “Can one enter a temporary marriage with a prostitute?”
Answer by Ayatollah Sistani: “It is a necessary caution not to marry them before they repent.”⁴⁰³
3. Is it permissible to temporarily marry a woman who is infamous and well-known for adultery?
Answer by Ayatollah Fadlallah: “It is a necessary caution to abandon it.”⁴⁰⁴

While Ayatollah Bahjat permits the marriage, Ayatollah Fadlallah strongly advises against entering such a marriage, though he does not completely forbid the marriage and deem it *haram*. Among the maraji‘, Ayatollah Fadlallah’s edicts appear most divergent from the majority of edicts and rulings on *mut‘a* marriage and on a number of other issues concerning women and families in favor of more autonomy for women. It is impossible to attribute Fadlallah’s rulings to the national context in which he operated, yet his grounding in Lebanon’s national and sectarian context must be evaluated as a likely contributor to his edicts.

⁴⁰² Sayyid Hujjat Musavi Kho‘i, *Fatawayi Hazrat-i Ayatollah al-‘Uzma Bahjat*, 133.

⁴⁰³ Sayyid Hujjat Musavi Kho‘i, *Fatawayi Hazrat-i Ayatollah al-‘Uzma Sistani*, 116.

⁴⁰⁴ “Ahkam al-Zawaj wa al-Talaq,” *al-Zawaj al-Muwaqqat: al-Mahiyya wa al-Shurut*, answered April 8, 2005, accessed December 4, 2013, <http://arabic.bayynat.org/ListingFAQ2.aspx?cid=274&Language=1>

Understanding the clerical establishment's rulings on sexuality on a spectrum of variations and combining individual *marajis'* placement within it to their overall position within the institution of *marja' iyyat* allow for some observations. For one, while Fadlallah is grounded within the Lebanese Shi'i context as the most prominent *marja'*, his standing within the Shi'i clerical establishment as a whole is precarious at best. He is little known within religious seminaries in Iran and seems not to be widely recognized.⁴⁰⁵ Books compiling the edicts and rulings of grand Ayatollahs exclude him from their ranks. While internal politics have often determined the social and political position of *maraji'* within Iran, Fadlallah is irrelevant in such conversations and his outcast position within the clerical hierarchy may be attributed to his controversial edicts on women and families.⁴⁰⁶ Within the most prominent institutions of Shi'i learning in Qum, Ayatollah Fadlallah continues to remain a second-tier *marja'*.⁴⁰⁷ Although Ayatollah Fadlallah's rulings on edicts pertaining to women and sexuality are only slightly removed from those of the Shi'i

⁴⁰⁵ Author's personal observations after a year spent in Qum in 2005-2006 engaging with various students and teachers in seminaries.

⁴⁰⁶ For more information and background on the tumultuous relationship between Ayatollah Fadlallah and the Iranian religious elite and the ethnic politics of *marja' iyyat* see, Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon*, chapter 4 and 150-155.

⁴⁰⁷ In the condolence letter issued by the *Jami'ih-i Mudarrisin-i Hawzah-i 'Ilmiyyih* of Qum on the occasion of the death of Ayatollah Fadlallah, he is neither referred to by the titles "ayatollah" nor "grand ayatollah" nor "*hazrat*." Instead he is referred to by the title 'Allamih and described as the *marja'* of the oppressed Shi'a of Lebanon.

"'Allamih Fadallah Marja' va Panahgah-i Mardum-i Mazlum-i Lubnan Bud," *Fars News Agency*, July 4, 2010, accessed January 17 2014, <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8904131012>.

clerical establishment and other prominent senior clerics, they are immensely controversial.

***Mut'a* and the Shi'i Believer**

No study of temporary marriage would be complete without a discussion of the way the marriage is received among Shi'i believers. In Iran, *mut'a* marriage remains a social taboo despite an overwhelming attempt to introduce it as an accepted facet of Shi'i doctrine. This is not to suggest the marriage is not practiced, but rather that its position is ambivalent at best. As Haeri has demonstrated, the marriage, in its manifestation as a sexual union, has been firmly grounded in class politics.⁴⁰⁸ The interviews published in *Ittila'at-i Banuwan* with prostitutes and discussed previously also suggest that the marriage was often used to evade the minimum age of a marriage, which was raised as a result of the changes in family law brought about by the White Revolution of 1963.⁴⁰⁹ *Mut'a* marriage became a tool to religiously and socially validate a marriage arrangement that had been made illegal by the state. In this context, women were often left without any recourse as these marriages were not registered, and quite often the women and girls were not aware that their marriage arrangements were temporary rather than permanent.⁴¹⁰ To say the least, under various social, legal, and economic

⁴⁰⁸ Haeri, *Law of Desire*, 147.

⁴⁰⁹ "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, December 20, 1972, 94; "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, November 26, 1975, 65.

⁴¹⁰ "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, May 30, 1973, 69; "Farib Khurdiha," *Ittila'at-i Banuwan*, August 6, 1974, 60.

conditions the marriage has been appropriated by Shi'i practitioners to reach intended goals. It has been employed to provide economically disadvantaged women economic stability in exchange for sexual services, to religiously sanction temporary sexual unions, to circumvent state policies both pre-and-post Revolution, and even in the Shi'i diaspora to provide religious justification for relationships. All this has been done both within the framework set forth by the Shi'i clerical establishment and outside it. Shi'i believers have adopted aspects of these religious edicts while they have avoided other aspects of it. In Iran this process has been well documented and analyzed.⁴¹¹

Most recently in Iran, some female jurists have begun to seriously question the parameters of *mut'a* marriage and its realistic implementation in modern-day Iran. Well-connected to the Islamic government, these women advocate a deeper examination of the practice and an investigation of the realities of the marriage arrangement for women, particularly in light of the abuses the marriage can burden economically and social disadvantaged women. One such woman, 'Izzat al-Sadat Mir Khani, a university professor in Tehran, has taken into question the motives behind propagating the marriage by some elements within the Iranian government.⁴¹² She states, "in the absence of wisdom and understanding, and appropriate and required social settings, and

⁴¹¹ See Haeri, *Law of Desire*.

⁴¹² 'Izzat al-Sadat Mir Khani, "Marz Shinasi dar Izdivaj-i Muvaqqat," *Faslnameh-i Shurayi Farhangi Ijtima'i-i Zanan*, no. 10 (2001), 8.

defined legal parameters, and without attention to the necessities of time and space and clear examples, and without a thorough investigation of the validity or invalidity of the practice in Islam, propagating this ruling [*mut‘a* marriage] is a mistake.”⁴¹³

Conclusion

Shi‘i sexual politics must be investigated through an analysis of the contradictory manner in which a practice such as *mut‘a* marriage is understood and practiced. A study of the Shi‘i clerical establishment’s discourse and rulings on *mut‘a* marriage reveals that sexuality is understood in masculine terms. Masculinity is defined as innately sexual and the acknowledgement of this sexuality is characterized as an important justifier for the authenticity and validity of Shi‘i Islam in response to attacks by Sunni and “secularist” scholars. Simultaneously, female sexuality is dismissed, and expressed as trivial, and in need of containment and passive. The gap between an imagined overtly sexual male body and an inherently pure and sexually dormant female body is to be occupied by an entirely divergent category of women, the *mut‘a* or temporary wives. In theory, she serves to quell social chaos by easing male sexual needs. While such a category is in no way explicitly acknowledged by the clerical establishment or in Shi‘i theology, it is the necessary outcome of the double standard of sexuality. The abrupt transition from the state management of prostitution pre-Revolution to

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 10.

the prevalence of *mut'a* discourse post-Revolution can serve to highlight the continuity of this cultural double standard despite immense political change.

Conclusion

Western academic knowledge of historical and contemporary sex work in the Middle East is limited, erratic, and isolated. This is in stark contrast to the widespread sensational obsession in the Western media with the portrayal of the exchange of sexual services by destitute women living under the rubric of Islamic law and the conditions of the growing and ever-looming conflicts in the Middle East. The selling of sex by Iraqi female refugees in Damascus to wealthy customers from the Arabian Gulf in the aftermath of the U.S. invasion, the sensationalization of Dubai as the attractor of Iranian and Eastern European—“white” that is—sex workers, the stories of the sexual abuse of domestic workers in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, the blatant association of temporary marriage with prostitution, and, most recently, the stories of “sexual jihad” by young Middle Eastern and diaspora girls “servicing” the Syrian opposition through sex as a form of religious responsibility serve as a few reminders. Societies across the Middle East, in turn, perpetuate their own sexual anxieties and racial and ethnic biases regarding the exchange of sexual services for money.

Simultaneously the question of how to address sex work has occupied much writing and speculation on the topic. Historically, abolitionism, prohibitionism, regulation, and decriminalization have represented some of the most prominent views that have shaped the politics and policy regarding prostitution. In recent years, the rise of sex

worker advocacy groups has ushered in a movement that seeks to bring recognition to sex workers' rights and to separate sex work from trafficking. In December 2013, the Canadian Supreme Court declared anti-prostitution laws unconstitutional and required that the parliament write new laws that would frame policy in favor of sex workers. This decision has harbored new debates about the outcomes in countries such as Germany, which have ventured into legalized prostitution. Concerns over prostitution and its dangers have also produced unlikely alliances as Christian Evangelicals and fervent feminists have and adopted a similar language to combat trafficking and prostitution.⁴¹⁴

Efforts to address prostitution and sex work, as this dissertation has demonstrated, are by no means unique to the West. The red-light district in Tehran in the 1960s and 1970s could have represented any city from around the world. While unique cultural attitudes and political concerns ultimately shaped policy toward prostitution in Iran during this period, the experience for prostitutes was often contradictory.

The entrance of women into the public spaces partly as a result of Reza Shah's policies in the early decades of the twentieth century necessitated the marking of respectable and disrespectable women. The reach of the centralization policies of the Iranian state which had begun during Reza Shah's time can easily be witnessed through the petition

⁴¹⁴ Elizabeth Bernstein, "Militarized Humanitarianism Meets Carceral Feminism: The Politics of Sex, Rights, and Freedom in Contemporary Antitrafficking Campaigns," *Signs* 11, vol. 36 (2010): 65.

letters for the removal of prostitutes and the complaint letters against prostitution across Iran that were sent to the government and particularly the office of the prime minister. Requests and demands for the removal of prostitutes were at times submitted with requests for better sanitation, cleaner streets, and electricity. Men repeatedly raised concerns about their women-folk's ability to engage in the public space if and where prostitutes were present. The moral hygiene of the public space was deemed essential for women's accepted entrance into it.

These citizen concerns coupled with the state's desire to regulate sex as part of its urban structuring solidified the existence of the red-light district. In Iran, regulation was an institutionalized method of controlling the geography of urban immorality and deviancy. The making of the geography of sexual commerce in Iran during this period suggests that men's sexual demands took priority both over legal codes and women's rights. Despite prostitution being officially illegal and criminalized, authorities informally tolerated prostitution so long as it was zoned, contained, and under control. These attitudes were also reflected by many Iranians who ignored prostitution in the red-light district so long as it was invisible. Simultaneously, they attended movies that depicted prostitutes as main characters. Fundamental to this process was the ability to draw sharp lines and clear distinctions between the respectable and disrespectable. Café girls and streetwalkers

who blurred social boundaries were targeted in real life and in representation.

The repeated sexual violence against streetwalkers—lone women in public spaces without the protection of a male guardian—can also suggest that Iranian men specifically feared for their wives’ and daughters’ safety from sexual violence. Women without male protection, it appears, risked sexual violence. Separating women available for sexual services by containing them in red-light districts, in cafés, and in all male entertainment venues also resulted in securing the public space for respectable women. Streetwalkers, then, became the transgressors and were violated and abused by customers and arrested by the police and fined or jailed. The physical separation of the geographical space prostitutes were allowed to occupy served as a suitable medium for working-class and “traditional” families who lived in geographical proximity to prostitutes.

Something must also be mentioned about how people evaluated economic activity associated with vice. As far as can be ascertained, it was the profiteers from the sexual commerce—pimps, madams, corrupt government officials, and café girls—who were seen and portrayed as immoral and demonized. Customers and purchasers of sexual services were often omitted and considered irrelevant.

During the period under study, the emerging middle and upper class separated themselves from the lower and traditional classes by espousing particular sets of family values, practices, and “modern” notions of marriage and compassionate unions. “Modern” middle and upper class women used the plights of prostitutes to carve a space for themselves within the larger discourse, politics, and policies of modernization and, in the process, promoted new ideals of domesticity and family life and controlled the image of prostitution. Much like popular movies, prostitutes were depicted as destitute victims, and the deviancy and immorality of prostitution were ignored so long as they was associated with female economic dependency and familial injustice. For female reformers, entrance into the public space and acceptance in it were achieved through social service. At the same time, a new scientific understanding emerged that sought to study and address the “problems” and concerns associated with modernity. “Saving” deceived and marginal women—prostitutes at the forefront—became, among female elites, a gateway to modernization.

During the second Pahlavi period, prostitutes and prostitution made repeat appearances in art, film, and literary protest. Popular films were especially important in controlling the image of prostitution and prescribing the boundaries of accepted deviancy. Subjugated women working in the red-light districts represented accepted deviancy and the promise of redemption, while assertive female sexuality and financial

independence associated with the benefits of sexual commerce remained deviant.

Female prostitutes, for their part, lived in a perpetual state of vulnerability that stemmed from inequalities in the law and social double standards. Despite this, they strove for their own interests in the context of unequal relations of power and took solace in friendships, motherhood, and in their personal search for love and companionship. In their everyday lives, they navigated state officials, the police, journalists, filmmakers, female reformers, and neighbors, who were outsiders to their lives and who focused, primarily, on the moral decadence, destitution, and disease they elected to see in the lives of these women.

The voyeuristic nature of the ways in which these women were represented by various media must not be overlooked. As indicated, over their daily lives, the women were photographed by photographers such as Golestan, filmed for documentaries by filmmakers such as Kamran Shirdel, interviewed by the likes of Sattareh Farman-Farmaian and the writers of *Banuvan*, and portrayed in both artistic hits and cheap movies by various filmmakers and famous actresses of their times. One can only speculate about the ways in which these encounters affected these women and their lives in the red-light district and beyond. The continual portrayal of prostitutes in Iranian cinema during the 1970s certainly raises questions about the relationship of female sex workers and their

cinematic counterparts. In other words, how did playing the “role” of a prostitute affect the social standing and artistic future of actresses and how did seeing and consuming such personal representations resonate with the women who actually toiled in the sex industry? Admittedly, given the available sources, such questions are challenging to answer, yet they provide a better understanding of the environment female prostitutes inhabited and navigated during this period. Meanwhile, these women negotiated through unequal relations of power within the sex industry as they dealt with customers, pimps, madams, and colleagues.

The religious establishment is strikingly absent from this picture, until of course, elements within it obliterated Tehran’s red-light district and penalized sex outside of marriage in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1979. While I have sought to address their role, the dissertation has become largely a reflection of my sources, and neither religious authorities nor religious sentiments manifest themselves openly in the archival documents. This is not to say that religion and the religious establishment had no say in the history of prostitution in Iran. As demonstrated elsewhere, the concern with immorality, excessive sexuality, and the exposed body of Muslim women was at the forefront of

some of the grievances that ushered in the anti-Shah Revolution of 1979.⁴¹⁵

As I have suggested, the nascent Islamic regime was faced with many of the similar questions and realities faced by its predecessor, chief among which was how to manage urban immorality and vice. Balancing Islam with modernity and appeasing the sexual and other needs of a massive youth population in a globalized context were at the forefront of policy discussions and theoretical debates. In this context, multiple answers were provided by various individuals and institutions within Iran, often channeling conflicting visions of Islam and its role in society. The Shi'i clerical establishment in Iran, however, was quite unanimous in its advertisement of temporary marriage as a God-sent solution to the issue of sexuality, and at times, a solution to the concern with prostitution. Instead of red-light districts, some suggested "chastity houses" where reformed or former prostitutes could be educated on harm reduction, safe sex practices, and temporary marriages. These suggestions, of course, were met with sharp criticism and never fully implemented. Yet, they highlight the multifaceted and complex ways sexuality was conflated with religion.

Promoting temporary marriage as a solution to sexual vice suggests a particular vision of the family set forth by the religious

⁴¹⁵ Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 2003, 229-230; Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 60-62.

establishment, one which set above all else a nuclear family. Temporary marriage was prescribed for men—and to a lesser extent for women—who were not able, because of material or social conditions, to partake in a permanent marital union. For men married permanently, authorities suggested, it offered the necessary sexual release. This may seem contradictory, but given the permissibility and historical precedence of polygamy, this focus on the importance of the permanent marital unions becomes more apparent. Within the religious establishment, polygamy is not propagated or endorsed in any comparable level to temporary marriage. This focus on temporary marriage to appease sexual needs, then, is intricately and complexly tied to visions of the family that favor a nuclear monogamous family, yet struggle to balance it with visions of male sexuality that are contradictory to it. Temporary marriage rather than polygamy or any other sexual union, in this process, is seen as the protector of nuclear families or a step towards it.

Across the Shi‘i world, the clerical establishment expressed strikingly similar attitudes towards the benefits and advantages of temporary marriage over “Western” modes of sexuality and the “sexual enslavement of women.” In the past two decades, these voices have become slowly unstable as few prominent senior clerics have suggested boundaries and modifications to the practice. What remains to be seen is the ways Shi‘i believers across the world adopt these “new” guidelines and parameters that frame sexual politics within the Shi‘i context in a

globalized world. In the globalized context of current political conflicts, wars, economic uncertainties, and social volatilities in the Middle East, the study of Shi'i sexual politics is subject to instability. The study of temporary marriage in the modern Middle East and in the diaspora offers a unique window for the study of emerging discussions on sexuality in Islam. The wide geographical distribution of core Shi'i religious symbols across the Middle East, the clerical cross-border movements from around the world to the *hawzah*-cities of Qum and Najaf, and the cross-border system of emulation practiced primarily by Shi'is outside of Iran point to multifaceted ways identity is expressed within Shi'i Islam.

The clerical establishment is intimately connected to space and specifically to Shi'i holy sites. As sites of popular piety they provide informative spaces to study the intersections of tourism, commerce, erudition, and most importantly for the purpose of this research, sexuality. In Qum, Mashhad, Karbala, Damascus, and Najaf, the clerical establishment maintains its legitimacy partly through its association with holy sites and its ability to attract and educate pilgrims and seminary students. These sites remain the most pronounced locales for the actual practice of temporary marriage and investigating its manifestation in action. These holy sites of pilgrimage, which attract millions of visitors on a yearly basis, have become sites of religious purification, sexual gratification, and financial empires. Further research into these spaces of Shi'i ritual and pilgrimage, which have not only

turned into expressions of political alliance but also become commodified, can prove insightful into the social realities of Shi'ism. As evidenced by these spaces, individuals participate in religion not only through prayers, rituals, and mourning but also through sexual acts that define them as distinctly Shi'i. Little, if any, credible information is documented about the actual practice of temporary marriage in Shi'i shrine cities beyond Qum. However, as early as the 1940s and 1950s, some Iranian women travelled to Iraqi cities such as Karbala to partake in what authorities explained as prostitution. Other Iranian women were transported to Iraqi cities as permanent or temporary wives and were subsequently abandoned or sold into prostitution in Iraq.

A few findings emerge from the interface of prostitution and temporary marriage. For one, this relationship highlights the difficulty of changing cultural and social norms in spite of changes in legal texts and practices. Going abruptly from a toleration of segregated vice to complete and strictly enforced prohibition guided by mandates in scripture suggests the complexities and contradictions in Iranian society. The intersection of sex, religion, and tradition was bound by concerns and ideals about the family. Ultimately, understandings of the family were crucial to the administration and representation of prostitution and sexuality in Iran throughout the twentieth century. Men were chastised not for infidelity but for neglecting emotional and financial family obligations and responsibilities. Simultaneously, contempt for members

of the sex industry was reserved for those women who threatened the institution of the family or refused to be incorporated in it or redeemed by it. Iranians across Iran also voiced their grievances against prostitution to the state in the language of protecting the moral security of their families. Female reformers, for their part, associated prostitution with backward family practices rooted in polygamy and temporary and early marriages. Prostitution then was tolerated so long as it did not immediately threaten the family. Continuities of these norms can be traced in post-Revolutionary Iran and are paralleled by systems of corroborating values. The puritanical language of the religious establishment was delivered in moral absolutes as many high ranking jurists refused to acknowledge the realities and concerns of temporary marriage. In delivering these legal prescriptions through state media, however, high ranking religious officials expressed a certain level of pragmatism in their promotion of temporary marriage that was primarily concerned with protecting the nuclear family.

The interface of temporary marriage with prostitution also establishes the continuous need for clear distinctions between the respected and the disreputable, permanent and temporary familial arrangements, and healthy and unhealthy families. In other words, a zoning of desire continued to occur. Visible walls separated the prostitutes from respectable families. Marked indicators distinguished between modern and backward families, and in popular culture, clothing

served as a visible marker of purity. The religious establishment also sought to codify and formalize religious laws that governed temporary unions. The blossoming of positioning temporary marriage as a solution to perceived unharnessed sexual needs was closely linked to efforts to formalize it in contractual sexual behavior and to place it within a scripted legal status.

This brings us to a final interplay between prostitution and temporary marriage. Throughout the period under study, arrangements of sexual encounters were wide and clearly hierarchical. A social continuum of virtue and of morality existed that situated and judged women along the clear line of family and sexual practices and went hand in hand with ideological assumptions about male sexual desires and needs.

The foremost personal challenge in writing this dissertation has been endeavoring to write a dissertation where the prostitute as well as the temporary wife remain at the center and serve as the normalized subject. Writing about prostitutes has not been easy, because they so rarely speak to us in their own voices. In the absence of direct sources by and voices of the women, this has naturally proved challenging. Yet, being attentively cognizant of the centrality of “flesh-and-blood” women who toiled in the sex industry in Iran continues to remain an important goal. Female reformers, under study, used prostitutes to contextualize

their demands for the advancement of women's rights within the language of protection. State laws and policies that attempted to curb the visibility of prostitutes dealt with the symptoms rather than recognizing the conditions that gave rise to red-light districts across Iran. Eradication of prostitution was not the agenda, and a tolerance of prostitution, certainly in its contained form, was evident during the period under study. It was the mobility and visibility of prostitutes in public spaces that were controlled. Despite the difficult economic and social conditions they lived in, prostitutes managed some form of communal life and offered a degree of support to each other.

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