

**SHAHR-E NOW, TEHRAN'S RED-LIGHT DISTRICT (1909–1979):  
THE STATE, “THE PROSTITUTE,” THE SOLDIER, AND THE FEMINIST**

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## Abstract

This thesis deals with the history of *Shahr-e Now*, Tehran's red-light district from 1909 until the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The district, as large as two football pitches, functioned as a sex market for almost seventy years with around 1,500 prostitutes living and working there. *Shahr-e Now's* existence as "Tehran's red-light district before the 1979 Revolution" has been only briefly mentioned in a number of scholarly works; however, the district has not been analyzed as a gendered and politically relevant urban construction in the context of modern Iranian history. This thesis uses the archival documents collected from The National Archive of Iran and The Document Center of Iran's Parliament to explain *Shahr-e Now's* long-lasting functioning in front of the public eye—despite the fundamental tension with Islamic morale.

This thesis argues, firstly, that *Shahr-e Now* was initiated by state officials, and preserved during the Pahlavi period (1925–1979), mainly for the sake of the military population in Tehran. Using the vast literature on the rise of the modern army in Iran as part of the Pahlavi Dynasty's establishment, this thesis explains that the increasing number of soldiers in Tehran was the main reason why the Pahlavi regime enabled/allowed the creation of *Shahr-e Now*; the state-regulated prostitution in *Shahr-e Now* served to provide the military with "clean women." Moreover, this thesis suggests that the system of regulation within SN was pretty much similar to systems of regulation enforced by other modern(izing) nation states in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The other major finding of this thesis is that state feminists in Iran, such as the women organized in Kanoun-e Banovan [the Ladies' Center] in 1935, and in Sazman-e Zanan-e Iran [Iranian Women's Organization] in 1966, implicitly accepted and backed the state-regulation of prostitution in *Shahr-e Now*.

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## 1. Introduction

On 30 January 1979, twelve days before the fall of the Pahlavi regime (1925–1979) and the victory of the 1979 Revolution in Iran, the daily newspaper *Ettela'at* [Information] reported that in the evening of the same day a group of people gathered around Shahr-e Now (SN), Tehran's red-light district, and set the district on fire. The report continues, stating that firemen, who already had announced their solidarity with the revolutionary groups, refused to extinguish the fire. According to the report, the brothels and the shops inside the district burned down, some of the prostitutes got injured and two or three women were burned deadly.<sup>1</sup>

Parvin Paidar, a feminist scholar on Iran, compares the incident of setting Shahr-e Now on fire with other destructive actions, like burning down cinemas and bars in the midst of the Revolution. She frames these actions as forms of protest against the Pahlavi regime.<sup>2</sup> Val Moghadam, another feminist scholar, understands the burning down of Shahr-e Now as part of the struggles for regaining Iran's "honor and dignity" that supposedly had been lost during the Pahlavi period.<sup>3</sup> However, Paidar and Moghadam both have remained silent about the preceding, basic question: How come that SN, a site for regulated prostitution as large as two football pitches, existed in the middle of Tehran? This question was the starting point of my research. Thinking about the incident of SN's arson in 1979 was moving, but more than that, I was

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<sup>1</sup> "Shahr-E Now Atash Gereft va Rouspian Koshte Shodand [Shar-E Now Was Set on the Fire and the Prostitutes Died]," *Ettela'at*, January 30, 1979.

<sup>2</sup> Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, Cambridge Middle East Studies 1 (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 197.

<sup>3</sup> Val Moghadam, "Revolution, the State, Islam, and Women: Gender Politics in Iran and Afghanistan," *Social Text*, no. 22 (April 1, 1989): 64, doi:10.2307/466519.

surprised to learn that SN was tolerated in Tehran until 1979. Prostitution was—and still is—a social taboo in Iranian society; how, then, can one explain the long-lasting existence of SN in front of the public eye?

This thesis is an effort to retrieve and narrate the history of SN. In order to explain the existence of SN, I will explore whether the institution of SN in Tehran was connected to the state's agenda, and if so, what these connections consisted of, and how one can explain them.

In order to answer these questions, I review the modern Iranian history from 1909 to 1979 and investigate some primary sources to find those moments that show SN's links to the state. In each chapter, after discovering or documenting a connection between SN and the state, I explain the politics behind these connections.

My research indicates that SN was not a random urban construction in Tehran that happened to be destroyed at the midst of the 1979 Revolution; instead, it argues that, firstly, SN was initiated and preserved by the Pahlavi regime mainly for the sake of its military. In other words, I suggest thinking about SN as a site for state-regulated prostitution. Using the vast literature on the rise of the modern army in Iran as part of the Pahlavi Dynasty's establishment, I explain that the increasing number of soldiers in Tehran was the reason why the Pahlavi regime enabled/allowed the creation of a site to satisfy its soldiers' sexual needs with "clean women" (i.e. women not suffering from venereal disease). In addition, by discovering some aspects of the largely invisible state policies related to SN, this thesis suggests that the system of regulation within was pretty much similar to the other systems of regulation enforced by other modern(izing) nation states in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The other major claim of this thesis is that



state feminism in Iran, during the period under discussion, was implicitly backing the state regulation of prostitution in SN.

### **1.1. Sources and Methodology**

There are a few published sources on SN: In 1968, Madrese-ye Madadkari-ye Tehran [The School of Social Work in Tehran] organized a comprehensive field research entitled *dar Bareye Rouspigari dar Shahr-e Tehran* [About Prostitution in Tehran]. The research was designed to study different kinds of prostitution in Tehran. SN was one of the main sites of the research. A three-hundred-page report was published in the same year in a limited number and was circulated among the state organizations. The report contains valuable statistical data about SN during the 1960s. William Floor, a Dutch historian, has framed a part of his recent book *The Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran* (2009) based on the 1968 report. Floor's contribution is comprehensive, but more of a descriptive study; he does not reflect on SN as a political urban construction. Recently, Mahmoud Zand Moghadam, an Iranian monographer who had been in the research group for the 1968 project, in his book *Shahr-e Now* (2012), has narrated his observations in SN as a researcher. Zand Moghadam's book is a detailed account, rare and valuable in terms of the anthropologic information it provides about SN's women, pimps, madams, their life quality and the language they used.

I started this project with the assumption that sources on SN were limited and that was the main reason why not much has been written about it. Throughout my research, particularly during the archival stage, it turned out that contrary to my assumption, there is a wide range of primary

sources available on SN. I collected the archival materials related to my topic from two public archives in Tehran during the summer of 2014: The National Archive of Iran, and The Document Center of Iran Parliament.<sup>4</sup> In the National Archive of Iran, I used their online research system to search for documents. Some of the keywords I searched in this stage were “Shahr-e Now,” “prostitute,” “prostitution,” “brothel,” “corruption,” “Zahedi Castle” and “Jamshid District”—the last two are the alternative names for SN. I was able to collect some documents from the National Archive; however, I was told by one of the librarians that not all the documents about prostitution are shown on the online National Archive’s database. The librarian ambiguously explained that the National Archive of Iran’s prohibition law has banned access to some of the documents about prostitution.

My visit to The Document Center of Iran Parliament, which is a smaller archive compare to The National Archive, was much more productive. The librarian himself already knew the boxes and files which had documents about SN. The documents about SN were catalogued under the category “on Corruption.” In The Document Center of Iran Parliament, I was allowed to look at the files by myself and choose the documents I needed. There, the documents about SN were mainly official letters, petitions written by Tehran residents complaining about SN, and minutes of official meetings about the district.

I also used a series of oral accounts in order to develop my research. These accounts are based on the interviews that I started to conduct from the winter of 2012. I used particularly two

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<sup>4</sup> “Document Center of Iran Parliament” is the English title for the archive suggested by the organization itself.

interviews in this thesis: both of them with social workers who worked in SN in the 1970s. “Appendix 1” provides details about the interviews and interviewees.

Visual materials were the other category of sources that I dealt with, particularly for chapter 6. The documentary *Qal’e* [The Castle] (1967) is the only discussed source in my thesis, in which SN’s women are directly presented. “Appendix 2” presents *The Castle*.

Whenever I quote from a Persian-language source, the translations have been made by me.

The main method I used to analyze my archival data in order to answer my research questions is historical close reading. Close reading has been defined as reading each text with “special attention, depth, precision, acuity,” and contextualizing the text in its own time and place.<sup>5</sup> I have used this method especially for investigating primary sources. I have analyzed each text, by paying attention to the date, location and the author of the text, and ask whether the content of the document can be related/ responsive to the other texts I am using to develop the thesis.

## 1.2. Terminology

Here, I explain some of the words/ terms that I use repeatedly throughout the thesis.

Red-light District: Red-light districts are defined as “areas in cities or towns that are themed around sex. They consist of clusters of activities or individuals and can be widely known outside the immediate area. [...] They may be characterized by prostitution alone, but some

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<sup>5</sup> Frank Lentricchia and Andrew DuBois, *Close Reading: The Reader* (Duke University Press, 2003), 4.

districts have few or no visible prostitutes and consist of entertainment or other services.”<sup>6</sup> Given the fact that SN was the location of a set of brothels along with around 1500 women providing sexual services, identifying it as a red-light district is well grounded.

Prostitute/ Sex-worker/ Provider: There has been a debate in the contemporary feminist discourse about the choice of language when it comes to discuss women who are in the sex trade. “Prostitute” is the word traditionally used to describe the woman who is engaged in commercial sex. Some radical anti-prostitution feminists have suggested words such as “prostituted woman,” “sex slave” and “survivors” to highlight the supposed oppression and lack of choice in the sex trade.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, pro-prostitution feminists have argued that terms such as prostitute, prostituted woman or sex slave, deny the agency of women in the sex trade. By suggesting the terms “sex worker” instead of prostitute, and “sex work” instead of prostitution, they insist that sex work is a form of labor and the sex worker is in fact a laborer.<sup>8</sup>

Since it is impossible for this thesis to discover the amount of compulsion or agency that each of the SN’s women experienced while working in SN, instead of prostitute or sex worker, I have chosen to use a neutral-general term, namely “provider.” In my account, I use the term provider based on the fact that SN’s women, either forcefully or electively, were providing sexual services to men. Whenever I am referring to other texts, I use the terminology used there.

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<sup>6</sup> Ray Hutchison, *Encyclopedia of Urban Studies* (SAGE Publications, 2009), 838.

<sup>7</sup> Ronald Weitzer, “New Directions in Research on Prostitution,” *Crime, Law and Social Change* 43, no. 4–5 (June 1, 2005): 213.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 213–214.

### 1.3. Structure of the Thesis

The period under review in this thesis begins in 1909 and ends in 1979. After this introductory chapter and another chapter dedicated to the literature and the theories I have used to frame the thesis, four chronologically ordered chapters will be presented:

Chapter 2, “Literature Review and the Conceptual Fields,” first of all examines the existent literature on women’s and gender history in Iran to see whether the question of prostitution and women in sex trade have been discussed, and if so, how. In this part, I show that the history writing about women in Iran has largely concentrated on the privileged, elite and visible women and that “prostitutes,” including SN’s women, have largely been excluded from analytic historical studies.

Two main theoretical frameworks will be introduced in this chapter: Women’s movement and state feminism, and state-regulation of prostitution in Iran. Under the first theoretical field, firstly, I define what I mean by the usage of the term “state feminism.” Then, I review those scholarly works that discuss the women’s movement in Iran related to state feminism.

Under the second theoretical field, state-regulation of prostitution, I show how this topic has not been discussed in the works of feminist scholars on Iran. Further, I suggest the case of SN to be studied based on the patterns that Stephanie A. Limoncelli (2010) offers for understanding state-regulated prostitution in the late nineteenth and the twentieth century.

Chapter 3, “In Search of Origins (1909–1925),” is designed to answer two basic questions: Where in Tehran SN was located, and since when, and under which circumstances did it start to function as a red-light district? In this chapter, I argue that SN became a concentration zone by the state officials either for sake of the military, or as a political maneuver. Moreover, I

argue that locating SN in a suburban area was to keep the state-regulation of prostitution away from the public eye, in order to prevent public dissatisfaction.

Chapter 4, “Shahr-e Now 1925–1941: Military and State Feminism,” focuses on the rise of the Pahlavi regime and the building of the modern state based on military forces. In this chapter, I reflect on the increasing number of soldiers in Tehran in this period, and argue that preserving SN, and backing the regulation there were strategic decisions. Further, by referring to the formation of state feminism in this period and the state’s “women’s emancipation” project, I suggest that the state and state-sponsored feminism in this period, which was framed by elite women, shared the same opinion towards prostitution. Women who were associated to this brand of feminism, believed that the regulation of prostitution was necessary for protecting public hygiene and moral; therefore prostitution institutes should exist, but in remote areas. At the end of this chapter, I explain and theorize the mutual relationship between the Pahlavi regime and state feminism about prostitution.

Chapter 5, “Shahr-e Now 1941–1963: Politicizing the District, Political Usage,” addresses the CIA-backed 1953 Coup d’état, as a turning point in Iranian history and that of SN. The 1953 Coup caused a popular progressive government to be overthrown. In this chapter through archival materials, I show how the sex trade and police corruption in SN before the Coup had disturbed Tehran’s residents. By documenting the engineered participation of SN’s women in the Coup, I suggest that the public hostility towards SN reached a height and became and became political as well. Further, based on post-Coup documents, I argue that the new regulations and policies regarding SN— most notably, building a wall around the district—were a reaction to the

threatening public dissatisfaction. This chapter shows how the Iranian government used SN's women as political tools to reach its desired political objectives.

Chapter 6, “Shahr-e Now: 1963–1979: State Feminism and Suppression of SN's Representation in the Public Sphere,” details the establishment of the Iranian Women's Organization (IWO), the most powerful institution of state feminism in Iran, in 1966, and its links to SN. This chapter is focused on a documentary, *Qal'e* [The Castle], that the IWO ordered to be made about SN and its women. By analyzing the suppression of the documentary by the Ministry of Culture and Art, I argue that any representation of SN—even one proposed by a state-sponsored feminist organization, namely the IWO and for humanitarian purposes—was threatening for the state, and capable of challenging the cherished “emancipatory” image of the Pahlavi regime.

In a broad sense, *Shahr-e Now, Tehran's Red-light District (1909–1979): the State, “the Prostitute,” the Soldier, and the Feminist* represents Shahr-e Now as a highly gendered and political urban construction. Discussing SN in relation to the most important moments of modern Iranian history, enables one to think about SN not only as “Tehran's red-light district before the 1979 Revolution,” as it appears in numerous texts, but as a location initiated and used for political purposes of the state and its organizations.

## 2. Literature Review and Conceptual Fields

In this chapter, firstly in section 2.1, I will review three scholarly contributions to women's history in Iran to display the patterns of history writing about women and, more specifically about women for the lower-class. At the end of this section, I argue that writing about sexuality and prostitution, in the Iranian context, has been more of an exotic field for some historians, like William Floor in *The Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, rather than an analytic field.

Then, I introduce and discuss my theoretical framework in this thesis. This part is consisted of two headings: Women's movement and state feminism in Iran, and state-regulated prostitution.

Under the heading 2.2, I will look at the literature about women's movements and feminism in Iran. In this part, I focus on the literature about state feminism in Iran to see whether this brand of feminism ever has been discussed in relation to the question of prostitution.

Under the heading 2.3, I examine Afary's book *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (2011), searching for possible references to prostitution and its regulation by the state. Following that, I present the patterns that Limoncelli suggest in *Politics of Trafficking* (2010), for analyzing the case of SN.

All of the discussed works in this chapter are written originally in English and published outside of Iran. They are part of the scholarship produced after the 1979 Revolution by Iranian or non-Iranian scholars. The aim of this chapter is to inquire the content of the existing scholarship, how it relates to my topic, and which elements are be missing.



## 2.1. History Writing about Women

Within the realm of Iranian historiography, it is not hard to list some scholarly works and categorize them as women's history. However, "gender" as an analytical and meaningful category for historical analysis, using Scott's words, has been introduced and practiced only recently and by only a few scholars of Iranian history.<sup>9</sup> Afsaneh Najmabadi (1946–), Iranian historian, is one of the first of those few historians whose works have done more than describe Iranian women's personal and political life. In her article, "'Is Our Name Remembered?' Writing the History of Iranian Constitutionalism as If Women and Gender Mattered," published in 1996, Najmabadi revives a story about some Iranian girls, who were sold by their poor peasant families to a provincial ruler instead of tax. The incident took place in 1905, around the Constitutional Revolution (1905–1909), voiced largely by the newspapers of that time, and the petitions of girls' relatives discussed in Majlis (the National Parliament). Najmabadi wonders through some of the significant histories of Iranian Constitutional Revolution and shows that this story was systematically omitted from the histories of Constitutional Revolution. She explains that:

The girls, after all, constituted male honor-sexual, familial, religious and national. While significantly useful to recall and recite, the story had become profoundly shameful. It reminded people that some of the most important achievements of the Constitutional government and the precedents set by the 'sacred' Majlis [...] had to do with a dishonorable and unholy episode, particularly as the story never came to an honorable close.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review*, 1986.

<sup>10</sup> Afsaneh Najmabadi, "'Is Our Name Remembered?': Writing the History of Iranian Constitutionalism as If Women and Gender Mattered," *Iranian Studies*, 1996, 106.

In the epilogue of her article, Najmabadi mentions that in order to tell this story, she used the same sources as other Constitution historians. Based on this fact, she refuses that women are absent from Iranian history: “If gender is used analytically, sources about men become sources about women as well.”<sup>11</sup> Further, she criticizes the kind of history writing in form of “separate chapters or books...written about Iranian women in the modern period, virtually insulated from the other historical narratives, or at best appended to them”.

Najmabadi’s article was one of the first contributions, in the Iranian context, which used gender as an analytical category, rather than descriptive. More or less since then, “gender” has been a popular word among scholars on Iran. However, most of the historical studies presented as gender analysis are fixed on women and particularly on visible and notable women. I will elaborate this claim by discussing “Uncovering Women and Gender in Qajar Archives of Iran” an essay published as part of the book *Contesting Archives: finding women in the sources* (2010).

Framed into four sections and written by four Iranian scholars based in the US and Iran, the essay “Uncovering Women and Gender in Qajar Archives of Iran” is a collaborative essay to show the possibilities for writing about women in the Qajar period based on archival sources. The first section deals with legal documents and contracts to show women’s economic rights and agency. The second section uses records about women’s contributions to charities, arguing that there was a shift in women’s donations after the Constitutional Revolution; women tend to donate money to the educational and health charities rather than mosques and religious institutions. The third section analyzes the language and style of private letters of the mother, wives and daughter

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 107.

of Naser al-Din Shah (1848–1896), one of the Qajar kings. Finally, the fourth section is a review on the Austrian physician of Naser al-Din Shah, Jakob Polak's writings (1918–1891), about marriage practices in the Qajar court.<sup>12</sup>

One can easily notice that the visibility of the discussed women within the above sections is related to their privileges. In order to be part of the essay, a woman must be either literate, or rich or in a way associated to the Qajar court. The writers themselves admit that their writings are focused on middle- and upper-class women in urban areas. In response, I argue that “uncovering women and gender” is not only associated with middle- and upper-class women. Those women, who were not necessarily privileged enough to record themselves or to be recorded, are omitted from this kind of history writings. I am suggesting that if we think about the evident hierarchy among women as historical subjects, then it is not unusual to find the upper-class women in archives, rather than the subaltern women. In other words, there should be more documents about women of the royal families and female political leaders than about peasant women, or prostitutes. In the fourth and the sixth chapters of this thesis, by discussing the elite women's organizations, and their approaches to prostitutes, I show how the existing literature has been largely fixed on female activists, forgetting about the prostitutes.

In 2009, William Floor, a Dutch historian majored on Iranian social history and published a book entitled *The Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*. Floor's book consists of five chapters on marriage, temporary marriage, prostitution, homosexual relationships and venereal

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<sup>12</sup> Mansoureh Ettehadieh et al, “Uncovering Women and Gender in Qajar Archives of Iran,” in *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources*, ed. Nupur Chaudhuri et al. (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, c2010, 2010), 156–168.

disease; he starts each chapter from the Achaemenids dynasty (550–330 BC) and terminates by the Islamic Republic. His project is ambitious, holding a great number of sources for each dynastical period, covering a wide range of time—twenty-five centuries—though it is not fair to acknowledge his work, particularly his chapter on prostitution, as an analytic and accurate contribute to gender’s history in Iran. First of all, as Floor himself admits in the introduction, the book was written in order to be “of interest to a larger public.” The primary idea was provoked by a comment from his publisher after Floor submitted the draft of his previous book: “why don’t you write something more sexy so we can have a bestseller.”<sup>13</sup> In spite of some incorrect citations and generalizations, the book has been widely accepted in the field as “the most comprehensive attempt to understand the nuances and changes on the topic [sexuality] throughout Iran’s history.”<sup>14</sup>

Floor begins the third chapter of his book “Prostitution: an Extra-marital Affair” by normalizing prostitution as an inseparable part of Iranian life before and after the arrival of Islam, without questioning the reasons: “prostitution, like dogs and soothsayers, continued to be part of life in Iran after the imposition of Islam as the official religion.”<sup>15</sup> Under his subchapter on prostitution in the Pahlavi Period, Floor remarks on SN, its genesis and its structure and the way it functioned. Apart from some false points about SN, this part is equipped with a set of rare key-

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<sup>13</sup> Willem M. Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran* (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2008), XIII.

<sup>14</sup> Naindeep Singh Chann, “Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire Passionate Uprisings: Iran’s Sexual Revolution Sexual Politics in Modern Iran A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran,” *Iran & The Caucasus* 13, no. 2 (December 2009): 340, doi:10.1163/157338410X12625876281749. See also: Jacob Passel, “A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran,” *Middle East Journal* 63, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 521.

<sup>15</sup> Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, 175.

references and provided helpful hints for my thesis.<sup>16</sup> However, organized mostly based on descriptions and quotations, Floor's contribution lacks any analytic aspect.

## 2.2. Women's Movement and State Feminism

It was only after the Constitutional Movement (1905–1909) that women, actively and without ties to the royal courts, became part of the political discourse in Iran. In this part, I look into some scholarships to see how the spontaneous women's movement in Iran was affected, and at some points owned by the Pahlavi regime. First, I will explain what I mean by the usage of the term “state feminism” in the following paragraphs.

State feminism is a term originally coined by Helga Hernes, a Norwegian political scientist, in 1978. She used the term to explain “the idea that governments [in the Scandinavian context] could pursue feminist aims through policy and also that individuals and actors within the state could promote a ‘women friendly’ approach to policy and state action.”<sup>17</sup> Since then, state feminism has been used as an umbrella term for studying women's agencies, which are actively associated with the state.

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<sup>16</sup> Here I remark on two of Floor's false points: in page 259, Floor mentions 1881 for SN's establishment date. Further and through communication with him, he provided me first with *tarikh-e ejtema'i*, vol. 1, 468-9 and *Tehran-e Qadim*, vol. 1, p. 28, vol. 3, 394-6 as references for this date. I checked both books, no trace for 1881. Later, he referred me to Sattareh Farmanfarma'iyān, *Peyramun-e ruspigari dar shahr-e Tehran* (Tehran, 1349/1970), p. 13, the mentioned date in this book was 1919: William Floor, e-mail message to author, December 6–8, 2014. Second remark: Floor states in Page 258 that “in 1949, it was estimated that there were 4,000 prostitutes in Shahr-e Now plus an unknown number in the rest of Tehran,” citing from Overseas Consultants, Inc., *Report on the Seven Year Development Plan for the Plan Organization of the Imperial Government of Iran*, New York, 1949, 5 volumes; I checked this source too, and again no clue reading the 4,000 prostitutes.

<sup>17</sup> Dorothy E. McBride and Amy G. Mazur, *The Politics of State Feminism: Innovation in Comparative Research* (Temple University Press, 2010), 4.

Dorothy E. McBride and Amy. G. Mazur, feminist scholars, have discussed in their major work, *The Politics of State Feminism: Innovation in Comparative Research* (2010), how it has generally been accepted that women's policy agencies cannot bring any progress to women's movements. In their book, they challenge this assumption through numerous case studies in Western postindustrial societies. They argue that in fact, state feminism is able to support women's movements to reach their goals easier.<sup>18</sup> However, in this thesis, whenever I use the term state feminism, I am referring to organizations and events that were initiated by the state, within its framework, and functioned disconnectedly to the women's movement in Iran.

*The Women's Rights Movement in Iran* (1982) written by Iranian political scientist Sanasarian, and Jayawardena's chapter on Iran in *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (1986) are the first scholarly works after the 1979 Revolution about the women's movement in Iran. Both works, Sanasarian's in more detail and elaboration, have similar arguments. However, Sanasarian's book is not part of the Jayawardena's literature.

*The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini* (1982) is a historical overview covering the timeline between the Constitutional Revolution and the 1979 Revolution. In her book, Sanasarian, makes a crucial point by declaring that the activities performed from above and by the Pahlavi state in favor of women's emancipation are not supposed to be included in the women's movement by scholars in the field.<sup>19</sup> Following this statement, she identifies and represents an independent brand of feminism

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>19</sup> Eliz Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini* (Praeger, 1982), 154.

which was significantly active during the 1920s. She shows how during Reza Shah regime, nongovernmental women's magazines like Alam-e Nesvan [Women's World] and women's organizations like Jam'iyat-e Nesvan-e Vatankhah [Patriotic Iranian Women's Association] were suppressed by the regime.<sup>20</sup> Sanasarian argues that these groups were either critical to the regime, or they were suppressed in line with Reza Shah's unification policies; only one kind of women's movement was allowed to operate and it had to be under the supervision of the central state.<sup>21</sup>

In the fourth chapter of her book, Sanasarian remarks on the rise of state feminism during the Reza Shah's period and identifies it as the end of the independent women's movement. Sanasarian explains how Kanoun-e Banovan [the Ladies Center], a women's organization, was established in 1935 by the Pahlavi regime to advertise and regulate the state's women's emancipation project. Sanasarian states that the Ladies' Center in fact did not make any political effort for women's liberation, but was a conservative organization that followed the state's agenda.<sup>22</sup> She mentions that the core committee of the Ladies' Center consisted of educated women who, even with their supposedly radical moves like getting unveiled before the mandatory unveiling law in 1936, were under the direct supervision of the state.<sup>23</sup>

Jayawardena, in her chapter "Women's Struggles and 'Emancipation from Above' in Iran," makes the same point as Sanasarian. She argues that the women's movement in Iran, after

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 56–57.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 106–115.

<sup>22</sup> Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 107.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 107–108.

the rise of Reza Khan, was largely engineered from above and that “women’s emancipation remained a purely bourgeois urban phenomenon.”<sup>24</sup>

It is important to note that Jayawardena’s work was the first attempt that linked the women’s movement in Iran to the concept of nationalism. Jayawardena argues that in spite of the dominant assumption in western discourse, a history of feminism does exist in the third world, including Iran, and that this history is strongly related to the history of nationalism.<sup>25</sup> The connection between nationalism and Iranian feminism made by Jayawardena was developed later by other scholars like Parvin Paidar and Cameron Michael Amin. Parvin Paidar (1949–2005), Iranian Feminist scholar based in the UK, in her comprehensive book *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-century Iran* (1995), challenges the notion that women’s issues became a prioritized part of the state political agenda after the shift of power from the Qajar Dynasty to the Pahlavi Dynasty. She explains:

State as the embodiment of society undertook the construction of a nation state in Iran. The new nation state was conceived on the basis of a particular definition of modernity and progress which included the imitation of certain aspects of Western societies and the exclusion of others. The main features of this model were a central state, a unified nation, a single language and religion, the secularization of society and national sovereignty, technological progress, economic development and the emancipation of women.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Books, 1992), 70.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 81–82.



Paidar describes the women's emancipation project as a challenging phase for the Pahlavi regime, designed in favor of two main aims: Firstly, women's integration into the social sphere, as it could represent Iran as a modern society close to Western standards and secondly, educating women as the mothers of the nation and reproducers of future generations. Paidar points out that these two objectives were already proposed by the independent women organizations, since the nationalist Constitutional Movement (1905–1909). In this sense, the Pahlavi regime was not the initiator of the women's rights movement, but threatened by the sufficiency and unpredictability of these nongovernmental organizations. Paidar explains that the new regime achieved empowerment regarding the women's issue through "control and manipulation of the independent women's organizations and [their] leaders," and by establishing the Ladies' Center.<sup>27</sup>

In his groundbreaking book, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman: Gender, State Policy, and Popular Culture 1865–1946* (2002), Cameron Michael Amin, an Iranian-American historian, explains the gradual construction of the modern Iranian woman. The starting point of his work is the implementation of the unveiling law by the order of Reza Shah in 1936. Amin argues that the unveiling law was a significant moment in Iranian gender history in different ways. This compulsory shift paved the way for women to move into the public sphere, show up and engage with men while receiving state support. Following his point about women's integration into the public sphere, Amin invents the term "male guardianship": in a patriarchal society, intensely gender-segregated, it was man's responsibility to take care of women's safety and honor. The woman awaking project—this is the term he uses for the women's emancipation

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 104.

project— disturbed the conventional gender relations by encouraging women to participate in public life and promising to provide them with care and security. In this sense, men were not in charge of protecting women anymore and as a result, their authority upon women could be questioned.<sup>28</sup>

### 2.3. State-regulated Prostitution

In this thesis, I use the phrase “state-regulated prostitution” to describe the state strategies and policies for regulation, or supporting the already-existing regulation of prostitution in urban areas. In the following four chapters, I show and document that the regulation of prostitution in SN was made possible by the state. Here, firstly, I review Afary’s *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, to see whether prostitution and its regulation by the state is discussed in her work or not. Then, I will turn to Limoncelli’s *The Politics of Trafficking*, to detail her analysis of state-regulated prostitution during the nineteenth and twentieth in an international framework.

Afary’s *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (2011) is a detailed study about the construction of modern sexuality and sexual relations in Iran. Using various types of sources like literature, newspapers and visual materials, Afary shows that the sexual and gender norms in contemporary Iran, like elsewhere, have been constructed through a historical process associated to the political intentions of the state. Afary’s book covers practices of marriage, slavery, homosexuality, polygamy, and dress-cedes throughout the Qajar, Pahlavi and Islamic republic periods.

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<sup>28</sup> Camron Michael Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman: Gender, State Policy, and Popular Culture, 1865-1946* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 103–113.

Regarding prostitution, there are a few minimal remarks in Afary's book. These remarks are either descriptions about the status of prostitutes, or narratives of how prostitution was conceived by public opinion.<sup>29</sup> However, Afary hardly discusses the state's attitude towards prostitution, except once, when she is reflecting on the relation between prostitutes, police and ulama'[clerics] during the Qajar era:

Because of their close ties to the police and influential people, sex-workers found themselves taking part in the world of politics and intrigue. They serviced so many different kinds and classes of men that if anything happened or anything was in the works, the prostitutes almost certainly heard of it. [...] From time to time, at the instigation of the 'ulama [clerics], the authorities embarked on moral crusades against the unfortunate prostitutes and called for their expulsion. These events, reasserted the moral authority of the 'ulama and provided a form of carnival-like for the public.<sup>30</sup>

Afary's reflection is general and not well supported.<sup>31</sup> I suppose that not all the prostitutes were that close to the police guards and actively involved in the political arena. Yet it is surprising that prostitution is not discussed in *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, particularly within the second chapter "Towards a Westernized Modernity", where she analyzes the sexual politics during the Pahlavi period related to the building of the modern nation state.

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<sup>29</sup> For instance, under the subchapter "Female desire and normative heterosexuality in modern Persian literature," within two pages Afary brings up examples of literary products that prostitution was part of their plot. Still, she misses to engage with the literary works more profoundly; she could, for instance, discuss the censorship towards some of these works by Pahlavi regime, and ask why Pahlavi regime was not pleased with the representation of prostitution in literature. Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 167–169.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>31</sup> Afary builds this comment upon only one source, writings of an Austrian foreigner who served as physician in the Qajar court: Polak, Jakob Eduard, "Prostitution in Iran," in *Jahrbuch Des Verbandes Iranischer Akademiker in Der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Berlin-West*: [1861] 1982.

Stephanie Limoncelli, in her book *The Politics of Trafficking: The First International Movement to Combat the Sexual Exploitation of Women* (2010), has studied the history of the anti-trafficking movement through international agreements and prohibitions since 1899. Limoncelli is reflecting on two major brands of combating against sex trade: abolitionism initiated by the International Abolitionist Federation, and the “purity reform” by the International Bureau for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic. The purpose of both organizations was to change some aspects of state-regulated prostitution; nonetheless, each organization pursued this mission in its own way. The International Abolitionist Federation was against prostitution in a general sense and did not differ between the prostitution of domestic women and foreign women: “Its members attempted to frame the issue in universal terms, by championing the protection of all women from state-regulated prostitution and challenging the rights of states to organize prostitution in their territories.”<sup>32</sup> However, the International Bureau had more national interests and their main objective was to take control over the women’s trafficking:

The solutions they [Purity reformers affiliated with the International Bureau] proposed emphasized national interests. They saw the movement against trafficking as means of increasing administration over sexual activity within their territories and as a way to defend state-regulated prostitution as a national rather than an international concern. The focus on trafficking placed only migratory prostitution and foreign prostitutes in the international realm, leaving stated with continued sovereignty over domestic prostitution.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Stephanie A. Limoncelli, *The Politics of Trafficking: The First International Movement to Combat the Sexual Exploitation of Women* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2010), 8.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

As a result, the state officials were more interested in the agenda of the International Bureau, rather than the International Abolitionist Federation because the International Bureau, apart from solving “the problem of foreign women,” was supporting “the state interests in the control of women’s bodies and sexual activity [in the national level].”<sup>34</sup> According to Limoncelli, the sexual labor of “clean” women in the metropolitan areas was needed for satisfying the desire of the military men, who were serving the imperial projects.<sup>35</sup>

In *The Politics of Trafficking* there is no reference on Iran and the sources I have reviewed for this thesis do not reference the above-mentioned organizational approaches being practiced regarding prostitution in Iran and more particularly, regarding the case of SN. Nevertheless, the framework Limoncelli suggests in her book is perfectly applicable for the study of prostitution in SN. First, SN, a suburban area, started to function as a red-light district at the dawn of the state’s modernizing project in the early twentieth century. Chapter 4 in this thesis uses Limoncelli’s pattern to explain the process of building the Iranian modern state based on the military and its connection to SN. Second, given the fact that SN functioned for almost seventy years means that, at the very least, the state tolerated the district. Chapter 5 and 6 explain some aspects of the state’s tolerance regarding SN.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 4–5.

## 2.4. How are these fields related to *Shahr-e Now's* Story?

In the first part of this chapter, through reviewing some literature on women's history in Iran, I mentioned two points: first, that the existing literature has been more fixed on women, rather than paying attention to gender relations and second, that women from the lower social classes, including prostitutes, have been excluded from women's history in Iran. Writing about SN in this thesis, I focus not only on SN's women, but I am studying a series of state gendered policies and strategies that made SN a site for regulated prostitution. As will become clearer in the following chapters, three other groups or historical actors besides SN's women must be analyzed: the state, the military and feminists associated with the state. This thesis is an effort to narrate the history of SN's women, whose sexual labor was part of the modern state building during the Pahlavi period.

Within the second part, I reviewed some scholarship on the women's movement and state feminism during the Pahlavi period. Discussing state feminism and its connections to the women's movement are crucial for this thesis. In chapters 4 and 6, I will present the approach of two state-sponsored women's organizations towards SN and argue that the attitude of state feminism during the Pahlavi period was highly classed and framed within the state's agenda in order to regulate prostitution.

In the last part of this chapter, based on Limoncelli's suggested patterns for regulating prostitution, I presented a framework that I will use in this thesis for explaining the state-regulation of prostitution in Tehran. My analysis in chapter 3, chapter 4 and chapter 5, shows and documents the state's reasons for supporting regulated prostitution in Shahr-e Now.

### **3. In Search of Origins**

Discussing Shahr-e Now, the case of study in this thesis, the very first fact that comes to mind is that SN was located in Tehran, more specifically in the southwest of Tehran. This chapter mainly seeks to answer two basic questions: First, whether SN was located at a random geographical point in Tehran or whether there are certain reasons explaining the geographical existence of the district, and second, since when SN started to function as a red-light district.

In four sections, I will answer the above questions: in section 3.1, I briefly review the urban history of Tehran to show the process of formation of suburban towns, including SN, around the city. In section 3.2, I will show that SN was initially a suburban area without any association with prostitution. In section 3.3, I will review the political climate in Iran during the early twentieth century and introduce some key political actors in this period. Finally, by comparing two accounts in section 3.4, I state that SN most probably started to function as a red-light district from 1909, for military purposes.

#### **3.1. City of Tehran**

The very beginning of Qajar dynasty (1785–1925) in Iranian history coincided with the beginning of Tehran's history as the capital of Iran. It was on March 21, 1796, that the founder of the Qajar Dynasty, Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar (1742–1797), on his coronation day announced the city

of Tehran to be the capital of Iran.<sup>36</sup> The reasons that would determine why Agha Mohammad Khan chose Tehran or why, the city remained the capital until today and , did not change with the decease of kings and shifts of dynasties<sup>37</sup>, are not matters of importance in this research. However, it is crucial to point that within less than one century after Tehran became the capital, it grew from a medium-sized town to a large city.

If we trust the account of Guillaume-Antoine Olivier, a French entomologist and traveler who passed by Tehran in the very same year of the Qajar Dynasty's establishment, we would picture Tehran as a town with an estimated 15,000 habitants, living in four districts.<sup>38</sup> However, the first official census in Qajar era dates back to 1853. The census was ordered by Amir Kabir (1807–1852), the contemporary prime minister and one of the most innovative figures in Qajar history. In this census, Tehran was described as a city with 4.5 km<sup>2</sup> surface, 6.5 km perimeter, surrounded by a moat and a wall, having six gates, and accommodating 125.952 citizens. According to this report, at this point, a “very small” population was living on the other side of the gates—the outer city.<sup>39</sup>

The geographical interest of my thesis is located next to one the above-mentioned gates; a district which was once a suburban area and then became part of the inner-city along with an increase of the city's perimeter. Darvaze Qazvin [Qazvin Gate] was first built in 1540 as the

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<sup>36</sup> J. R. Perry, “Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar,” *Iranica*, 1982, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/aga-mohammad-khan>.

<sup>37</sup> In the former dynasties, the change of the capital after the fall of the previous monarch or dynasty was common practice. For instance, in Zand dynasty that was in power for 45 years, Kerman and Shiraz were the capitals

<sup>38</sup> Guillaume Antoine Olivier, *Travels in the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and Persia, Undertaken by Order of the Government of France, during the First Six Years of the Republic. Transl. Vol.1,2 [in 1].*, 1801, 66.

<sup>39</sup> Mansoure Etehadiye, “Roshd va Tose'ey Shahar-E Tehran Dar Dore-Ye Naseri [Tehran's Growth and Development in Naseri Era],” *Tahqiqat-E Eslami* 10 (1995): 149.



western entrance of Tehran town and remained a gate and a frontier marker for several centuries. In the 1853 census, we read that two caravansaries and thirteen stores, three of them abandoned, were located behind the gate.<sup>40</sup>

Tehran's population increased to a great extent during the second half of the nineteenth century, reaching 155,737 by 1870—10 times more than the population in 1796. As a result, the Qajar state decided to deconstruct the primary wall, build a new boundary and develop the surface of the capital by including those constructions which were located outside of Tehran. The 1870 census stated that at this time 11 percent of the population was living outside of the city, close to the gates and next to the outer side of the surrounding wall. Apparently the new wall was never completed. However, Tehran turned into a city with 12 km<sup>2</sup> surface—three times larger than the former registered surface.<sup>41</sup> Still, in this phase of the expansion of the city, Qazvin gate remained protected, and it continued to function as one of Tehran's main entrances until 1931.<sup>42</sup> Figure 1 shows the location of the Qazvin Gate and its marginal orientation.

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<sup>40</sup> Mansoure Etehadiye and Khosrow Sa'dvandian, *Amar-E Dar Al-Khalafe-Ye Tehran [Statistics of the Capital, Tehran]* (Tehran: Nashr-e Tarikh-e Iran, 1990), 340.

<sup>41</sup> Mansoure Etehadiye, "Roshd va Tose'ey Shahar-E Tehran Dar Dore-Ye Naseri [Tehran's Growth and Development in Naseri Era]," 150.

<sup>42</sup> Ernest Orsolle, *Safarname-Ye Orsolle [Travel Journals of Orsolle]*, trans. Aliakbar Sa'idi (Tehran: Zavar, 1996), 207.

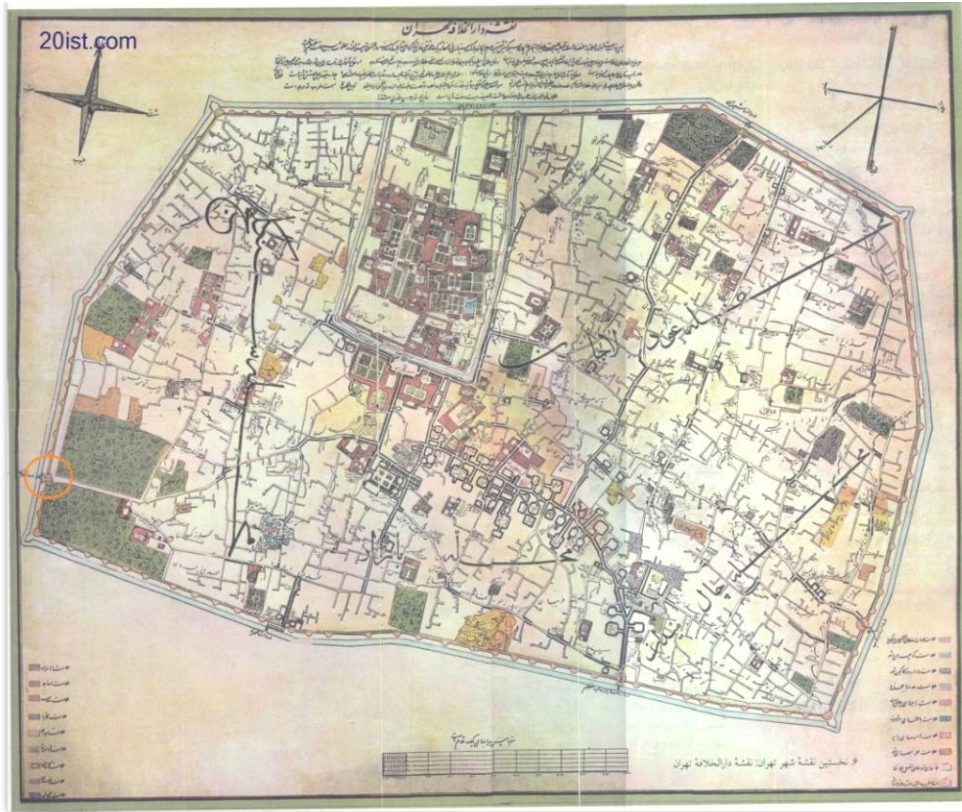


Figure 1. Tehran's Map, February 1854. The Qazvin Gate is indicated by the red circle, from <http://www.kavehfarrokh.com/news/maps-and-photos-of-old-tehran-1826-1900/>

### 3.2. New City

As I will show below through entries from two published diaries from the early twentieth century, the area behind Qazvin Gate was recognized with the name *Shahr-e Now* (SN). The name itself has some textual connotations; the word *Shahr* means city and *Now* means new.

Eyn ol-Saltane (1872–1946), a Qajar prince, who resolutely kept a journal for sixty years, once made a note on the establishment of a workhouse in Shahr-e Now:

January 26, 1918

In Tehran, they opened a workhouse in Shahr-e Now, in the building of Emad-ol Hozour—merci of God to his soul. Shah and people have devoted lots of money [for this workhouse], and almost one

thousand people are backed by this fund. The place is capable of holding up to two thousand people.

However, according to what I read, most of the poor people run away and do not like to go there.<sup>43</sup>

Additionally, in two notes in his journal, Mohammad Reza Kamarei (1866–1942), an Iranian political activist mentioned SN:

March 1918

I went to Shahr-e Now to visit E'temad ol-Eslam. ... I waited there until the sunset. Then I went towards Qazvin Gate to take a droshky.<sup>44</sup>

May 1920.

Woke up in the morning, drank some tea. ... Eyn ol-Malek came for a visit. We talked for some time. Then Khalkhali, Ardebili, and Haaj Reza Qoli came to take me to the country side, Shahr-e Now, to Khatib ol-Mamalek's place.<sup>45</sup>

In these accounts, Shahr-e Now is described as part of the outer city, somewhere close to the Qazvin Gate, and as the location of the newly-established workhouse. Yet, no reference has been made to SN as a red-light district.

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<sup>43</sup> Ghahraman Mirza Salvar, *Rouzname-Ye Khaterat-E Eyn ol-Saltane [Daily Journals of Eyn Ol-Saltane]*, Iraj Afshar (Tehran: Asatir, 1995), 5008.

<sup>44</sup> Kamarei Mohammad Reza, *Rouzname-Ye Khaterat-E Seyed Mohammad Kamarei [Daily Journals of Seyed Mohammad Kamarei]*, ed. Iraj Afshar (Tehran: Asatir, 2005), 111.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 1411.

### 3.3. Political Climate

Following the Great Game during the nineteenth century in Central Asia, Iran was confronted with the Russian and British great powers, due to its geographical position.<sup>46</sup> Some years prior to WWI, consequent to the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, Iran split into three zones: a Russian zone in the north, a British zone in the southeast, and a neutral zone, which was left to be governed by the Qajar court.<sup>47</sup> The agreement was signed between the Russian Empire and the British Empire in Saint Petersburg in September 1, 1907, without approval of the Qajar state or ratification from the Iranian Parliament. The nation and the state were informed about the negotiations and the agreement only on September 16<sup>th</sup>. The Shah and the Parliament declared that the Anglo-Russian Convention was against Iran's autonomy and that they would not accept it. However, at that point, the Qajar state was too fragile to resist the agenda of the convention.<sup>48</sup>

The country was in crisis and still divided when the last ruling member of the Qajar family, Ahmad Shah Qajar (1898–1930), was crowned on June 1914. A month later, WWI started. Ahmad Shah issued a statement and declared that Iran would not take any sides and

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<sup>46</sup> The term Great Game describes the conflicts and competitions between Russia and Great Britain in Central Asia from 1860s to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Before the 1860s, Great Britain was the dominant power in Central Asia; but for a number of reasons, including the invasion of Samarkand in 1968 by Russians, the British dominance was threatened. For more information about the Great Game and its impact on Iran see: Elena Andreeva, "Russo\_Iranian Relations up to the Bolshevik Revolution," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, January 6, 2014, accessed 8 March, 2015, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/russia-i-relations>.

<sup>47</sup> F. Kazemi, "Anglo-Persian Oil Company," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1985, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/anglo-persian-oil-company>.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

would remain a neutral country. Although Iran did not participate in the war, it served as a battleground for Ottoman, Russian and British troops.<sup>49</sup>

After the fall of the Russian Empire and the end of WWI, the British Empire considered the emergence of the Bolsheviks in the north of Iran as a threat to its interests in India. In this respect, Iran's northern boundaries were possibly used as a defensive wall, preventing the waves of the Red Revolution. Therefore, the more extensive the British powers could settle down in Tehran, the more efficient the wall would function. The so-called Anglo-Persian Agreement was signed between the British Acting Minister in Iran, Sir Percy Zachariah Cox (1864–1937), and the Iranian Prime Minister, Vosough-od Dowleh (1868–1950), in August 1919. The agreement was meant to “promote the progress and prosperity of Persia to the utmost,” but in reality it was turning Iran into a British protectorate. The agreement provided the British government with absolute authority over Iran's financial and military affairs.<sup>50</sup> In return, the British side “promised to loan Iran 2,000,000 sterling, and to assist in the construction of railroads, revision of tariffs, and collection of war compensation from third parties”.<sup>51</sup> Once more, the agreement was not ratified by the National Parliament—*Majlis*. Even the Shah was unaware of the ongoing

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<sup>49</sup> Elena Andreeva, “Russo\_Iranian Relations up to the Bolshevik Revolution,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 2014, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/russia-i-relations>.

<sup>50</sup> S. N. Fatemi, “The Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919,” *Iranica*, 1993.

<sup>51</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, ACLS Humanities E-Book (Princeton University Press, 1982), 114.

negotiations. Publicizing the agreement provoked anger and disturbance on national and international levels.<sup>52</sup>

The Anglo-Persian Agreement was officially annulled just after the 1921 Persian coup d'état. In February 1921, Reza Khan, an Iranian officer in the Qajar Cossack Brigade, occupied Tehran with his armed Cossacks.<sup>53</sup> Reza Khan forced the government to dissolve and to acknowledge his own appointment as Minister of War. He also ensured the Qajar court that Ahmad Shah would remain the king of Iran if he accepted Seyed Zia'odin Tabatabai, Reza Khan's comrade in the coup d'état, as Prime Minister.<sup>54</sup>

Yet, historians debate whether the 1921 coup d'état was a nationalist movement designed by two nationalists, namely Reza Khan and Tabatabai, or whether it was engineered mainly by British powers, and more particularly by William Edmund Ironside (1880–1959), the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, who was in Iran at the moment of the coup d'état.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> The Council of Peace in Paris protested to the secret treaty and its impact on Iran's autonomy. Russian and American states also expressed their dissatisfaction towards the agreement. For more information see: N. S. Fatemi, "The Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, December 15, 1993, accessed 8 March, 2015, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/anglo-persian-agreement-1919>.

<sup>53</sup> Cossack Brigade was part of the Iranian army, consisted of cavalry forces. The brigade formed in 1879 and it was emulated from the Russian Cossack Brigade. The Iranian Cossacks were trained by the Russian generals following the request of contemporary Qajar Shah, namely Naser o-din Shah. The brigade's commanders were Russian officers who enrolled in the Russian army as well. After the 1919 Agreement, The British officials succeeded to expel to Russian officers from the brigade. Reza Khan, with the rank of brigadier general was assigned to be the chief commander of the Cossack Brigade. Muriel Atkin, "Cossack Brigade," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, December 15, 1993, accessed 8 March, 2015, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cossack-brigade>

<sup>54</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 117–118.

<sup>55</sup> Iranian historian, Homa Katouzian, had offered a alternative reading of the 1921 coup d'etat. In his recent study supported by the archival documents in the UK, Katouzian argues that the British diplomats and officers did not have any desire nor to dismiss the Qajar dynasty, neither to empower Reza Khan, and the coup d'etat was the natural result of the local crises and the chaos in the entire country. Homa Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006).

### 3.4. Becoming a Red-light District

In his book, *Iran between two Revolutions*, historian Ervand Abrahamian starts the chapter on the rise of Reza Khan with a key sentence: “the transformation of Reza Khan to Reza Shah was slow but steady”.<sup>56</sup> Four years and nine months after the Persian coup d’état in 1921, Reza Khan ordered Majli-s Mo’asesan Iran [Constitute Assembly of Iran] to announce the Qajar Dynasty overthrown, and to pronounced himself as the king of Iran and the founder of the Pahlavi Dynasty.<sup>57</sup>

During the transition period of four years and nine mounts, Reza Khan made a number of bold and subtle moves and set the stage for establishing the Pahlavi dynasty. He suppressed a great number of political and intellectual characters in Tehran either by sending them in exile overseas or by having them executed. He also managed to curb and calm down the tribal rebellions in most of the country. Suspending dozens of newspapers and the Parliament temporarily, mobilizing the military forces and gaining authority over the governmental revenues were some of his others strategic maneuvers.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, Reza Khan tried to develop a network consisting of his potential supporters; Shi’a clerics were one of the targets. Throughout the period under discussion, the clerics possessed authority and popularity among all the social classes. In absence of an effective educational and juridical system, Iranians referred to clerics for a vast number of their day-to-day

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<sup>56</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 114.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

affairs. If clerics would have approved Reza Khan's agenda, he would have faced less resistance from the masses.<sup>59</sup>

In his recent book, *Bastarhaye Ta'sis-e Saltant-e Pahlavi* [The Sources of Pahlavi Monarchy's Establishment], Abadian, an Iranian historian, reflects on the emergence of SN as a red-light district and links it to Reza Khan's efforts to satisfy public opinion. Abadian writes that one year after the 1921 Persian coup, Sir Wald Smart, the First Secretary, and Reginald Bridgeman, the chargé of the British Embassy in Iran, were accused of visiting two prostitutes in Tehran. While the two British diplomats were forced by the British Embassy to leave Iran without any judicial review, those two prostitutes, Aziz Kashi and Amirzade Khanom, both Iranian, were arrested and whipped in the central square of Tehran, Meydan-e Toopkhane [Toopkhane Square] on March 7, 1922. Reza Khan, whose title now was Sardar-e Sepah [Commander of the Iranian Army], and the one who ordered the public punishment of the two prostitutes, achieved two major goals with this. First, by disclosing the identity of the British diplomats, he demonstrated his independence from the British state and second, by criminalizing and punishing the prostitutes, he obtained the support of Muslim communities and the clerics in Tehran, something he desperately needed for the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty. Following this event, Reza Khan ordered that all prostitutes from the city be gathered and sent out of the city, behind the south-eastern gate of Tehran, the Qazvin Gate.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> John. Foran, *Fragile Resistance: Social Transformation in Iran from 1500 to the Revolution* (Boulder: Westview Pr, 1993), 237.

<sup>60</sup> Hossein Abadian, *Bastar-Haye Ta'sis Saltant Pahlavi [The Sources of Establishment of Pahlavi Monarchy]* (Tehran: Mo'asese-ye Pazhuheshha-ye Siasi, 2011), 134–135.



Abadian's account makes sense in terms of explaining Reza Khan's intentions regarding the public punishment of prostitutes and their further exile out of Tehran. Moreover, Abadian's sources support the story about whipping Aziz Kashi and Amirzade Khanom.<sup>61</sup> However, another source allows me to argue that SN was already functioning as a red-light district in Tehran some years prior to the rise of Reza Khan during the early 1930s.

Hasan E'zam Qodsi (1890–1977), Iranian political activist and parliament representative, provides a different account for the emergence of SN in his only book, *Khaterat-e Man* [My Journals], published in 1964. He writes:

In June 1908, Mohammad Ali Shah [Qajar contemporary king] moved to Baq-e Shah [King Garden]. The royal court was not situated in the city anymore. The Cossacks and soldiers camped around the King Garden.

King garden was located in south of the Qazvin Gate. Shortly after the Shah settled there, [...] the district became residential; several shops and a public baths were built there. From all groups, people started to move from the city [Tehran] towards the district; and that is the reason why the district was called Shahr-e Now [new city].

Mohammad Ali Shah strictly banned any disturbance to be caused from the militants towards the residents in the district.

Qajars Alley. Inside the city, there was an alley called Qajars alley or Qajars district. In this alley, all the houses were belonged to the prostitutes. The former king [Mozafar od-Din Shah] tried to expel the residents of the alley and move them elsewhere, but his efforts were not successful.

At this point [sometime after 1908], SN was expanded, and the officials considered there the best place to resettle the prostitutes of Qajars Alley. The princes discussed the issue with Shah and alarmed him

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<sup>61</sup> Mohamad Taqi Bahar, *Tarikh-E Ahzab-E Siasi-E Iran [History of Political Parties in Iran]* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1944), 234.

that the militants might annoy the families in SN district, since it already had happened once or twice. They suggested deporting the Qajars Alley's prostitutes to SN in order to provide security for the families in SN. The Shah liked the idea and ordered to move the prostitutes to SN. The military vehicles relocated the prostitutes at once while people were standing in the streets and watching the incident.<sup>62</sup>

According to E'zam Qodsi, the act of moving the prostitutes of Qajar's Alley to the newly-established town behind Qazvin Gate was motivated by two means: first, excluding the prostitutes from the urban environment of Tehran and "purifying" the public sphere of the capital, and second, securing the chastity of the so-called decent women who were living in SN. It is interesting how the potential threat from the stationed soldiers in SN, namely their sexual desires, supposedly was brought under control by moving the prostitutes into the district.

Mohamed Ali Shah was deposed on July 1909 and therefore the above incident had to have happened sometime between June 1908 and July 1909. Qodsi was an eyewitness of his account and I therefore think more reasonable to trust his suggested date rather than Abadian's.

In fact, in several sources, the Qajars Alley and SN are represented and discussed as the same district. Doing so in his book *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, William Floor even provides his readers with an explanation regarding the name of the district: "earlier Shahr-e Now had been known as Mahalleh-ye Qajar [Qajar district], because most of the Madams of the prostitutes were Qajar women."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Hasan Ezam Qodsi, *Khaterat-E Man: Tarix-E Sad Saley-E Iran [My Diaries: 100-Year History of Iran]* (Tehran: Karang, 1963), 203.

<sup>63</sup> Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, 247.

As it is related to Abadian's account, the establishment of SN following the incident of whipping the prostitutes, can be interpreted as a political usage of prostitutes. In this sense, deporting the prostitutes out of Tehran, was more of a political maneuver to gain support from the clerics who were not happy with the existence of prostitutes in Tehran.

E'zam Qodsi's explanation, "purifying" the city from the prostitutes and sending them where the soldiers were stationed, perfectly matches the patterns of state-regulated prostitution which I explained in chapter 2.

### **3.5. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that, firstly, Shahr-e Now, Tehran's red-light district, was not located in a random area of the city of Tehran. Instead, it was initially and deliberately located outside the gates of the city, in order to be hidden away from the public eye as much as possible. According to Abadian's and E'zam Qodsi's accounts, state officials apparently were not against prostitution itself. However, they decided to deport prostitutes out of Tehran, because they were aware of public dissatisfaction with prostitution. This theme, namely regulation of prostitution away from the public eye, will appear repeatedly in the following chapters.

Secondly, I have presented two narratives that shed light on the circumstances that led SN to be a concentration zone for prostitution. Abadian's narrative suggests that SN started to function as a red-light district consequent to a political maneuver made by Reza Khan in 1922 to gain the clerics' support. In this sense, gathering the prostitutes and deporting them to a suburban area, namely SN, can be interpreted as an action of state officials based on political motivation.

This topic, the political usage of SN's women, in chapter 5 will be discussed once more in a different context and related to the 1953 Coup d'état.

Finally, by analyzing E'zam Qodsi's account, I have showed that the establishment of SN, which he dated back to 1909, was associated with the act of "purifying" Tehran from prostitutes, and deporting them to where the soldiers were stationed. This theorizing of E'zam Qodsi's account is a fitting introduction for the next chapter, where I emphasize that further, during the Pahlavi period, the regulation of prostitution in SN was systematically backed by the state and served military purposes.

#### 4. Shahr-e Now 1925–1941: the Military and State Feminism

Following the fall of the Qajar Dynasty in December 1925, the central government was assigned to Reza Khan, the Prime Minister at the time. A few months later, in April 1926, Reza Khan crowned himself and renamed himself to Reza Shah, and the Pahlavi Dynasty was officially established.<sup>64</sup> Reza Khan, the founder of the Pahlavi Dynasty and the first Pahlavi king, ruled Iran for sixteen years (1925–1941). The new regime brought along new political-social agendas and perspectives. This chapter will be about SN during the Reza Shah period.

At the beginning of this chapter, in section 4.1, I will give a brief overview of the Reza Shah period and the reforms and changes he instituted. Then, I will focus on two main reforms: in section 4.2, I discuss the military reforms, and in section 4.3, I focus on the women's emancipation project. In this chapter, I mainly explain how these two reforms were connected to the history of SN. My first major argument in this chapter is that the regulation of prostitution in SN was backed by the state, and for the advantage of its military. In this part, I use Stephanie Limoncelli's theorization of state-regulated prostitution to explain the patterns of prostitution in SN. This part will show how the state, by allocating medical care for prostitutes, was aiming to provide its soldiers with safe sexual services. My second finding, explained in section 4.3, is that state feminism in this period implicitly backed the state's agenda for the regulation of prostitution. By analyzing the minutes and resolutions of the Second Eastern Women's Congress in 1932, hosted by the Pahlavi state in Tehran, I show that the Iranian feminists attending the congress shared the same opinion on prostitution as the state. Further, in section 4.4, I explore the

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<sup>64</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge, UK : Cambridge University Press, 2008, n.d.), 65.

pro-regulation approach of Iranian feminists at the Congress, connect it to the state's women's emancipation project, and theorize this relation.

At the end of this chapter, in section 4.5, there is a minimal descriptive sketch of SN made out of various available materials, in order to help the reader imagine SN more comprehensibly.

#### 4.1. General Overview of the Political Climate

There are legends—sometimes contradictory—around Reza Shah's figure. He is portrayed as illiterate, as multilingual, as brutal towards his inferiors, and as generous to his soldiers by paying them an allowance from his own pocket.<sup>65</sup> Apart from these semi-truthful accounts, historians do not disagree about the fact that Reza Shah was rootless. He and the dynasty he established were not associated to any tribe, the way Qajars or Zands or Safavids were, neither did he come from an aristocrat background.<sup>66</sup> Pahlavi, the name he chose both as his last name and the title of his dynasty, was the name of an ancient Iranian language.<sup>67</sup> He did not have any kind of legacy from his ancestors. Reza Khan started his career as a private in the Cossack Brigade when he was a teenager.<sup>68</sup> In section 3.3, I touched upon Reza Khan's progress from an officer in the Cossack Brigade to becoming the founder of the Pahlavi Dynasty.

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<sup>65</sup> Sadeq Adibi, *Si Sal Ba Reza Shah Dar Qazaq Khane va Qoshun [Thirty Years with Reza Shah in Barracks and Field]* (Tehran: Alborz, 2006).

<sup>66</sup> Almost all of the independent dynasties in the Iranian history after the arrival of Islam were originally a Tribe. The concept of aristocracy in the urban areas, and its relation to power and the central state, did not exist in Iranian context before the Pahlavi period. For instance, Qajar, Zand and Safavid, the three dynasties before the Pahlavi, were primary tribes in different regions of Iran. For more information see:

<sup>67</sup> Peter G. Lewis, "The Politics of Iranian Place-Names," *Geographical Review*, 1982, 99.

<sup>68</sup> Adibi, *Si Sal Ba Reza Shah Dar Qazaq Khane va Qoshun [Thirty Years with Reza Shah in Barracks and Field]*, 46.

Reza Shah is described as “a man of few words, he had little time for rhetoric, philosophy, or political theory. The main ideological baggage he carried stressed order, discipline and state.”<sup>69</sup> His ultimate goal was to build a powerful central state in a large and diverse country, full of ethnicities and tribal groups with different languages and cultures. This goal was reachable only through a series of unification strategies.

Just within the first five years of Reza Shah’s state, under the supervision of his team, fundamental changes and reforms occurred all over the country. It became mandatory for all to have a “family name,” a record of family names was started together with the issuing of birth certificates, modern educational and juridical systems replaced the old versions administrated by clerics, Persian became Iran’s official language and mandatory in schools, and the national railway started to function, connecting the country from north to south.<sup>70</sup>

However, the major reform of Reza Shah was reforming and modernizing the army.<sup>71</sup> Reza Shah’s power did not rely on any political party or the Parliament; instead, he invested as much as possible in the army and military equipments. Abrahamian mentions that “Reza Shah built his new state on two main pillars: the military and the bureaucracy,”<sup>72</sup> John Foran, American sociologist, in his book *Fragile Resistance: Social Transformation in Iran from 1500 to the Revolution* (1993), however, indicates three pillars: “The army, the bureaucracy, and the

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<sup>69</sup> Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 66.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 67–73.

<sup>71</sup> Foran, *Fragile Resistance*, 220–227; Stephanie Cronin, *Soldiers, Shahs and Subalterns in Iran: Opposition, Protest and Revolt, 1921-1941* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 66–72.

<sup>72</sup> Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 66.

government proper (cabinet and Majlis).<sup>73</sup> The army, one of the common pillars in both accounts, is important for this thesis.

## 4.2. Tehran and Its Soldiers

During the early 1920s, at the beginning of Reza Khan's rise, there were 126,000 men serving in the army. By the end of Reza Khan's rule, this number had reached 400,000. This number was extremely high for a country in which there lived less than five million economically active men.<sup>74</sup> Approximately forty percent of the national revenue was spent on military expenses.<sup>75</sup> Reza Pahlavi justified this unusual prioritization and focus on the army by referring to the tribal riots all around the country. He convinced his supporters that provincial military divisions would defeat any regional rebellion and secure national unity.<sup>76</sup> Funding for the army mainly came from taxation. Moreover, a large amount of oil revenues was devoted to buying military equipment and the establishment of weaponry industries.<sup>77</sup>

In 1924, Reza Khan handed the conscription bill to the Parliament. Back then, Reza Khan was still serving as the Minister of War for the Qajar state. The bill was ratified within the same year. According to this law, all male Iranians above 21 years old must serve two full years in the national army. The army started to recruit soldiers "first from the peasantry, then from the tribes,

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<sup>73</sup> Foran, *Fragile Resistance*, 221.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 221–222.

<sup>75</sup> Stephanie Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran, 1921-1926* (I.B.Tauris, 1997), 118.

<sup>76</sup> Cronin, *Soldiers, Shahs and Subalterns in Iran*, 21.

<sup>77</sup> Foran, *Fragile Resistance*, 221.



and finally from the urban areas.”<sup>78</sup> Regulation of family names and issuance of birth certificates, derived from the conscription law, were instruments for official identification and registration of Iranians.

The literature on Reza Shah and the establishment of the Pahlavi regime has often discussed the military pillar. The British historian, Stephanie Cronin, in her book *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran, 1910-1926* (2006), argues that the Pahlavi regime in fact established itself based on the basis of the powerful and reformed army, and that the other factors like political parties, the Parliament, and reforming the bureaucratic system were secondary for the building of the modern Iranian state.<sup>79</sup>

In her book, *The Politics of Trafficking*, Limoncelli explains how the presence of a high number of men in metropolitan areas as military troops or male laborers, was crucial for nation-state building projects during the late nineteenth and twentieth century. She writes: “In both metropolitan and colonial areas, brothels were set up by military officials in port cities and garrison towns to service military men, and then extended to the civilian population in order to service laborers.”<sup>80</sup> Limoncelli’s explanation also applies to the rise of the modern army in Iran, more particularly in Tehran, and its possible relations with SN. In section 3.4, based on E’zam Qodsi’s account, I showed how the presence of soldiers in SN was the reason for moving the Qajar’s Alley women to SN. One can suppose that with the rise of Reza Shah and the military reform, the regulation of prostitution in SN became more systematic, as will I discuss below.

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<sup>78</sup> Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 68.

<sup>79</sup> Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran, 1921-1926*, 13–15.

<sup>80</sup> Limoncelli, *The Politics of Trafficking*, 22.

The statistics regarding the military troops in Tehran during the Pahlavi period show how, with the rise of the Pahlavi regime and the mass recruitment of soldiers, the military population in Tehran increased. Reviewing the statistics from the period under review (1925–1941) is informative but also striking: in Tehran, a city with 540,087 habitants in 1939, there were 50,000 men under arms. In other words, about one tenth of the population in Tehran consisted of the military population.<sup>81</sup> Cronin states that the central army division, the division located in Tehran, was particularly important to Reza Shah:

It had grown increasingly clear since 1921 that the central division was especially important politically to Reza Khan, indeed it was estimated that half the Tehran garrison had to be retained in the capital at the times for political reasons, and he always [...] paid close attention to its condition. It was numerically by far the largest division in the army and was the best trained and equipped, putting on many impressive displays at reviews held before the shah and foreign dignitaries in the capital.<sup>82</sup>

In addition to the above-mentioned records about the high population of military troops in Tehran, two of my interviewees, both of them social workers who worked in SN before the 1979 Revolution, mentioned during their interviews that the soldiers in Tehran were among the regular visitors of SN. One of them, Mr. Shams, who also did his military service in Tehran during the 1960s, in response to the question of how he learnt about SN for the first time, told me that during their weekly meeting at the military base, their commander would warn them about venereal disease in SN and how they should be careful. He also added that it was easy to

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<sup>81</sup> Habibollah Zanjani, “Jam’iyat-E Tehran va Ayandeye An [Tehran’s Population and Its Future],” *Mohitshenasi*, no. 15 (1989): 24; Hossein Foroudast, *Zohour va ’Oful Saltanat-E Pahlavi [Emergence and Fall of Pahlavi Monarch]*, vol. 1 (Tehran: ‘Etela’at, 2000), 76–77.

<sup>82</sup> Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran, 1921-1926*, 113–114.

recognize the solders in SN because of their high and tight haircuts.<sup>83</sup> My other interviewee, Ms. Arshad, a social worker who did her internship in SN during the 1970s, told me that she got to know about SN through her older brother who told her that his comrades in the army often went there.<sup>84</sup>

In addition to the statistics and the oral accounts, two archival documents enable me to apply Limoncelli's theorization to the case of SN, and argue that SN was functioning as a red-light district backed by the state and in favor of the military troops in Tehran. One of the documents is a petition that I have collected from the Document Center of Iran Parliament in the summer of 2014. The petition was signed in December 1933 by some landlords who had properties in SN. According to this petition, the Ministry, some years prior to 1933—it is not clear how many years exactly—had asked the local property owners in SN to give their houses up for rent to the providers, leave the district, and find accommodation elsewhere in Tehran:

We are a group of residents and landlords of houses in Tehran's SN. We inherited our houses from our fathers or bought them when the district was still chaste. Some years ago, due to the implicit request of the glorious Interior Ministry, we moved out from the district and left our homes for prostitutes. During the first years that all the prostitutes were forced to live in SN, and we could manage to charge them with the rental fees [...] it was affordable to find accommodations in the city center with the same purchased money. However, recently, especially this year, the prices are getting higher and higher, and we cannot afford accommodation expenses. [...] We, a group of innocents and obedient people to the [Interior] Ministry orders, now are becoming homeless because of a group of prostitutes. [...] Is it fair

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<sup>83</sup> Abdol Ali Sham in discussion with author, July 2013.

<sup>84</sup> Leila Arshad in interview with author, June 2013.

that some people get sacrificed for the sake of the lustfulness of prostitutes? Is it fair that landlords desperately turn into tenants?<sup>85</sup>

Why did the Interior Ministry propose, implicitly, the property owners to leave the district? I argue that this proposal was actually made as an effort to homogenize the district, to dedicate one part of the city to commercial sex, and separate that part from the rest.

A document testifying to the existence of a sexual health hospital in SN also supports my argument. The document is a letter, signed in 1940 by the head of the Medical Department, French physician Charles Oberlin (1895–1960), and sent to the Ministry of Culture, Office of Hospitals Affairs. In this letter, Oberlin requests the demolition of Nahid hospital and referral of SN's women to another hospital. According to this document, Nahid hospital was established in 1939 in SN. In the letter, Oberlin states that the hospital is small and does not have the capacity for all the diseased women.<sup>86</sup>

If the Interior Ministry encouraged the property owners to move out of the SN district, and leave their houses for the providers, and if the Ministry of Culture devoted some budget for a sexual health hospital in SN, it means that Reza Shah's state was indeed operated strategically regarding SN. In this sense, SN was not an abandoned district forgotten by the government. Instead, based on the above-discussed statistics, the oral accounts, and the two archival documents, I suggest that SN was a site for state-regulated prostitution. Similar to other

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<sup>85</sup> "Mavard-E Mashruhe-Ye Malekin-E Shahr-E Now [Petition from SN's Landowners]" (Petition, Tehran, September 19, 1933), 28/84, Document Center of Iran Parliament.

<sup>86</sup> Charles Oberlin, "Enhelale Bimarestan-E Nahid [Demolition of Nahid Clinic]" (Letter, Tehran, September 14, 1940), 224/Alef, National Archive of Iran.

modernizing nation states, the Pahlavi regime needed the sexual labor of SN's women to satisfy the sexual desires of the military men.

If we accept this interpretation, one may ask how come that the literature about the rise of the modern army during Reza Shah's period has made no reference to the military brothels and the state regulation of prostitution?<sup>87</sup> Feminist scholar, Cynthia Enloe explains how "military bases and prostitution have been assumed to 'go together'"<sup>88</sup> in her book, *Bananas, Beaches & Bases* (1990). She explains that there have always been some policies behind this supposedly self-evident relation, and that "these policies have been so successfully made invisible."<sup>89</sup> In this sense, the invisibility of the state policies regarding the regulation of prostitution is not something unique to Iran. Regarding the Iranian context, in the official history of the Pahlavi regime and their published documents, as far as I researched, there is no record of the state's agenda towards commercial sex. Even the Criminal Code, ratified by the Parliament in January 1926, did not acknowledge prostitution. However, it did criminalize "acts against personal and public chastity."<sup>90</sup>

It is possible to partly explain the invisibility of the state's strategies towards SN by connecting it to the state's women's emancipation project. While the state was advertising women's emancipation and promising women better opportunities, some women were merely

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<sup>87</sup> For instance the following scholarly productions: Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran, 1921-1926*; Foran, *Fragile Resistance*; Homa Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis* (I. B. Tauris ; New York, 2000).

<sup>88</sup> Cynthia H. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches & Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 81.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ali Falahati, "Rouspigari va Sokout-E Sangin-E Qanoun [Prostitution and the Heavy Silence of the Law]," *Motale'at-E Rahbordi Zanan*, no. 22 (2005): 23.

defined as “prostitute,” and excluded from the newly-offered concept of “Iranian woman.” Subchapters 4.3 and 4.4 will discuss this explanation in more detail.

### 4.3. Women’s Emancipation Project

By the 1930s the Pahlavi state was well established. Therefore, matters beyond diplomatic affairs and tribal rebellions became important for the central state. In this phase, the Pahlavi state was seeking for strategies to modernize Iran further. Women’s emancipation could be a fitting project for this modernization plan. According to Paidar, women’s emancipation was more than a fitting project: “women’s integration into social life [...] was considered to be the hallmark of modernity and essential for progress in the country.”<sup>91</sup>

However, before Reza Shah’s rise to power, a movement had already been initiated by independent feminists. Hamideh Sedghi, feminist scholar, in her book *Women and Politics in Iran* (2007), explains that the women participating in the pre-Pahlavi women’s movement were mostly coming from privileged backgrounds. Thanks to their families, they had had access to education and financial comfort. The brand of feminism, with a few exceptions, was concentrated in Tehran, and its struggles embodied several women’s organizations and several short-lived women’s magazines.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 104.

<sup>92</sup> Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 88.

Numerous scholars have debated why women's emancipation became so important and central for Reza Shah's state. Amin argues that Reza Shah became interested in women's emancipation largely after his travel to Turkey in 1934:

[Reza Shah] was very impressed with the social reforms that were being carried out in that country [Turkey] by Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk, the first president of Turkey (1881–1938)]. Women were participating in education and employment in an unprecedented fashion, a ban was proposed on women's veiling but it did not result in legal sanctions, and women were also participating in local elections and granted the right to elect and be elected in 1934, and the Turkish Civil Code abolished polygamy and granted women divorce rights in 1926.<sup>93</sup>

Nonetheless, it seems that the Pahlavi state had already shown some attention to women's issues before 1934. Sending a delegate to the First Eastern Women Congress in 1930 and hosting the Second Eastern Women Congress in 1932 are the most significant examples of this earlier interest.

#### **4.3.1. Eastern Women's Congresses (1930 and 1932)**

The First Eastern Women Congress was held in Damascus in 1930. In her article, "Between Nationalism and Feminism: The Eastern Women's Congresses of 1930 and 1932," Charlotte Weber, names Nour Hamda, a Lebanese women's activist, as the main initiator of both Congresses. For the first Congress, delegates from Afghanistan, Australia, China, Egypt, the

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.; Amin makes the same point in his book: Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*, 84.

Hijaz, India, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Indonesia, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, and Turkey attended.<sup>94</sup> There were around 100 participants at the Congress, which lasted for four days. The sessions of the first Congress were mostly formed around the equality between women and men in marriage, education and labor.<sup>95</sup>

The consul general of Iran in Syria introduced Ghodsieh Ashraf (1889–1976) as Iran’s representative, to the secretariat of the first Congress. Ashraf, educated in Europe and the US, was fluent in Arabic and English. It is not clear what her speech was about, but Nour Hamda described it as “forceful” and “widely echoed.”<sup>96</sup> It is important to note that in 1930, when Ashraf presented her speech on behalf of Iranian woman in Damascus, she was not living in Iran. From 1927 to 1944, Ashraf studied and worked in Beirut and Nablus.<sup>97</sup> Given the fact that during the 1930s, there were a number of activists in Iran, actively participating in independent women’s organizations and magazines, sending Ashraf who was living abroad at the time, seems to be more of a political decision. In addition, during the Second Congress, which was held in 1932 in Iran, the only reference to Ashraf was made by Nour Hamda, the Syrian chair, and not by the other Iranian delegates.<sup>98</sup> This lack of connection between the Iranian delegates in the first and second Congress, as it appears in the minutes of the Second Congress, can also support the above–mentioned assumption.

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<sup>94</sup> Name of the all delegates has not been appeared in the literature on the Congress 1930 and 1932. In addition, the reason for the presence of Edith Glanville, the Australian delegate, according to the minutes of the second Congress, was that the core committee tended to increase its scope beyond the Asia. Qolamreza Salami and Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Nehzat-E Nesvan-E Sharq [Congress of Women of the East]* (Tehran: Shiraze, 2010), 176.

<sup>95</sup> Charlotte Weber, “Between Nationalism and Feminism: The Eastern Women’s Congresses of 1930 and 1932,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 4, no. 1 (2008): 88.

<sup>96</sup> Mahnaze A. da Silveira, “Ashraf, Ghodsieh,” *Iranica*, 2012, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ashraf-ghodsieh>.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Salami and Najmabadi, *Nehzat-E Nesvan-E Sharq [Congress of Women of the East]*, 37.



The second Congress took place in Tehran in 1932. According to Nour Hamda's account, Tehran was chosen to be the second Congress's host at the end of the first Congress. This decision was agreed upon by the delegates, because Iran was in the intersection of the Eastern countries and because it was formally independent from foreign regimes.<sup>99</sup>

The Iranian state accepted to host and organize the second Congress. Historian and collector of the documents of the Second Congress, Qolamreza Salami argues that hosting the Congress by the Pahlavi regime was mostly a political gesture to represent the Iranian state as liberal and progressive.<sup>100</sup>

The Ministry of Culture and Art asked Mansoure Afshar, head of Jam'iyat-e Nesvan-e Vatankhah [Patriotic Iranian Women's Association], an independent women's organization, to assist with the organizing of the Congress. Afshar came from a wealthy family, she had studied in Tbilisi and Istanbul and she knew Turkish, Russian and French.<sup>101</sup>

Sessions of the Congress took place from November 27 to December 2, 1932. Representatives from Australia, China, Egypt, Greece, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Japan, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, and Zanzibar attended the Congress in Tehran.<sup>102</sup> Reviewing The Second Eastern Women's Congress is important for this thesis because prostitution was one of the discussed topics there.

Some years prior to the first and second Congresses, in 1928, Mehrtaj Rakhshan, an Iranian teacher, wrote an article about forced prostitution in a monthly magazine called *Alam-e Nesvan*

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 19–20.

<sup>101</sup> Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 42.

<sup>102</sup> Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 82–83.

[Women's World]. The topic of Rakhshan's article was radical for her time and the background she was coming from. Rakhshan's father was a religious and liberal merchant who let his daughters, Rakhshan and her sister, study in the American school in Tehran. Rakhshan was the first Iranian Muslim girl to graduate from the American school.<sup>103</sup> In her published article in 1928, Rakhshan makes a difference between those women who were essentially "prostitutes" and those women who were deceived and thereby fallen into prostitution. She called upon the readers to rescue this second group by initiating a rehabilitation center. She also referred to SN and suggested that the budget for the rehabilitation center be raised either from the public taxation or from the small enterprises created for "fallen women," like tail workshops that produced military uniforms.<sup>104</sup>

In 1932, Rakhshan was one of the presenters at the Congress. During one of the sessions, she proposed the rehabilitation of "fallen women." Following Rakhshan's speech, the delegates discussed the issue. They came up with two categories: open prostitution and hidden prostitution. With open prostitution, they referred to the selling of sexual services in brothels, and by hidden prostitution, they were addressing the sale of sexual services in the streets. The Congress participants believed that open prostitution should take place only in suburban areas and not in the cities, and that hidden prostitution should be prohibited. Eventually, the Congress added the following resolution with two articles to its agenda about prostitution:

We have to try to limit open prostitution to particular locations, and hidden prostitution must be banned. The gentlewomen should try to prevent this corruption to transmit into the families. There

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<sup>103</sup> Salami and Najmabadi, *Nehzat-E Nesvan-E Sharq [Congress of Women of the East]*, 313–329.

<sup>104</sup> Mehrtaj Rakhshan, "Khane-Ye Omid [House of Hope]," *Alam-E Nesvan*, November 1928 quoted in Qolamreza Salami and Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Nehzat-E Nesvan-E Sharq [Congress of Women of the East]*, 309–312.

should be some female cops to go around, and check the baths and entertaining centers [...] for hidden prostitution; if they find any trace of hidden prostitution they should report to the police office [...].

Article 20 [of the Second Eastern Women's Congress]: hidden prostitution is banned and female cops should be trained and recruited to discover these sorts of acts.

Article 21 [of the Second Eastern Women's Congress]: Public centers and workhouses must be established for those women who have been deceived and have been fallen into prostitution.<sup>105</sup>

A'zam Solatani, one of the Iranian delegates made a slight reference to SN: "About open prostitution, the content of the article is already practiced in our country. This group [prostitutes] is already moved to the suburb, and receives medical examinations. More efforts will be paid to this issue in the future."<sup>106</sup>

Studying the 1932 Congress's resolutions can give us some of ideas about how prostitution was justified by the attending feminists: Open prostitution should be distanced from the city centers, prostitutes of that category should receive medical care, and women who had been deceived and who had fallen into prostitution should be rescued by rehabilitation centers.

It is possible that the records of the Second Congress in Persian, *Nehzat-E Nesvan-E Sharq* [Congress of Eastern Women] collected by Qolamreza Salami, Iranian historian, are not representative for all the discussed issues during the sessions. However, based on the records that I had access to, the Congress resolution about prostitution is problematic. Through the statistics that Limoncelli presents in her book, *Politics of Trafficking*, we know that The International Abolitionist Federation, during the interwar period had branches in Egypt and India. As I already explained in chapter 2, The International Abolitionist Federation was a feminist organization

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<sup>105</sup> Salami and Najmabadi, *Nehzat-E Nesvan-E Sharq [Congress of Women of the East]*, 149.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

combating against prostitution. In this sense, supposedly, the Egyptian delegate Hanifa Kuri, and the Indian delegate—her name is not mentioned—were aware of the international anti-prostitution combat. However, there is no hint in the records of the Congress to whether they made a point about the abolitionist movement. The resolution of the Congress regarding prostitution is clearly a pro-regulation resolution; distancing prostitution to the suburban areas and medicalizing it. I suggest two possible ways to explain the pro-regulation approach: First, as I have already mentioned in this chapter, the Iranian women’s activists in this period mainly came from elite backgrounds. In this sense, it is possible to imagine that they cared little about women from lower social classes, including prostitutes. Second, probably these women were assuming by regulation of prostitution in distant areas that other women in the society would be protected from the sexual danger of men.

The important point about the Iranian delegates in the 1932 Congress is that they were approaching the question of prostitution similar to the state did. This similar approach will be discussed in detail under the heading 4.4.

#### **4.3.2. The Official Start of State Feminism (1935)**

On May 12, 1935, the Minister of Education, Ali Asghar Hekmat (1892–1980), invited a group of students of the Women’s Teacher Training College and some other activist women to a meeting. They were told that they were invited to be the pioneers of Iranian women’s emancipation under the supervision of Pahlavi state, and that they had a mission to initiate an organization for this

aim. It was also stated that the president of the organization would be Shams Pahlavi, Reza Shah's daughter.<sup>107</sup>

Discussing the structure of the Ladies' Center, Sanasarian in her book *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran* explains that the Ladies' Center was mainly "comprised of middle- to upper class women from Tehran and, to lesser extent, other major cities of Iran." She continues to explain that the women who participated in the activities initiated by the Ladies' Center were educated and came from wealthy and politically powerful families.<sup>108</sup>

The agenda of the new organization, Kanoun-e Banovan [the Ladies' Center], was clear, focused, and financially funded:

The Ladies' Center of Iran is instituted under the honorary presidency of H.I.H Princess Shams Pahlavi and the patronage and supervision of the Ministry of Education, for the purpose of achieving the undermentioned objectives:

To provide adult women with mental and moral education, and with instruction in housekeeping and child rearing on a scientific basis, by means of lectures, publications, adult classes, etc.

1. To promote physical training through appropriate sports in accordance with the principle of health preservation.
2. To create charitable institutions for the support of indigent mothers and children having no parent or guardian.
3. To encourage simplicity of life-style and use of Iran-made goods.

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<sup>107</sup> Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 83; Badr ol-Molouk Bamdad, *Zan-E Irani: Az Enqelab-E Mashrutiat Ta Enqelab-E Sefid [Iranian Woman: From the Constitutional Revolution until the White Revolution]* (Tehran: Ebn-Sina, 1968), 89.

<sup>108</sup> Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 48–49.

4. This center has the legal personality in accordance with article 587 of the Commerce Code, and its president is the legal representative of the center.<sup>109</sup>

One of the first results of the state-sponsored women's emancipation project was a limitation of independent feminism. Women's organizations and journals, gradually, either got suspended by the state or were absorbed into the state's women's emancipation project. For instance, Sedighe Dowlatabadi (1882–1961), one of the leading feminists, initiator of *Sherkat-e Khavatin-e Isfahan* [Women's Association of Isfahan] (1918) and *Zaban-e Zanan* magazine [Voice of Women] (1919), became director of the Ladies' Center in 1936.<sup>110</sup> Feminist scholar Sedghi argues that those earlier feminists who started to work under the supervision of the state either feared to be threatened by the regime if they did not cooperate, or hoped that their feminist projects could progress easier through cooperation with the regime.<sup>111</sup> I suggest that the establishment of the Ladies' Center can be considered as the official beginning of state feminism in Iran. Figure 2, group portrait of the Ladies' Center members.

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<sup>109</sup> Badr al-Mulūk Bāmdād, *From Darkness Into Light: Women's Emancipation in Iran* (Mazda Pub, 1997), 93–94 quoted in Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, Cambridge Middle East Studies 1 (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 104–105..

<sup>110</sup> Sanasarian, *Jonbesh-E Hoqouq-E Zanan Dar Iran: Toqyan, Ofoul va Sarkoub Az 1280 Ta Enqelab-E 1357 [The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini]*; Hamideh Sedghi, "Feminist Movements in the Pahlavi Period," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1995, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/feminist-movements-iii>.

<sup>111</sup> Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*, 84.



**Figure 2. Core Committee of the Ladies' Center, 1935,**  
from: <http://www.hakimi.me/Family/psuffragettes.htm>

From the beginning of its activity, the Center took some steps in order to provide women with more opportunities for education and employment. However, the main plan of the organization was to promote unveiling. The Center defined the veil as the main obstacle for women's liberation. The members of the Center were encouraged to join its meetings unveiled. Members were promised protection by police guards while appearing in the city unveiled.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

Iran's mandatory unveiling law came into force on January 8, 1936. The day was celebrated and added to the national calendar as "Rouz-e Rahayiye Zan" [Women's Emancipation Day].<sup>113</sup> Reza Shah himself appeared at the ceremony at the Women's Teacher Training College, accompanied by his unveiled wife and two daughters (Figure 3), and made a speech stating that January 8 would be the beginning of a new era in Iranian women's lives. Civil servants were provided with loans to buy their wives new cloths, veiled women were banned from entering the public baths, stores, hospitals and schools, and veiled women were forbidden to use a taxi or droshky.<sup>114</sup> The unveiling law was the backbone of state policies to increase women's integration into the public sphere. Unveiling was not solely a shift in dress code, but a fundamental change, shaking the conventional gender norms.



**Figure 3. Reza Shah, his wife and their daughters in Emancipation Day, 1936, from: <http://nedaehaftkel.ir/index.php/farhangi-honari/3599-2014-10-25-20-11-11>**

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 83\_86.

<sup>114</sup> Afsaneh Roushan, "Mas'ale-Ye Kashf-E Hejab Be Ravayat-E Asnad-E Ketabkhane-Ye Majles Shoray-E Eslami [Unveiling Issue through the Documents of National Parliament Archive]," *Payam-E Baharestan* 2, no. 6 (2009): 861.



#### 4.4. Women in the Public Sphere: Corrupted, Emancipated

The unveiling law immediately ignited a great deal of anxiety among the public. The law targeted every single woman in all Iranian families. Some women chose not to appear in public anymore.<sup>115</sup> In this sense, unveiling, instead of paving the way for women to participate in public life, generated limitations for some of them, and made them even more stuck in the domestic sphere. Some scholars argue that the unveiling law led to a religious clash between the state and the nation; the contradiction of the law with the Islamic moral provoked the nation's religious emotions.<sup>116</sup>

Amin (2002) suggests another analysis of the anxieties during the post-unveiling era. He uses the term “male guardianship”, men's authority over women in order to control/ save them. Amin argues that, after the unveiling law, women were encouraged to show up in public and participate in public life while they were guaranteed protection from the state. Men's manhood was no longer crucial for protecting women's safety and chastity:

The general principle of male guardianship was preserved in the symbolic figure of Reza Shah as the great father. He could not be a stranger and remove the veil, and he could not be a sexual intimate like a husband. He could also not be a peer, and so he would be the supreme patriarch overseeing the moral guidance of his extended *national* (the private space of a family home). One of the imperatives of male guardianship that was originally safeguarded by the veil—that women would keep themselves modest

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<sup>115</sup> Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 157.

<sup>116</sup> Roushan, “Mas'ale-Ye Kashf-E Hejab Be Ravayat-E Asnad-E Ketabkhane-Ye Majles Shoray-E Eslami [Unveiling Issue through the Documents of National Parliament Archive]”; Hamid Basirat Manesh, “Ravande Kashfe Hejab va Vakonesh-E Rohaniyoun [Unveiling Process and Clerics Reaction],” *Tarikh Mo'aser Iran*, no. 2 (1988): 73–92.

and sexually unavailable to strangers—was now to be preserved by an internalized sense of morality instilled through education.<sup>117</sup>

I suggest adding another explanation for the anxiety around unveiling and women's presence in the public realm. Before the enforced unveiling, some women were already actively present in the public, interacting with men, namely *Motrebs* and “prostitutes.”<sup>118</sup> Motreb was a term for a musician, singer or dancer who performed in joyful events, not very professionally but in an entertaining manner.<sup>119</sup> Usually, women participated in motrebi bands beside men. The representation of motreb women, whether in photographs or in textual materials, is very similar to the representation of prostitutes. Motreb women are represented unveiled and physically close to their male colleagues, or other men (Figure 4 and 5).<sup>120</sup> Motrebi music, generally speaking, was associated with low culture:

People were afraid to even admit that they enjoyed listening to *motreb* “given the force of Islamic proscriptions and social etiquette.” For instance, Yusef Forutan, the aristocrat and master of the setar [an Iranian musical instrument], always refused to be photographed with his instrument in his hand, “fearing that he might be mistaken for a motreb.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*, 92.

<sup>118</sup> Thinking about motreb besides prostitute as public woman is not originally my own idea; Dr. Staci Scheiwiller, through the seminar I had with her in University of Vienna (Winter 2014), suggested me to think about the category of motreb too.

<sup>119</sup> Sasan Fatemi, “Music, Festivity, and Gender in Iran from the Qajar to the Early Pahlavi Period,” *Iranian Studies* 38, no. 3 (September 1, 2005): 339.

<sup>120</sup> There is a limited literature on the overlaps of female motrebs and prostitutes in Safavid (1501–1736), Zand (1750–1794), and Qajar (1785–1925) periods: Rudi Matthee, “Prostitutes, Courtesans, and Dancing Girls: Women Entertainers in Safavid Iran,” in *Iran and Beyond*, ed. Rudi Matthee and Beth Baron (Costa Mesa, California, 2000), 121–150; Fatemi, “Music, Festivity, and Gender in Iran from the Qajar to the Early Pahlavi Period;” Anthony Shay, “Dance and Non-Dance: Patterned Movement in Iran and Islam,” *Iranian Studies* 28, no. 1/2 (January 1, 1995): 61–78.

<sup>121</sup> Ameneh Youssefzadeh, “Iran’s Regional Musical Traditions in the Twentieth Century: A Historical Overview,” *Iranian Studies* 38, no. 3 (September 1, 2005): 430.



**Figure 4. “Female entertainers and dancers in different groups during the late Qajar and early Pahlavi era.” From: Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies, <http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/1261A114.html>**

Moreover, it seems that the female motreb sometimes functioned as both entertainer and prostitute: “In the Safavid and Zandi periods groups that included dancer/prostitutes were held in high regard, to the extent that some European travelogues make mention of prostitutes and dancer-prostitutes who were quite wealthy.”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Fatemi, “Music, Festivity, and Gender in Iran from the Qajar to the Early Pahlavi Period,” 400.



**Figure 5. “Colonel Naqi Khan flirting with Taymur the dancer,” captioned anonymously on the back. From: digital archive of Women's World in Qajar Iran, <http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/1257A129.html>**

This is not to say that the rest of Iranian women were stuck in their homes. Teachers, midwives, bath keepers and tailors were other female groups with paid jobs in the society even before the women’s emancipation project. However, the rare and common point in being a motreb and a provider was that these two groups interacted with men or that their clients were men. They were approachable, and their physical availability was the condition of their professional status.

Regarding the above description, the idea of male guardianship could not be applied to female motrebs and providers. They were not considered as someone’s source of honor, because they did not belong to one single man. Instead, they were conceived as public women. Unlike

private women, motrebs and providers could be accompanied and seen by more than one man; the public women were not capable of developing in men the sense of “owning a female body.” In this regard, they were not women who needed men’s protection; they did not have the chastity that private women were supposed to have. Therefore, saving them was pointless.

If we accept that in terms of physical visibility and being encouraged to interact with men on social occasions, the ideal emancipated woman for Pahlavi state was similar to the figure of motreb and provider, then the anxiety around the unveiling law and women’s emancipation project can be explained in a new way. Under the heading “Women’s Emancipation Project,” I explained how the Pahlavi state wanted to change the highly gender-segregated society by making women more social and visible. I suggest that lots of men were simply annoyed to witness that their wives, sisters and daughters were pushed to perform similar to the “indecent” versions of women, namely prostitutes and motrebs. In other words, obeying the unveiling law without any resistance could be interpreted as assisting the Pahlavi regime to transform decent women into corrupted public women.

Turning to SN, within the subchapter 3.4, two narratives that I took into account about the beginning of SN as a red-light district, were both associated with the act of deporting the providers from the city to a suburb of Tehran. I argue that the idea of the public woman and its overlaps with the figure of the corrupted woman, the women’s emancipation project, and the act of “purifying” the city from prostitutes, are all connected in a meaningful way. The less that the supposedly corrupted public women were seen in the city, the less comparison would be drawn between the corrupted public woman and the emancipated public woman. Therefore, by marginalizing one, the other, the new version of emancipated public women, could be centralized

in public opinion with less annoying resemblance. Lastly, and connected to the resolutions adopted at the Second Eastern Women's Congress, I suggest another reason why the Iranian delegates in the 1932 Congress supported the regulation, particularly in remote areas: it could facilitate their presence in the society as the only version of respectable public women.

#### **4.5. A Minimal Sketch of SN (1925–1941)**

In order to extend Tehran's surface, the wall surrounding the city was destroyed in 1930. Therefore, SN, which had been located behind the Qazvin Gate, now became part of the city. The district consisted of two long parallel streets, both dead ended. Each street was extended to some alleys and there were houses and shops located in the alleys. In each house, there was one 'madam', some providers and one janitor, a cook and/ or maid(s). The janitor was always a man and he was in charge of the habitants' security. Pimps were involved, but they were not living in the houses, they just brought the clients and received their commission from the madam.<sup>123</sup>

Providers were usually in debt to the madams. The madam provided them with accommodation, food and cloths. When the women got old or sick, they were forced to leave the house.<sup>124</sup> During the period under review, apparently there was no age restriction for the providers. There are accounts about nine and ten-year-old girls working in SN.<sup>125</sup> Clients mostly

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<sup>123</sup> Mahmoud Zand Moqadam, *Shahr-E Now, Qal'e Zahedi [Shahr-E Now, Zahedi Castle]* (Stockholm: Bokarthus, 2013), 35–85.

<sup>124</sup> Hedayat ol-Allah Hakim Ehali, *Ba Man Be Shahr-E Now Biayid! [Come with Me to Shahr-E Now!]* (Tehran: Sherkat Sahami Chap, 1946), 145.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 11–12.

belonged to the working class. Soldiers and visitors coming from the rural areas to Tehran were among the clients.<sup>126</sup>

Risks of venereal disease were high. Gonorrhea was the most common disease. Condoms were used, but rarely. The client himself had to pay for the condom.<sup>127</sup> There was no way to figure out if a woman was infected.<sup>128</sup> The sexual health hospital in SN, Nahid hospital, was established in November 1939. The facilities of the hospital were limited. On average, nine women visited the hospital per day. This number increased to 87 when the hospital became part of a larger hospital, Sina Hospital, in 1940.<sup>129</sup>

Drinking alcohol and smoking opium were part of the ongoing life in SN in this period. Drinking alcohol was more common among the older providers. There were several liquor shops in the district.<sup>130</sup>

#### 4.6. Conclusion

This chapter showed that SN had a certain political importance for the Pahlavi regime. I have argued that the high number of soldiers in Tehran made SN a location for state-regulated prostitution. I mentioned that the existing literature has not discussed SN as a military red-light district, because the policies for regulation of prostitution have been invisible and unwritten.

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>129</sup> Oberlin, "Enhelale Bimarestan-E Nahid [Demolition of Nahid Clinic]."

<sup>130</sup> Hedayat ol-Allah Hakim Ehali, *Ba Man Be Shahr-E Now Biayid! [Come with Me to Shahr-E Now!]*, 70.

Moreover, I have argued that while the state was stressing women's liberation through its women's emancipation project, SN's women had to serve the state as "prostitutes."

In this chapter, I also looked for links between prostitution and the women's emancipation project, state feminism and the 1936 unveiling law. By analyzing discussions and resolutions of the Second Eastern Women's Congress in 1932, I showed that the approach of Iranian participants in the Congress was pro-regulation of prostitution. I could explain their position regarding prostitution and prostitutes in two ways: First, I noted that these feminists mainly came from elite backgrounds and probably cared less for lower-class women, and second, I suggested that maybe they believed that by supporting the regulation of prostitution in remote areas, they were protecting other women in society from sexual danger.

Furthermore, by focusing on the unveiling law and the governmental efforts to increase women's integration into the public sphere, I was able to connect the figure of the corrupted public woman and the figure of the emancipated public woman. I have argued that the similarities between these two figures were one of the reasons for the anxiety around the unveiling law. I have also argued that the marginalization strategies, gathering all the providers in one remote location, were a reaction to the above mentioned anxiety. By excluding the corrupted public women from the city, the idea of the emancipated public woman could be developed more easily. Finally, I have suggested a third reason why the Iranian delegates at the Second Eastern Women's Congress agreed on the regulation of prostitution in remote areas: possibly they wanted to be seen as the only version of public women.



## 5. Shahr-e Now 1941–1962: Politicizing the District, Political Usage

During World War II, on 25 August 1941, Iran was invaded from the north and the south by Soviet and British troops. The forced abdication of Reza Shah on 25 September 1941, in favor of his young son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was one of the first consequences of the Allies' occupation.

This chapter covers the period that begins with the rise of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to power in 1941, and ends in 1963, before the initiation of the White Revolution—a series of reforms that the Pahlavi state made, including the granting of voting rights to women. A significant turning point in this period was the coup d'état backed by the US and the UK, which took place on 19 August 1953, in Tehran. The 1953 Coup eventually culminated in the deposition of the Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, and his nationalist progressive state. This coup is related to the history of SN in two particular regards: first, some of SN's women were among the participants of the Coup, and second, a wall was built around SN after the Coup, after which SN became known as SN Castle or Zahedi Castle—Fazlollah Zahedi was an Iranian general who played a key role in the Coup. Much has been written about the 1953 Coup. Some have slightly remarked on the presence of SN's women in it. However, so far, no one has asked why SN's women appeared in the Coup, and why the wall around SN was built right after it. This chapter is formed around these two central questions.

First, in section 5.1, I briefly review the political-social history of Iran before the Coup, based on published literature. Then, in section 5.2, I use a series of archival documents to reflect on the public dissatisfaction about SN and the recurrent requests for SN's removal during this period (1941–1953). In section 5.3, I discuss the 1953 Coup, following to the day of the Coup,

when SN's women participated in pro-Shah demonstrations. In section 5.4, based on post-Coup era documents, I discuss the state's intensified engagement with the district. This chapter details the state's dual approach towards SN from 1941 to 1963; neglect during the pre-Coup, and active surveillance during the post-Coup era. I argue that building the wall around SN was indeed a new stage of state-regulation of prostitution. The wall functioned as a tranquilizer for the anxious environment of Tehran after the Coup, and represented a political boundary between the Mossadegh state and the post-Coup Zahedi state.

### **5.1. Brief Overview of the Pre-coup Political-social Climate**

During the Reza Shah period (1925–1941), Germany was Iran's first trading partner. Iran exported agricultural and mineral goods to Germany and in exchange, the Germans supplied Iran with industrial equipment.<sup>131</sup> Since 1927, Junkers Company (a major German aircraft manufacturer) achieved the concession of all postal transportations and became authorized to initiate airlines and piloting schools in Iran.<sup>132</sup> In 1928, the national Iranian railroad was assigned to German contractors. In November 1935, Hjalmar Schacht, Reich Minister of Economy in Nazi Germany visited Tehran for financial negotiations, and in December 1935, a barter agreement was signed in Tehran by both countries.<sup>133</sup> In December 1937, Baldur von Schirach, head of the

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<sup>131</sup> Basil H. Aboul-Enein, Faisal H. Aboul-Enein, and J. D. Thornton, "Axis and Allied Intervention, Collaboration in Iran," *Infantry* 99, no. 4 (December 11, 2010): 18.

<sup>132</sup> Hamid Reza Aryanfar, "Junkers va Tose'eye San'ati Dar Iran 1301-1311 [Junkers Company and Industrial Development in Iran 1922-1932]," *Tarikh-E Ravabet Kharjei*, no. 33 (2007): 106–109.

<sup>133</sup> Jalalodin Madani, "Ravabet-E Iran-Alman Dar Tarikh-E Mo'aser [Iran-Germany Diplomatic Relations in Contemporary History]," *Zamane*, no. 60 (September 2007): 24.

Hitler Youth, visited Tehran and talked about the “emerging German-Iranian Alliance.”<sup>134</sup> Nevertheless, by the outbreak of WWII, Iran announced a position of neutrality. The Soviet and British sides alarmed the Pahlavi state into deporting the German community by arguing that they were “probable Nazi agents.”<sup>135</sup> After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the alarms turned into serious military actions on the side of the UK and the Soviet Union, which together invaded the south and the north. Some historians argue that the referring to the presence of Germans by the Soviet and British sides was more of an excuse and that the Angelo-Soviet invasion was motivated by two main reasons: “physical control over oil” for the British side and “a land ‘corridor’” for the Soviet Union, since the alternate route through Archangel was frozen much of the year.”<sup>136</sup>

Reza Shah’s army could not resist the foreign occupation and collapsed under the airstrikes within three days. Within three weeks, Reza Shah was forced to abdicate from power in favor of his young son, Mohammad Reza Shah. Reza Shah was expelled to Johannesburg, where he died three years later.<sup>137</sup>

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919–1980) took his father’s place when he was only twenty-one years old. It took him years to prove himself as an empowered ruler. At the beginning of his political career, the Allies agreed that the Iranian national army should remain under his direct control, as it used to be during Reza Shah’s reign. In return, Mohammad Reza Shah promised to

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<sup>134</sup> Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 45.

<sup>135</sup> Foran, *Fragile Resistance*, 254.

<sup>136</sup> Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 97; R. W. Ferrier, “ANGLO-IRANIAN RELATIONS Iii. Pahlavi Period,” *Iranica*, August 5, 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/anglo-iranian-relations-iii#pt3>.

<sup>137</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 164–165.

be cooperative with the Allies. The British ambassador in Iran, Sir Reader William Bullard wrote to Mohammad Reza Shah stating that he was expected “to [show] good behavior, which would include the granting of extensive reforms, the restoration to the nation of the property illegally acquired by his father, and the exclusion of all his brothers from Persia.”<sup>138</sup> In November 1943, when Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin met in Iran, for the Tehran conference, only Stalin paid the Shah a visit and Mohammad Reza Shah himself went to the embassy of the Soviet Union to meet the other two. The Shah was offended by this lack of attention during his “first brush with international diplomacy” as reflected in his own words, “although I was technically the host of the conference, the big three paid me little notice.”<sup>139</sup>

During this period (1941–1953), particularly in the first years, Iran was in political crisis: the foreign pressure and the Shah’s lack of experience and authority made any political stability hard to achieve. Iran had twelve prime ministers within twelve years. Despite the fact that the Allies promised to withdraw their troops within six months—which they did not—and not to irritate the Iranian population, all the economic key sectors, including industry, agriculture and foreign trade were negatively affected by the 1941 occupation.<sup>140</sup> As a result, the living standards declined dramatically. Shortage of food caused famines all over the country.<sup>141</sup>

Apart from all the fundamental changes that the 1941 Anglo-Soviet invasion caused, this occupation also marked the beginning of American-Iranian relations. Some accounts also suggest

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<sup>138</sup> Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 98.

<sup>139</sup> R. K. Karanjia, *Mind of a Monarch: Biography of the Shah of Iran* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1977), 72 quoted in Abbas Milani, *The Shah*, Reprint edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Trade, 2012), 112; Fereydoun Hoveyda, *The Shah and the Ayatollah: Iranian Mythology and Islamic Revolution*, First edition (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), 17.

<sup>140</sup> Foran, *Fragile Resistance*, 265.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

the role of the American Allies in the 1941 incident. For instance, Foran (1993) describes this role as “advising Iranian government and army in Tehran, as well as transporting supplies to the Soviet Union,” or as Ferrier (2011) indicates “[Americans] becoming more closely acquainted with the country [Iran] in the process of manning the Persian Corridor with their allies.”<sup>142</sup> From 1941 onward, the presence of Americans in Iran and the political links between Tehran and Washington gradually increased and led to significant shifts in Iranian history.<sup>143</sup> Subchapter 5.3 discusses these shifts in more detail.

## **5.2. Shahr-e Now before the Coup (1941–August 1953)**

Compared to the previous periods (discussed in chapter 3 and 4), in this period, SN is more visible in archival documents. I was able to find a number of petitions and official correspondences about SN in the Document Center of Iran, particularly from the late 1940s. Written petitions, in the Iranian context, are usually letters addressed to state officials, reporting a certain public issue that caused inconvenience for a group of people. The number of signatures at the bottom of each petition shows the level of inconvenience and dissatisfaction.

The petitions about SN that I dealt with were mainly sent to either the Parliament or the office of Prime Minister(s). Through the petitions we can hardly learn anything about SN’s women themselves, but to some extent, we can grasp how SN was conceived by the population of Tehran. The petitions do not state who these women were, where they came from or how they got

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>143</sup> For more information about the gradual expanding of Iran-United States relations from 1941 see: Foran, *Fragile Resistance*.

into SN. SN's women were referred to as "deviant," "corrupt" or "lustful."<sup>144</sup> At first glance, these petitions represent SN as if a large but disturbing feast was going on there, and the providers, before anyone else, were the ones enjoying that feast.

It seems likely that the bolder presence of SN in manuscripts written by citizens of Tehran is related to the geographical orientation of the district in this period. The overall wall around Tehran was destructed in 1930 and SN officially became part of the city. Yet, it was far away from the city center and not surrounded by residential buildings. The increasing number of documents related to SN from the late 1940s onward can be considered as corresponding to Tehran's extension and the gradual process of SN's fusion into Tehran's body. The larger the city became, the less remote SN became, and consequently the more problematic. As discussed within the previous chapters based on Limoncelli's contribution (2010), the strategies that Iranian officials followed regarding SN were very similar to the systems of state-regulated prostitution in Western nation states in the early twentieth century: criminalizing prostitution, meanwhile supporting its regulation far away from the public eye.<sup>145</sup> Now that the city was getting larger, existing procedures for keeping SN out of sight of the residents of Tehran became insufficient.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Abbas Bahardoost, "Arize Az Tarafe Agha-Ye Bahardoost [Petition Written by Abbas Bahardoost]" (Petition, Tehran, June 22, 1950), 2253.11/4, Document Center of Iran Parliament; "Shekayat Be Majles Baraye Enteghal va Mahdudiyate Favaresh-E Manataghe-Ye Dah [Petition Addressed to the Parliament for the Relocation and Limitation of the Tenth District's Prostitutes]" (Petition, Tehran, May 13, 1951), 12884.11/4, Document Center of Iran Parliament; "Shekayat Az Tarafe Sakenan Khiaban-E Jamshid [Petition from Jamshid Street's Residents]" (Tehran, April 14, 1951), 32.11/4, Document Center of Iran Parliament.

<sup>145</sup> Limoncelli, *The Politics of Trafficking*, 151.

<sup>146</sup> I am referring to the plans such as those that encouraged residents of the district to leave their houses and move to the inner city, or the resolutions of the Second Eastern Women's Congress for distancing the "open prostitution." I discussed these distancing strategies in detail within the forth chapter, pp: ...

Therefore, it was crucial for the state to initiate new strategies to continue the regulation of commercial sex in SN.

According to the petitions written by residents of the tenth district—the district in which SN was located—the size of SN was increasing. One of the petitions stated the number of brothels as fifty. The same petition also mentioned that new brothels were being built in the alleys next to SN’s two main streets.<sup>147</sup> Not only brothels, but also several opium dens and gambling houses in the district, were said to be disturbing the residents. Apparently, at this point, SN functioned as a location for villains and thieves.<sup>148</sup>

In a petition signed in 1948, the complainants clearly argued for the necessity of the deportation of SN habitants from the city:

SN used to be behind the Qazvin Gate. Now that the city is getting larger, SN is located close to the houses of chaste people. The light of the street lights and asphalt of the streets are used by wantons and sluts. Moreover, the channels passing through SN have become polluted by germs of the tramps. This water can make innocent children sick.<sup>149</sup>

In another petition from 1951, the residents alarmed the Prime Minister that they, along with their wives and children, would seek sanctuary in Parliament and would not leave from there until there was a relocation of SN’s women.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Abbas Bahardoost, “Arize az Tarafe Agha-Ye Bahardoost [Petition Written by Abbas Bahardoost]” (Petition, Tehran, June 22, 1950), 2253.11/4, Document Center of Iran Parliament.

<sup>148</sup> “Shekayatname Baraye Jabejayi Shahr-E Now Be Jenabe Aghaye Nakhost Vazir [Petition towards the Prime Minister for Relocation of Shar-E Now]” (Petition, Tehran, October 14, 1950), 6373.11/4, Document Center of Iran Parliament.

<sup>149</sup> “Shekayat Az Tarafe Sakenan Khiaban-E Jamshid [Petition from Jamshid Street’s Residents].”

<sup>150</sup> “Shekayat Be Majles Baraye Enteghal va Mahdudiyate Favaresh-E Manataghe-Ye Dah [Petition Addressed to the Parliament for the Relocation and Limitation of the Tenth District’s Prostitutes].”

Police corruption is one of the dominant themes in the petitions. There are complaints about the inefficiency of the police station in the district, accusing policemen of bribery and corruption. One of the locals, in a ten-page detailed letter sent to the Spokesman of the Parliament, argues that the main reason for police corruption is the long duration of their services. The writer indicates that most of the police officers had been serving in the district for more than two years. As a result, they had lost their sense of investigation, had become acquainted with brothel owners and pimps, accepted bribes for allowing the latter to bring new women into the district.<sup>151</sup> In February 1953, the police station of the district declared that the police guards would not take any responsibility regarding the business of the prostitutes. Their sole responsibility would be to provide security and order in the spaces outside the brothels.<sup>152</sup> In this sense, the police station confirmed its lack of control over the district, and its inability to be responsive to public dissatisfaction.

The above-mentioned remarks about police corruption draw attention to another parallel with state-regulated prostitution elsewhere. As Limoncelli argues and shows through various cases in different countries, police corruption could be found in most of the regulation systems. She explains that one of the points that abolitionist reformers criticized the most about regulation systems was framed around the status of police in these systems.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Mahmoud Salehi, "Name-Ye Mahmoud Salehi Be Agha-Ye Fakher Hekmat [Mahmoud Salehi's Letter to Mr. Fakher Hekmat]" (Letter, Tehran, November 7, 1957), 10364.11/4, Document Center of Iran Parliament.

<sup>152</sup> "Kholase-Ye Parvande-Ye Favahesh-E Mahl-E Shar-3 Now Ke Dar Edare-Ye Polis-E Tehran Baygani Mibashad [The Summary of the File of SN's Prostitutes, the File Is Documented in the Tehran's Police Station]" (Tehran, May 22, 1956), 1, Document Center of Iran Parliament.

<sup>153</sup> Limoncelli, *The Politics of Trafficking*, 38–39.



It was not only the locals submitting petitions who expressed disapproval of SN's presence but also some government officials. In October 1947, a parliament representative, E'tebar, made a strong statement about SN and the necessity of its demolition. In his speech, E'tebar referred to a recently published report in a weekly magazine about SN and accused SN's women of polluting public hygiene and moral, and called for scrutiny:

[...] One more thing, and I suppose all Tehran's citizens are already aware of it [that] is the center of corruption and diseases, located in the 10th district, SN [...]. Dear Minister, if you have made up your mind about this place, please order its demolition, and let them [SN's women] die under the ruin.<sup>154</sup>

According to the document, the state's reaction to the public disapproval was cautious and inconspicuous. For instance, in November 1950, the Ministry of Interior, the Department of Social Affairs, sent a brief letter to the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament, Dr. Mo'azemi, informing him of the petitions against SN, stating that the government had begun studying the case and that necessary procedures would start immediately.<sup>155</sup> The letter is short, without any appendix or detailed plan.

What is clear from the petitions is that the central strategy of the Reza Shah's regime towards SN, namely the distancing of the district to prevent possible interactions between SN's community and the citizens of Tehran, by this time had become inefficient. It is also clear that the state officials had no concrete plan in reaction to the locals' disapproval, other than mild responses and promises for future solutions. Nonetheless, the 1935 Coup transformed previous compromises to concrete control over SN.

<sup>154</sup> *Mashruh-E Mozakerat-E Majles Meli, 15 [Minutes of the 15th National Parliament]*, vol. 3 (Tehran: Chapkhane Majles, 1953), 263.

<sup>155</sup> Mohsen Nasr, "Name Az Vezarat-E Keshvar Be Agha-Ye Mo'azemi [Letter from the Interior Ministry to the Mr. Mo'azemi]" (Tehran, December 10, 1950), 7063/11.4, Document Center of Iran Parliament.

### 5.3. The 1953 Coup d'état

The 1953 Coup is a major historical moment in Iranian history. By suppressing the nationalist and communist parties, the Coup significantly changed the political arrangements in the country and turned the regime into an openly pro-American state, lasting until the 1979 Revolution. The Pahlavi regime referred to the Coup later as a “national uprising.”<sup>156</sup> But, in reality, apart from the military forces, certain groups were paid to attend the pro-Shah demonstrations, SN’s women among them.<sup>157</sup> In addition, building a wall around SN and assigning a new set of regulations within SN were among the immediate post-Coup urban changes in Tehran.

The 1953 Coup has often been discussed either as a British-American maneuver to secure their oil interests in Iran, or as a Coup engineered by the CIA “to save” Iran from the spread of international communism.<sup>158</sup> The Coup overthrew the progressive government of Mohammad Mossadegh (1882–1967). Immediately after the Coup, the communist party, Hezb-e Tudeh [Tudeh Party], and the nationalist party, Hezb-e Melli [National Front] were suppressed as well.

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<sup>156</sup> Mark J. Gasiorowski, “The CIA Looks Back at the 1953 Coup in Iran,” *Middle East Report*, no. 216 (October 1, 2000): 4.

<sup>157</sup> Mahmoud Torbati Sanjabi, *Koudetasazan [Coup Engineers]* (Tehran: Kavosh, 1997), 408.

<sup>158</sup> There is an extensive literature on the Coup and its backgrounds; the followings are some of the scholarly works that suggest the oil nationalization and the Cold war as the main reasons for the Coup: Maziar Behrooz, “Tudeh Factionalism and the 1953 Coup in Iran,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no. 03 (August 2001): 363–82, doi:10.1017/S0020743801003026; Ervand Abrahamian, *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations* (The New Press, 2013); Mark J. Gasiorowski, “The 1953 Coup D’etat in Iran,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 3 (August 1, 1987): 261–86; Mark J. Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (Syracuse University Press, 2004); Torbati Sanjabi, *Koudetasazan [Coup Engineers]*.

### 5.3.1. Day of the Coup d'état

On 19 August, 1953, a series of demonstrations took place in Tehran. Shouting “death to Mossadegh” and “death to Tudeh”, the demonstrators appeared to be pro-Shah protesters who asked for the immediate abdication of Mossadegh and his cabinet, and the elimination of the Tudeh Party. On the morning of the Coup, the national radio was taken over by army forces and tanks were placed in the city center. By noon, the demonstrating population and the armed forces moved towards the house of Mossadegh, the Prime Minister. The army opened fire on Mossadegh’s house, asking him to submit himself to the armed guards. By evening, Fazlollah Zahedi, an Iranian general and the CIA’s key-agent in mobilizing the participant groups in the Coup, announced through the national radio that “Mossadegh, the betrayer” had fled, people in Tehran had made a great uprising, and he himself had been appointed the Prime Minister.<sup>159</sup> The next day, Mossadegh and his cabinet members submitted themselves to the police station. Mossadegh was sentenced to prison for three years, and later to lifetime exile and home arrest.<sup>160</sup>

Much has been written about the engineered nature of the Coup, about the pre-Coup negotiations between the Zahedi team and apolitical groups, set in place to convince them to take part in the Coup. According to historian Foran, these groups, paid by CIA funds, consisted of gangs of thugs, “peasants trucked in from countryside,” and some onlookers who were deceptively frightened by the threat of communism.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Foran, *Fragile Resistance*, 297.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

Torbati Sanjabi, a journalist, in his book *Koudetasazan* [Coup Engineers], reviews the participating groups in the Coup in detail. Remarking on SN's women, Torbati Sanjabi quotes from an anonymous source:

As I can remember, in the morning of August 19, four groups moved from the south towards the north of Tehran for pro-Shah and anti-Mossadegh demonstrations. Mossadegh's house was in the northern part of the city and they went to occupy his house. [...] The third group, as I heard, was from the infamous part of the tenth district (Shahr-e Now) led by Mahmoud Mesgar, along with a group of Castle's women and madams.<sup>162</sup>

Torbati Sanjabi's account is likely to be reliable because of his remark on "Mahmoud Mesgar." In the archival documents that I have been working with, the name "Mahmoud Mesgar" appears several times. Through two documents, one an open letter to the Prime Minister, another a petition submitted to the Parliament, we learn that Mahmoud Mesgar was the owner of several brothels and gambling houses in the SN district. According to the open letter, Mesgar was accused of two acts of killings, but he was not arrested because of his strong lobbies with the police force.<sup>163</sup> Based on the profile the documents give of Mesgar, it seems likely that Torbati Sanjabi's account can be trusted; Mahmoud Mesgar was a powerful character in SN district, he had some brothels and probably had power over women in the brothels, and he had connections with officials, namely the police. Therefore, he was in the position to provide the Coup organizers with some so-called demonstrators.

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<sup>162</sup> Mahmoud Torbati Sanjabi, *Koudetasazan [Coup Engineers]* (Tehran: Kavosh, 1997), 103–106 quoted in Homa Sarshar, *Shaban Jafari [Shaban Jafari]*, 2nd edition (Naab Publishers, 2002), 408.

<sup>163</sup> Shaban Bolouri, Hossein Pahlavichi, and Reza Sajadi-nia, "Name-Ye Sargoshade Be Jenab-E Nakhost Vazir va Agha-Ye Dadsetan-E Tehran [Open Letter to Mr. Prime Minister and Mr. Attorney General]" (Letter, Tehran, n.p), 37 Alef. 45/14, Document Center of Iran Parliament; Bahardoost, "Arize Az Tarafe Agha-Ye Bahardoost [Petition Written by Abbas Bahardoost]."

But why was it planned for SN women to be part of the Coup? One possible explanation is that having a female population could have helped the Coup to be represented as a spontaneous and inclusive uprising, rather than an arranged movement. It could be conceived as “the nation, including men and women, who have come to the streets to protest against Mossadegh and communists.” Given that the leader of the SN’s group in the Coup was a brothel owner, Mesgar, it can also be interpreted that he either forced women to participate in the Coup or bribed them into participating. However, as Torbati Sanjabi’s account suggests—and also some other documents which I will discuss a bit later—the participation of SN’s women in the Coup was disclosed. Based on public dissatisfaction with SN before the Coup—which I discussed earlier in sub-section 5.2—and the public awareness of the participation of SN women in a Coup that deposed a popular national icon, Mossadegh, it can be argued that after the Coup, public hostility towards SN became political too. This may also explain the new set of state-regulations regarding SN after the Coup. The next subsection reflects on SN during the post-Coup era.

It is important to note the engineered presence of SN’s women in the Coup and the political instrumentalization of their participation by officials. SN’s women were either forced or paid to go to the streets and perform as pro-Shah demonstrators. In this sense, the incident can be linked to another form of political usage, namely the regulation of prostitution in SN for military purposes (chapter 3 and 4).

#### 5.4. Zahedi Castle (1953–1962)

Immediately after the Coup, the new Prime Minister, Zahedi, made some fundamental changes in Tehran: he replaced the mayor of Tehran and the chief of the central police station, he also ordered the walls of the city covered with anti-Coup graffiti, to be washed (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** “A resident washes 'Yankee Go Home' graffiti off a wall in Tehran on August 21, 1953.” From: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/08/19/politics/cia-iran-1953-coup/>

The submitted letters and petitions to officials after the Coup testify to a new era that had started for SN. A letter sent to the police station in 1957 states that “the forty-month period after the event of the August 19 [1953], was the period of actual order and security in the district.”<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Salehi, “Name-Ye Mahmoud Salehi Be Agha-Ye Fakher Hekmat [Mahmoud Salehi’s Letter to Mr. Fakher Hekmat].”

According to one of the documents I collected from the Document Center of Iran Parliament, a report that was documented in the central police station, two months after the Coup on 24 October, a meeting was held to discuss the status of SN. The Attorney General of Tehran and representatives of Tehran's municipality and Tehran's gendarmerie participated in the meeting that concluded with the following decisions:

1. Closing all the liquor stores in the district
2. Building some public toilets in the district
3. Limiting the extends of SN by building a wall around it
4. Establishing a police station inside the district
5. Transferring the opium addicted population to the public hospitals
6. Gathering and excluding the younger than fifteen-year-old children, both girls and boys, from the district.<sup>165</sup>

The wall around SN was built in 1953 (Figure 7). Clients had to pass through an iron gate in order to get into the district. There were guardsmen at the gate in charge of controlling the age of clients.<sup>166</sup> According to my interviews with Arshad and Shams (Appendix 1), the age control was not based on ID validation but by checking if the client had a grown beard.<sup>167</sup>

In 1955, the Ministry of Health established a new sexual health clinic in the district, named Farabi Clinic.<sup>168</sup> The official registration of the providers began from that date. From 1955 to 1967, around 6000 women were registered and had files in the clinic. At the beginning, the

<sup>165</sup> "Kholase-Ye Parvande-Ye Favahesh-E Mahl-E Shar-3 Now Ke Dar Edare-Ye Polis-E Tehran Baygani Mibashad [The Summary of the File of SN's Prostitutes, the File Is Documented in the Tehran's Police Station]."

<sup>166</sup> Mahmoud Zand Moqadam, *Shahr-E Now, Qal'e Zahedi [Shahr-E Now, Zahedi Castle]*, 27.

<sup>167</sup> Shams, interview; Lili Arshad, June 2013.

<sup>168</sup> This clinic was different from the Nahid Clinic (chapter 4).

medical check-ups were not mandatory, but later—it is not clear exactly since when—weekly visits and blood examinations became mandatory twice a year.<sup>169</sup>

Once the wall had been erected, SN started to function as a self-sufficient district. Grocery stores, butchery, bakery, restaurants, beauty salons (both for women and men), two theaters and tailing shops were established in the district.<sup>170</sup> Another important change was the issuance of ID cards for shop keepers and providers.<sup>171</sup>

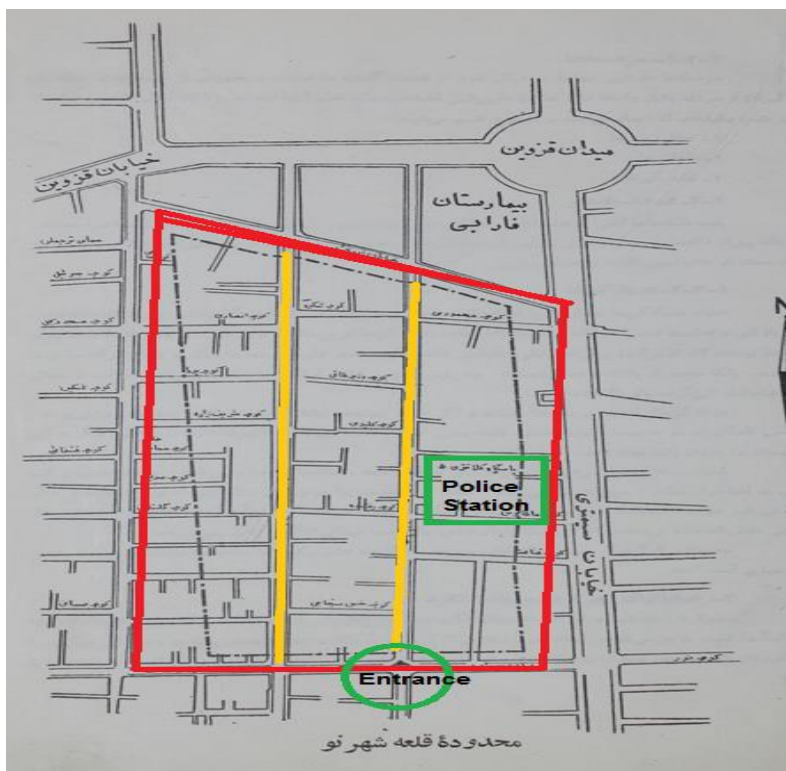


Figure 7. SN's Orientation after building the wall. The yellow lines are the two main streets.

<sup>169</sup> Mahmoud Zand Moqadam, *Shahr-E Now, Qal'e Zahedi [Shahr-E Now, Zahedi Castle]*, 66.

<sup>170</sup> Sattare Farmanfarmaian, *Darbareye Rouspigari Dar Shahr-E Tehran [About Prostitution in Tehran City]* (Tehran, 1971), 14.

<sup>171</sup> "Arize Dar Bareye Kart-E Voroudi [Petition about the Entrance Cards]" (Petition, Tehran, March 17, 1959), 26416.11/4, Document Center of Iran Parliament.



A comparison of state-regulations before and after the Coup clearly shows that after the Coup, the state put a greater effort into policing the district. After years of dissatisfaction and numerous petitions, the wall around SN was built, just two months after the Coup, separating SN from the rest of the city. This fact also shows the urgency that the regime felt to reinforce its control over the district.

How can one explain the connection between the political agenda of the regime and the form of state-regulation of prostitution in SN before and after the Coup? I argue that the active and visible engagement of the state in SN after the Coup was due to two main reasons. First, making SN's women participate in the Coup had increased the already existing public hostility towards the SN district. SN's women appeared to be not only the source of "corruption" and "sexual danger," but also participants in a Coup that toppled a popular public icon and his progressive government. In this context, building the wall, a boundary that could cover and secure the realm of providers was seen as necessary. In addition, given the fact that Mahmoud Mesgar, head of SN's participants in the Coup, had properties and financial interests in the district, the wall can be also considered as a reward for the support he provided for the Coup. Without the wall and the visible state involvement with the district, the anger towards SN and anti-SN emotions could have possibly turned into attacks, leading to the destruction of SN—exactly what eventually happened in February 1979 (chapter 1). Second, changing the face of Tehran after the Coup through a process of "sanitization"—such as washing the anti-American graffiti (Figure 1) from the wall, and containing SN by building a wall around it—was instrumental to the overall functioning of the Zahedi government. I suggest that by policing the district and taking control over the hygiene, security and registration of the providers, the Zahedi regime projected a

spectacle of control and ownership, implying that “the city is in our hands.” The new regulations regarding SN could have also signaled that the new state, unlike Mossadegh’s, was more responsive to people’s unhappiness regarding SN, and was more efficient in implementing necessary reforms.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I retrieved and analyzed the history of SN from 1941, when Reza Shah became deposed, to 1963, when the White Revolution’s reforms became initiated. In the beginning of the chapter, through archival research, I showed how the state strategies for regulation of prostitution away from the public eye in this period proved to be inefficient. The extension of Tehran’s size caused SN to be a part of the city, surrounded by residential buildings. This fact caused an increase of public dissatisfaction. Moreover, I documented police corruption in the district and discussed it as an element that made the pattern of regulation in SN similar to other regulation systems elsewhere. The archival documents I studied, testify that brothel owners lobbied with the police, bribing them into allowing bringing new women to the district.

Further, I have suggested that the 1953 Coup was a turning-point in the history of SN in two regards: first, by employing SN’s women as demonstrators in the Coup, and second, by building a wall immediately after the Coup around SN, applying new regulations in SN.

Regarding the engineered presence of SN’s women in the Coup, I explained that having a female population could possibly represent the Coup as a spontaneous national uprising. I

interpreted this incident as a usage of SN's women by officials to support their political objectives.

Regarding the wall and the post-Coup regulations in SN, I have suggested that the wall around SN was a new stage of state strategies to keep the district away from the public eye. In addition, the wall could also have functioned as a tranquilizer for public hostility, which after the Coup and the fall of Mossadegh's progressive government, was of political importance as well. Lastly, the wall and the new regulations could suggest that Zahedi's government was powerful and responsive to public dissatisfaction about SN and different—in a positive way—from Mossadegh's government.

## **6. Shahr-e Now (1963–1979): State Feminism and Suppression of SN’s Representation in the Public Sphere**

With the fall of Mossadegh’s government after the 1953 Coup and the suppression of the two most powerful political parties, namely the Tudeh Party and the National Front, the Shah gained new power as the head of state. In terms of national politics, the most significant event between the 1953 Coup and the 1979 Revolution was the White Revolution in 1963. The White Revolution was basically a series of reforms made by the state. Related to the topic of this thesis, the extension of the right to vote to women and providing them with more educational and professional opportunities were among the reforms of the White Revolution. Following women’s suffrage, Sazman-e Zanan-e Iran [Iranian Women’s Organization (IWO)], a state-sponsored organization, was established in 1966. The president of the organization was Ashraf Pahlavi, Shah’s twin sister. Up to 1979, the IWO was the most powerful women’s organization in Iran.

Immediately after its establishment, the IWO ordered a documentary to be made about SN. Male Iranian film director, Kamran Shirdel, made the documentary, Qal’e [The Castle]. However the state suppressed the project and confiscated the footage of the documentary.

In section 6.1, I will briefly introduce the White Revolution. In the same section, I will discuss the establishment of the IWO and its approach to SN. I will analyze the process of ordering the documentary by the IWO to explain how SN was a favorable site for the IWO to show its solidarity with subaltern women. I point out how “solidarity with subaltern women,” and publicizing that solidarity was in fact associated with the main agenda of the White Revolution. Then I will argue that the documentary *The Castle* was suppressed by the Ministry of Culture and

Art because it could represent the state's acknowledgement of SN, which consequently would lead to questioning the "emancipatory" picture of the regime.

In section 6.3, I question the IWO's approach to prostitution and more particularly to SN. Using a framework that feminist scholars McBirde and Mazur offer in their book *Politics of State Feminism*, I argue that, similar to the 1932 Eastern Women Congress (chapter 4), the IWO, a state-sponsored organization, approached the question of prostitution within the state agenda, and not with a critical position.

### **6.1. The White Revolution and the Iranian Women's Organization**

The White Revolution was launched by the Shah in 1961 and put to national referendum in January 1963. The reforming project was named the White Revolution, in order to emphasize that it was a bloodless reform program. Some of the implanted reforms by the White Revolution were: land reform, distribution of government lands among the peasants, nationalization of forests and pastures, combating illiteracy, initiation of a health corps, free and mandatory education for children, and women's suffrage.<sup>172</sup>

Scholars often discuss the White Revolution as a strategy in line with anti-communist policies in Iran. Feminist scholar Afary (2009) connects the White Revolution to the election of John F. Kennedy as U.S president in 1960. According to her, the internal democratization of Iran could prevent possible pro-communist movements:

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<sup>172</sup> Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 203.

The Kennedy administration expressed some dissatisfaction with pro-US authoritarian rulers, including the Shah, and encouraged greater political liberalization. To forestall communism, Kennedy's "New Frontier" proposed both a military buildup and internal democratization as key response to the perceived threat of Soviet expansion. Between 1960 and 1963 the Shah tried to present a more democratic face by establishing a state-sponsored two-party system, but he continued to manipulate elections to the Parliament, which caused repeated protests. In January 1963, in response to continued US pressure for reform, the Shah Launched his White Revolution.<sup>173</sup>

The question of women's suffrage, one of outputs of the White Revolution, was not a new topic for the women's movement in Iran. During the 1930s, during rise of the women's emancipation project, independent Iranian feminists proposed the right to vote. According to Amin, "the regime of Reza Shah did not feel ready to grant women's suffrage."<sup>174</sup> The second Pahlavi regime, by approving women's suffrage through the White Revolution, represented itself as a supporter of women's rights.<sup>175</sup>

In 1966, three years after the White Revolution, the IWO was established under Shah's order. Ashraf Pahlavi, Shah's sister, was appointed as the head of the organization.<sup>176</sup> According to feminist scholar Sedghi, Ashraf was "the most powerful Iranian woman" in her time.<sup>177</sup> The IWO was not her first experience of working with a women's organization. Prior to that, from 1959 to 1966, Ashraf Pahlavi was the president of the Shoray-e Ali-ye Zanan-e Irani [High

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 202–203. For more information about the anti-communist strategies and the White Revolution see: Ali M. Ansari, "The Myth of the White Revolution: Mohammad Reza Shah, 'Modernization' and the Consolidation of Power," *Middle Eastern Studies* 37, no. 3 (July 1, 2001).

<sup>174</sup> Camron Michael Amin, "Propaganda and Remembrance: Gender, Education, and 'The Women's Awakening' of 1936," *Iranian Studies* 32, no. 3 (July 1, 1999): 360.

<sup>175</sup> Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*, 128–130.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 164.

Council of Iranian Women (HCIW)], an organization supervising sixteen women's organizations. After the establishment of IWO, the HCIW was absorbed into the new organization. The political power of the IWO was significant. By 1970, the Secretary General of the IWO, Mahnaz Afkham, a lawyer, had gained a seat in the Cabinet. The IWO was openly associated with the state, and particularly to the Hezb-e Rastakhiz [Resurgent Party], the only lawful party in the country in the period.<sup>178</sup>

The organization soon started to grow numerous branches in other cities rather than Tehran, recruiting employees and volunteers. In her book, *Women and Politics in Iran*, Saedghi details the size of IWO:

When the Organization was first founded, Tehran branch of the WOI had a membership of almost 4,500 individuals, with 33 secular and religious organizations as institutional members. [...] by the late 1970s, it enlisted the membership of 48 women's societies and centers nationwide; with almost 400 branches, its total institutional and individual membership was almost half a million.<sup>179</sup>

The range of IWO's activities was wide: literacy courses for illiterate women, initiating kindergartens, law consultations and charities for women.<sup>180</sup> The central agenda of the organization according to Ashraf Pahlavi was to "integrate Iranian women into every facet of society and to create the conditions for equality that our female ancestors had enjoyed centuries ago."<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 169–170.

<sup>180</sup> Sanasarian, *Jonbesh-E Hoqouq-E Zanan Dar Iran: Toqyan, Ofoul va Sarkoub Az 1280 Ta Enqelab-E 1357 [The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini]*, 129–136.

<sup>181</sup> Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*, 169.

Large numbers of women benefited from the IWO reforms during its active years. Nonetheless, recent literature suggests that the organization was more concerned with its international image than with the situation of Iranian women. Sedghi, for example, argues that the IWO's international activities and the high amount of funds dedicated to them—such as donating a two-million dollar check in 1975 for the UN programs for International Women's Year—was more of a strategy to create a decent image of the Pahlavi regime for a global audience.<sup>182</sup> Similarly, Sanasarian refers to the structure of the organization and argues that the IWO, because of its strong ties to the state, failed to challenge the state policies about women in a meaningful way:

The IWO's membership was estimated to be 70,000 by 1977. The IWO members were not necessarily involved in the issues of women's rights. Many of them were professionals—teachers, nurses or government employees—whose associations belonged to the IWO making their membership automatic. Those in the leadership positions—such as the Secretary General and the members of the Central Council—were approved by the government for this task, chosen because of their social resources and clout. In short, the leaders were individuals who acted in accordance with the rules set out by the Iranian government, thereby acquiring functional legitimacy. It was obliged to follow channels acceptable to the regime in pursuing issues of concern to women.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>183</sup> Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 85.



## 6.2. The Castle

In 1966, at the beginning of its establishment, the IWO sent a proposal to the Ministry of Culture and Art, asking for the Ministry's cooperation to produce several social documentaries about women. The project was approved and assigned to Kamran Shirdel, a young Iranian film director.

Kamran Shirdel was born in 1939, in Tehran. He was eighteen years old when he left Iran for Rome, where he studied film direction. In January 1965 he was in Iran, paying a visit to his family. In a recent screening occasion at Stanford University, where four of Shirdel's documentaries were shown, he described his feelings upon his arrival in Iran:

I was shocked with what I saw; it was winter and the poverty showed itself very well. [...] it was a black discovery, a sad discovery for me to see what was going on. Specially, considering that the Shah was going to coronate himself as the emperor of Iran. The entire world knew about the richness we had; that time we exported 6.5 billion barrels of oil, and you [could] see people were selling their blood [in order to have some income to survive on].<sup>184</sup>

Through a friend, Shirdel was introduced to the Ministry of Culture and Art. Shahrokh Golestan, a representative of IWO, met Shirdel in the Ministry and suggested him to work on the IWO project. The IWO had proposed the production of three documentaries, one about the women's prison in Tehran, one about the slums of Tehran, and one about SN.<sup>185</sup>

The first documentary, "*Nedamatgah: Zendan-e Zanan*" [Penitentiary: The Women's Prison] was shot in 1966. The administrative stages were processed without any difficulty, the

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<sup>184</sup> "Film Screening of Kamran Shirdel's Films," 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPmrOiwMX1E>.

<sup>185</sup> Rohani Omid, "Kamran Shirdel: Yek Mosahebe [Kamran Shirdel: An Interview]," *Naghd-E Sinema*, no. 6 (1996): 185.

Ministry's officials approved the film and it was screened in cinemas.<sup>186</sup> *Penitentiary* is a ten-minute black and white documentary. The camera turns round and shows different parts of the prison. The narrator informs the audience about some statistics regarding the number of prisoners and their marital status. Then, some prisoners tell in front of the camera about their lives. At the end, the narrator asks for solidarity and introduces the IWO.<sup>187</sup>

Within the same year, Shirdel started to shoot the two other documentaries, *Tehran Paytaxt-e Iran Ast* [Tehran Is the Capital of Iran] about a slum in the south of Tehran and *The Castle* about SN. In an interview published in *Naqd-e Sinema* [Cinema Critique] in 1996, he explained the process of suppressing the documentaries in detail:

Shirdel: Regarding these documentaries [*The Castle* and *Tehran is the Capital of Iran*] I knew that I had to work secretly. I was going to the office in the evenings and staying all through the night and editing. Once I was in the Ministry and headed to my room, I found the door locked. I inquired and they told me to go upstairs. I went and Minister Pahlbod himself welcomed me. He was nice and polite and offered me a new project; he implicitly told me “forget about the other two documentaries”. I was still optimistic, I thought I will wrap up the new project and then continue with the [other two] documentaries. The new project was in Gorgan [a city in the north of Iran]. After two weeks when I came back to Tehran with the new film, they told me that my former projects were suspended and they didn't need me anymore. They took all the raw footages. *Tehran Is the Capital of Iran* was almost finished, I was in the soundstage; *The Castle* was not cut at all, I only had the raw footages. They confiscated both.

Rohani. The entire footages?

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<sup>186</sup> “Film Screening of Kamran Shirdel's Films .”

<sup>187</sup> Kamran Shirdel, *Women's Prison: Penitentiary*, documentary, (1966), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KswPA-TEF2w>.

Shirdel. Yes. *Tehran Is the Capital of Iran* was shown in the amphitheater of the Ministry with the presence of Minister and his assistant and several of his staff, it was mute. It was kind of a trial. One of the staffs asked me: “What is this? What kind of life do you tend to represent?” I told them: “this is the reality and still it’s a very small part of the reality.”<sup>188</sup>

After the 1979 Revolution, in 1980, the footage of *The Castle* was found in the Ministry of Culture and Art and after fourteen years it was edited by Shirdel himself.

The obvious question is, why the IWO ordered these documentaries to be made, and why the production of *Tehran is the Capital of Iran* and *The Castle* was stopped, whereas *Penitentiary* was screened without any difficulties.

Regarding the first question, the IWO’s motivation for the documentaries, I suggest that the agenda of the White Revolution is clearly visible in the IWO’s documentary project. Similar to the way that the land distribution was capable of displaying the “good will” of the regime towards the peasants, the IWO, by ordering documentaries about women prisoners and SN’s women, intended to represent itself as an organization concerned with marginalized women.

I will explain the different destinies of *The Castle* and *Penitentiary*, by discussing the different forms of state representation in the documentaries. The setting of *Penitentiary* is a prison. The documentary informs its audience that the represented women are in the prison because they have committed some sort of crime. These criminal women have been arrested and sentenced to prison by the state, the guardian of the security of its citizens. Therefore, *Penitentiary*, besides presenting the prison’s environment, also addresses and displays the state’s power over society. Meanwhile, the narrator calls upon the audience for help and attention, and

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<sup>188</sup> Omid Rohani “Kamran Shirdel: Yek Mosahebe [Kamran Shirdel: An Interview],” 1996, 197–198.

declares that this message is from the IWO. *Penitentiary* was successful in delivering the supposedly decent intentions of the IWO, and the state's authority in a positive way.

Differently, the topic of *The Castle* is a red-light district. The subjects of the documentary speak about their desperate lives, how they got to SN, how they were sold or deceived, how they are addicted to opium, and how they are in debt to madams.<sup>189</sup> Watching *The Castle*, the first implied message is the state acknowledgment of SN: "so, the state is aware of this place!" Unlike *Penitentiary*, *The Castle* does not represent the Pahlavi regime as a progressive savior regime. On the contrary, giving voice to the SN's women could put doubt on the "good will" of the state.

Based on the above explanations, I suggest that *The Castle* was prevented from screening because it could have hinted to state involvement in the regulation of prostitution in SN. Connecting this to what I have argued in previous chapters, after distancing SN from the city center in the Reza Shah period and building the wall around the district in 1953, suppressing the visual representation of SN can be considered as another form of covering up the state's support. Hence, in each of these periods, the state used a different method to keep SN out of the public eye and make itself, as the supporter of regulation in the district, invisible.

### **6.3. Shahr-e Now and the Iranian Women Organization: Activism in a Safe Zone?**

It is undoubted that the IWO in 1966, at the beginning of its establishment ordered a documentary to be made about SN. But is this sufficient to consider the IWO as a women's organization with an anti-prostitution agenda? In the literature that I have reviewed on the IWO, there is no

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<sup>189</sup> See Appendix 2.

reference to the IWO's approach to prostitution. Moreover, the project of the documentaries is also absent from this literature, as well as from the online archive of the IWO.<sup>190</sup> In fact, I could only find information about *The Castle* and the two other documentaries by looking into literature about the pre-Revolution cinema of Iran.

The fact that the IWO at the beginning of its establishment paid attention to SN and ordered a documentary to be made about the district, can at first glance be interpreted as the OWI being against state regulation of prostitution. However, there is no other source suggesting this position, and in any case, the fact that SN continued to function as a regulated red-light district up to the 1979 Revolution, implies that the IWO either did not or could not stop the regulation of prostitution.

In their book, *The Politics of State Feminism* (2010), feminist scholars McBride and Mazur discuss why state-sponsored organizations often failed to change state policies related to women. Through studying various cases, they argue that the main reason for state feminism's failures is a combination of "low capacity and the absence of feminist leadership with proximity to centers of power."<sup>191</sup> If we suppose that the IWO had an anti-prostitution approach, neither "low capacity" nor "the absence of feminist leadership" can explain the IWO's assumed failure to stop regulation in SN. The IWO had indeed a high capacity to initiate social reforms, as it did regarding the increase of women's literacy.<sup>192</sup> And, in terms of being close to the sources of power, the IWO was an absolutely privileged organization. The sister of the Shah was the head of

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<sup>190</sup> The webpage and online archive of IWO is available at this link: <http://fis-iran.org/en/women>.

<sup>191</sup> McBride and Mazur, *The Politics of State Feminism*, 112.

<sup>192</sup> Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 75.

the organization, and Farideh Diba, mother of the Queen, was its vice president. Therefore, the organization had close ties with the state and the Royal Court. Compared to earlier state-sponsored women's organizations in Iran, such as the Ladies' Center (1935), the political power of the IWO was in fact significant. As mentioned earlier, from 1970 onward, the Secretary General of the IWO, Mahnaz Afkham, a feminist lawyer, even had a seat in the Cabinet. In this sense, I believe that the IWO, as a feminist organization, was close enough to the state, and had enough power to make changes regarding SN. Therefore, I cautiously suggest that the neutrality of the IWO towards SN, in terms of its lack of activity regarding SN after the failed documentary project, can be interpreted as the IWO leadership not being in disagreement with the state's agenda. One possible explanation for the IWO's neutrality toward the women of SN is similar to the case of the 1932 Eastern Women's Congress (discussed in chapter 4), namely the category of class. Unlike its primary claims, the core administrative of IWO consisted of elite women, who mainly cared about women in their own social class. It is indeed strange that the IWO, just a few months after its initiation, made an effort to represent SN to a public audience, and then, after the suppression of *The Castle*, the history of the IWO lacks any reactions towards prostitution. It may be interpreted that *The Castle* was mainly ordered to represent the IWO's "good will," and its "sympathy" with SN women, and it was not of a serious and critical project for changing SN women's lives. One may reject this statement by referring to other IWO projects initiated for marginalized women, like literacy camps for women in rural areas. In response, I suggest that the IWO provided support for marginalized women in as far as that support was harmless to the state's "progressive" image. However, when representing or giving voice to marginalized women

could question the desired emancipatory face of the regime, as was the case for SN's women, the effort was risky and better to be denied.

#### **6.4. Conclusion**

Through this chapter, first by presenting the White Revolution as the most important moment of the period between the 1953 Coup and the 1979 Revolution, I have focused on the new attitude of the Pahlavi regime to the lower classes of Iranian society. I referred to literature that explains the White Revolution as a strategy to lessen the appeal of Communism. Then, I introduced the IWO as a state-sponsored women's organization, which was initiated by the state following the White Revolution. The main focus of this chapter's was a documentary about SN, *The Castle*, ordered by the IWO in 1966. By analyzing the events around the ordering and making of the documentary, and its subsequent repression by the state, I reached three main conclusions:

First, I argued that the IWO, by ordering a documentary about SN, followed the same agenda of the White Revolution, namely, in the case of the IWO, representing its solidarity with marginalized women. I explained that in the same way that the categories of the peasant and laborer became important for the regime in this period, the prostitute and the female prisoner became important for the Iranian state feminist organization.

Secondly, I suggested that the suppression of the documentary about SN by the state was intended to keep SN away from the public eye. By referring to the previous chapters, I made it clear that in each of the periods discussed in this thesis, the Iranian government used different strategies to mask its involvement in the regulation of prostitution in SN.

Finally, I discussed that, after proposing *The Castle*'s production in 1966, there is no evidence of the IWO's interest in or engagement with the question of prostitution or the fate of the women in SN. I used the framework of McBride and Mazur to explore whether the IWO's approach towards state-regulation of prostitution was a feminist failure or a political stance. I have suggested that unlike the primary claims of the IWO to support all groups of women, particularly women of the lower classes, the organization was an association for elite women, and its activities, at least as far as SN was concerned, were limited to the state's agenda. I explained that those projects which could possibly challenge the "emancipatory" image of the regime, like representing SN and its women, were not favorable for the IWO, as an organization closely tied to the state.



## 7. Conclusions

In this thesis, I have narrated and analyzed the history of *Shahr-e Now* (SN), Tehran's red-light district from the early twentieth century until the 1979 Revolution. The existence of SN and the event of its ruination in the midst of the 1979 Revolution have been mentioned in a number of scholarly works about Iran.<sup>193</sup> However, the district, as large as two football pitches and functioning as a sex market for almost seventy years with around 1,500 prostitutes in the 1960s, has not been contextualized within modern Iranian history. The goal of my study was to understand how the state dealt with SN, a red-light district located in front of the public eye. In order to answer this question, through four chapters, divided periodically from 1909 to 1979, I have investigated and built up the history of SN.

I used two theoretical frameworks to analyze my materials: first, that of state-regulated prostitution, and second, state feminism. Regarding the first field, I largely relied on Stephanie Limoncelli's book *The Politics of Trafficking*, published in 2010. Limoncelli showed that during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, state-regulated prostitution in metropolitan and colonial areas was part of the nation-state and imperial projects.<sup>194</sup> Limoncelli's analysis of militarization of the state and the medical discourse, and their relations to prostitution, was a fitting framework for studying the case of Shahr-e Now in this thesis.

Regarding the second field, state feminism, I used Dorothy McBride and Amy Mazur's contributions' in *Politics of State Feminism*. They use the term state feminism to refer to those

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<sup>193</sup> Moghadam, "Revolution, the State, Islam, and Women," 64; Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 197.

<sup>194</sup> Limoncelli, *The Politics of Trafficking*, 4–5.

agencies that work closely to the state in order to support the women's movements.<sup>195</sup> It was crucial for my thesis to investigate the approach of state-sponsored women's organizations to prostitution. Chapter 4 and chapter 6 were largely focused on this topic.

Archival materials, visual sources, and at some points oral accounts were the sources I used to write this thesis, which have led to the following findings:

Firstly, in chapter 3 and 4, I argued that prostitution in SN was regulated by the state, and for military purposes. Using historian Limoncelli's patterns, I showed that the system of regulation in SN was pretty much similar to global patterns of regulating prostitution. I have argued that SN was backed by the Pahlavi regime, with invisible policies, in order to provide the increasing number of soldiers in Tehran with the sexual services of "clean women." This argument is a gendered contribution to the vast literature that points to the military pillar as one of the main pillars of modern state building in Iran.<sup>196</sup> This literature has not explored the connection of a high number of military men in Tehran with prostitution.

Further, by analyzing the minutes and resolutions of the Eastern Women's Congress in 1932—an event hosted by the Pahlavi regime in Tehran—about prostitution, I showed that the female Iranian delegates at the Congress were implicitly supporting the state agenda for the regulation of prostitution in SN. In this part, I discussed the Iranian delegates' approach to prostitution linked to the feminist abolitionist movement led by The International Abolitionist Federation. This comparative investigation showed that the women's emancipation project,

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<sup>195</sup> McBride and Mazur, *The Politics of State Feminism*, 241.

<sup>196</sup> Cronin, *Soldiers, Shahs and Subalterns in Iran*; Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran, 1921-1926*; Foran, *Fragile Resistance*; Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*; Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran*.

initiated in the 1930s by the Iranian state and its organizations, was in fact devoted to elite women and ignored the condition of lower-class women, such as those living and working in SN. In this sense, the state and state feminism, during the period under review related themselves to the case of SN hand in hand and with similar agendas.

In chapter four, I connected the case of SN and its women to the unveiling law regulated by the regime in 1936. Based on that, I elaborated a comparison between the figure of the prostitute, as the corrupted public woman, and the modern Iranian woman, as the liberated public woman. This comparison led me to two connected conclusions: first, I could explain the anxiety in Iranian society surrounding the unveiling law in an alternative way. The existing literature on the unveiling law suggests that the compulsory nature of the law shaped the anxiety it raised. I argue that, in addition, the overlap between the figure of the prostitute and that of the liberated woman—both integrated into public life and interacting with men—to some extent shaped this anxiety. Secondly, I suggested an alternative explanation in the Iranian context for the regulation of prostitution away from the public eye: by marginalizing the prostitute, the unveiled women, the new version of public women, could be centralized in public opinion with less annoying resemblance.

In chapter five, I used archival documents to establish and discuss the public dissatisfaction around SN before the CIA-backed 1953 Coup d'état against the progressive government of Prime Minister Mossadegh. In this chapter, by reflecting on the police corruption in SN, I made another link between the system of regulation in SN and other state-regulated systems elsewhere, during the twentieth century. Regarding the 1953 Coup, again through archival research, I documented the engineered presence of SN's women in the Coup. This

documentation enabled me to explain the new set of state policies regarding SN during the post-Coup period. I have argued that the wall around SN, built immediately after the Coup, was in fact a strategy to keep the district away from the public eye and to prevent further dissatisfaction regarding it, which after the Coup was politically motivated as well.

The last chapter focused on *Qal'e* [The Castle], a documentary about SN ordered by the state-sponsored Iranian Women's Organization (IWO). By analyzing the process of ordering *The Castle* and relating it to the state-initiated early 1960s White Revolution reforms, I argued that SN was a favorable site for the IWO to show its solidarity with subaltern women. Then, in order to explain the suppression of the documentary by the Ministry of Culture and Art, I suggested that the documentary was stopped because it could easily expose the state's acknowledgment of the district, which in turn could possibly challenge the "emancipatory" image of the regime, which it had been trying to build up for decades. At the end of this chapter, I asked questions about the IWO's approach towards prostitution. First, by referring to their ordering of *The Castle*, I suggested assuming that they held an anti-prostitution position. Then, I challenged that assumption by stating that the available literature on the IWO does not report any other IWO effort to combat prostitution. Finally, by considering the nature of other IWO projects for subaltern women like literacy camps, I argued that the IWO provided support for marginalized women in as far as that support was harmless for the progressive image of the state. However, if representing or giving voice to the subaltern women could question the desired emancipatory face of the regime, as was the case with SN's women, the IWO did not pursue such action.

In general, three themes relating to the history of SN have underpinned the entire thesis: the public eye and public dissatisfaction, state feminism and its classed nature, and the political usage of SN's women.

Regarding the first theme, the public eye and public dissatisfaction, each chapter presented a different form of state effort to keep the state-regulation of prostitution away from the public eye. In chapter 3 by deporting the providers to a suburban area, in chapter 4 by encouraging the property owners in the SN district to leave their houses for SN's women and move elsewhere, in chapter 5 by building a wall around the district, and finally in chapter 6 by suppressing the visual representation of SN in a documentary. I have argued that these were all strategies to cover up the role of the Iranian state in the regulation of prostitution in SN and to prevent public dissatisfaction.

Regarding the second theme, state feminism, in chapter 4 and chapter 6, I remarked on two particular moments in which state-sponsored feminism dealt with the question of prostitution, and more particularly the case of SN. In the first case, the Second Eastern Congress of Women held in Tehran in 1932, the Iranian feminists at the Congress supported the regulation of prostitution in remote areas. In the second case, the IWO, in spite of its initial action of ordering *The Castle* (section 6.2), remained largely neutral or silent about SN's women. In both cases, my analysis showed how state-feminism in the Pahlavi period was classed and was only concerned with upper-class women.

Regarding the third theme, the political usage from SN's women, I have argued that the SN woman was not merely a provider of sexual services, but was at times used to support the state officials' objectives. In chapter 3, the gathering and deporting of the providers out of Tehran

(section 3.4) was a political maneuver made by Reza Khan to gain the clerics' support. In chapter 5, the presence of SN's women in the 1953 Coup was ordered and planned by state officials. And finally, in chapter 6, the creation of *The Castle* was ordered with the purpose of representing IWO's "solidarity with subaltern women." Therefore, SN's women did not serve the state only by their sexual labor, but also by their constructed identities as "prostitutes."

The general and central finding of this thesis was rethinking SN as a highly gendered and political urban construction in Iran's capital city of Tehran. Throughout the whole thesis, I have attempted to show how the history of SN is connected to some of the most important historical moments of modern Iranian history; the shift of power from the Qajar dynasty to the Pahlavi dynasty (chapter 3), the building of the modern Iranian state based on military forces (chapter 4), the 1953 Coup (chapter 5), and the White Revolution of 1963 (chapter 6).

Writing this thesis, I chose to limit my research to "state-regulated prostitution" and "state feminism." My decision was motivated by the lack of basic history of SN; I first needed to answer the basic questions of when, where, how and why SN was established. Answering these questions would have been impossible without analyzing the role of state.

However, this research could be expanded in the future by considering some other key elements related to the history of SN. For instance, inquiring about the agenda of the other feminist groups—rather than state-sponsored groups— regarding prostitution during the period under discussion could possibly provide us with new insights about the history of SN. The other possible approach for studying SN is discussing other forms of prostitution in Tehran during that period, like street-prostitution, and also studying the other red-light districts in Iran to see how, compared to SN, the state dealt with them. Finally, searching for SN's women in the sources,

researching their voices, finding the ways that they could possibly show some sorts of agency related to the dictated policies from above, can potentially be a supplementary project to this thesis.

*Shahr-e Now, Tehran's Red-light District (1909–1979): the State, "the Prostitute," the Soldier, and the Feminist* can be considered as part of the emerging scholarly works on women's and gender history in Iran, and possibly the first contribution to an analytic history of prostitution in the Iranian context. The modernization project of the Iranian state during the twentieth century and its relation to women's issues has been often discussed based on frames such as "women's emancipation," "women's progress" and "unveiling law." This thesis was an effort to show how the relation between the state's modernization project and women had an overshadowed side as well: the sexual labor of mostly nameless women who served the state's political objectives. By retrieving Shahr-e Now's history, this thesis was an effort to uncover and critically discuss one of the forgotten parts of women's history in Iran.

## Appendix 1: Interviews

In chapter 4 and chapter 5, I referred to two interviews in order to support my claims. The cited interviews are both discussions with two social workers, Lili Arshad and Abdolali Shams, who did their internships in SN during the 1970. Here, I briefly present the structure and content of my discussions with Arshad and Shams.

Both interviews were conducted by me through face-to-face discussion. Before the interviews, I already had a list of questions, though I did not limit the interview to only these questions. I asked the interviewees to share with me whatever they could remember and wished to share with me. The following are the main questions that I asked both Arshad and Shams:

- How did they learn about SN for the first time?
- How was SN conceived by public opinion in Tehran?
- What were their responsibilities during their internship in SN?
- How can they describe the everyday life in SN?

### **Interview with Lili Arshad, 12, June 2013.**

Lili Arshad, social worker, is currently the president of Khaneh Khorshid [House of Sun], an NGO in Tehran concerned with the rehabilitation of addicted women. The interview with her was conducted in her office in Tehran and lasted for one hour and thirty minutes. This interview was recorded by a MP3 device.



Prior to her internship in SN, Arshad learned about SN for the first time from her brother who was doing his military service in Tehran. He told Arshad that some of his friends were going to SN during the weekends. According to Arshad, during the 1970s, SN was a normalized urban construction for Tehran's inhabitants. All the people knew what was going on there, behind the walls, but in a way, they had accepted its existence.

Arshad's four-month internship in SN, in 1973, was arranged by her university, the School of Social Work in Tehran. During her internship, Arshad was in charge of going to certain brothels, to fill out questionnaires with the number of providers and the approximate number of clients, and hand the forms to the School of Social Work. According to her, a young provider was visited by approximately sixty to eighty clients per day. Each client could stay with a provider for maximum ten minutes, and if he proposed to stay more, he had to pay an extra fee. Condoms were available in all the brothels, but not mandatory to use. However, providers were authorized to make the clients use a condom. Arshad stated that among all the providers, the old ones had were in the worst emotional condition. They could not attract clients anymore, so the madams were ejecting them from the brothel. The old deported women usually turned into beggars in front of the brothels. Drinking alcohol was also common among this group but not very much among the younger providers.

The other point that Arshad made during our discussion was that most of the SN's women were highly religious; they refused to work during the holy religious days like Ramadan.

### **Interview with Abdolali Shams, 23 July 2013.**

Abdolali Shams, a retired social worker, is currently working voluntarily with the NGO Khaneh Khayerin [Charity House] in Shiraz. The interview was conducted in his office. Shams did not allow me to record the discussions; therefore I took notes while we were talking.

Similar to Arshad, Shams was a student at the School of Social Work in Tehran, and sent to SN to do his internship. Before he got in to the School of Social Work in Tehran, Shams did his military service in Tehran, and he got to know about SN for the first time at the military base. Shams stated that during the weekly meetings at the military base, their commander alarmed the soldiers about the venereal disease in SN and how they had to be careful.

According to Shams, each brothel-owner had some young male dealers. A dealer was usually sent to the small towns and peasantry areas to find the families that had young girls. The dealer proposed to the girl and eventually married her. The dealer brought the newly married girl to Tehran, the so-called hometown of the groom, and there she was sold to the brothel-owner in SN.

There were two guardsmen at the gates of SN in charge of controlling the age of clients. According to Shams the age control was not based on ID validation, but by checking if the client had a grown beard as a sign of puberty. Shams mentioned that soldiers were one of the groups who visited SN regularly, and it was easy to recognize them because of their high and tight haircuts—the mandatory style for soldiers during that period.

Drug usage was not very common among the providers, though the older women, after departing from the brothels, usually got addicted to heroin.

## Appendix 2: *The Castle*

This appendix is dedicated to the documentary *The Castle*, which I discussed particularly in chapter 6. Here, I will present the transcriptions of the audio narrations in the documentary. *The Castle* was originally shot in 1966 by Kamran Shirdel. However, it was only after the 1979 Revolution that the footage of the documentary was edited, by Shirdel himself. For the transcriptions, I mainly used the original English subtitle of the documentary-when and who provided these subtitles is not clear-however, when the subtitles did not exactly articulate the accounts of the film, I changed the translations.

Since the final edit was performed fourteen years after the film was shot, matching the audio narrations with the pictures was not possible for Shirdel during the soundstage of the documentary. Therefore, through watching the documentary, the audience is not able to recognize which audio account belonged to whom.

The documentary runs for eighteen minutes. It starts in a classroom in SN. There are about thirty women presented in the class. The teacher is dictating sentences to a woman who is writing them on the blackboard. The camera shifts from the classroom to some close-ups, mainly from faces of the SN women, and we hear twelve accounts from twelve women.

It is not clear to which organization the class in SN was associated. However, according to one of the accounts, it is unlikely that the class was related to the IWO. As you can see below, in the twelfth account it was mentioned that the class had been running in SN for six years, namely from 1960. Given the fact that the IWO was established in 1966, the class should be associated to another organization.

To those who perished in their innocence:

## **The Castle**

A film by Kamran Shirdel

This film was commissioned by The Women's Organization of Iran in 1966 along with "Tehran is the Capital of Iran." After the beginning of the latter, the shooting of The Qal'e was also stopped and the work remained incomplete. Fourteen years later, the 1979 Revolution made it possible to retrieve the footage and complete the unfinished work. This film was edited, for the first time in the winter of 1980.

[Location: a classroom, a female teacher is dictating sentences for the women and women are writing] *Write my dear...big cities... of Iran...have many... factories... offices and hospitals...in which people work day and night. Every Iranian whether a town-dweller... or a villager...toils...in order to...provide... a better life...for...*

**First voice:** Almost eighteen years ago, when I was a girl, they cheated me in the Pahlavi city [a city in the north] and brought me to Tehran and then to this hell. They sold me here and they never let me get out of here, no matter how hard I tried. I kept asking "why don't you let me get out of here?" They would reply "you owe us money." I missed my parents, they never came after me, never. After some years, I ran away from here to my city. But my parents didn't let me in. so I came back here. I don't know anyone who can take care of me, and I have nothing. I am lost now...I have nowhere to sleep. The sky is my cover and the earth my mattress.

[Location: in the same classroom]...*himself and for other...all of us wherever we might be in Iran...*

**Second voice:** My stepmother forced me to marry an old man when I was nine, he had a wife and children. They would beat me every day. They wouldn't give me any food. I gave birth to my son when I was thirteen...they kept teasing me. My husband sent me out begging. I would beg for little amounts of money in the streets, and then gave all the money to my husband. Yet they [the other wife and her children] weren't giving anything to me. I left that house and went to another house. There, I became a maid servant. There was a man in the other house, he cheated me and sold me to a women in Abadan [a city in the south]. In Abadan, they didn't gave me anything from of my earnings. Well, whatever it was, I ran away from there too and came to Tehran. I returned to my husband's house. Then, I came here [Shahr Now]. I was giving all the money I was making to my husband, no one paid attention to my pleadings. They would say "you are a child." Then, I gave some money to my husband, five hundred Tomans, and he accepted to divorce me. I stayed here for ten years. A client recued me from here and married me... Now we have been together for six years. I have a son, he is 14. My husband does not pay anything for him, even for the bread, he says my son eats too much. Those people who sold me, they gave me some kind of drugs to sterilize me, my womb is damaged, and still after two operations it's not recovered.

[Location: in the same classroom]...*whatever we do, we are...*

**Third voice:** My father was an army sergeant in Torbat Heydariye [a small town in the north-east]. I was cheated. Someone cheated me and brought me to Tehran. That person was a woman. I

didn't know what was going on here [Shahr-e Now]. I was a peasant woman. They took me there to Zahedi Castle. They sold me to here. Now I have two children. I spend all my earning on their education, so they won't be wretched like me, I'd like them to be happy.

[Location: in the same classroom]...*participating in the progress and development...*

**Forth voice:** My name is Shafiqe. I'm a wretched woman. I am not from Iran. I am from Russia. Twenty, thirty or maybe forty years ago, my parents took me to Tehran. When my parents died, I had no one, I fell into misery. I have no way out. I have a child. If there was any job, any kind of job, I would do it... I would. I have no debt and no one owes me anything. I just don't have a breadwinner...if I had, I wouldn't stay here. I would immediately leave here.

[Location: in the same classroom]...*the progress...and development of our country*

**Fifth voice:** I was only six when my mother brought me here. She sold me to a ringleader [a madam]. I ran away and went to Abadan. The ringleader found me again and forced me to get back to the Qal'e. She bribed the police. Again, I came here... I'm twenty-three. I have been an addict all these years. But I have given it up recently. Now I am somebody. Lots of my friends...they could find a husband and get out of this place. I hope God rescues me too.

**Sixth voice:** I am a wretched woman. I have a son who's in the fifth grade. One of the madams kept all my stuff away from me. When I ask her to give them back to me, she says "you owe me money." I went to the police, but they teased me there, they fined me. I leave my child to a woman, she take cares of him. I have nothing. I owe 3000 Tomans and I can't earn enough to give it back. Wherever I go, they beat me; they whip us at police stations. I have to go through all this,

because of my child. It's not a life what I am living. I wish Ashraf Pahlavi would help us somehow. This is our only wish: to get out of this misery.

**Seventh voice:** When I was a small girl, they cheated me and took me to here. Then three years ago my dad died and I inherited some money. My family took that money from me and cheated me. It is been one year since I have been in this class, I am miserable, my mind is troubled, occupied. I keep thinking. I can't even write one line, I can't read, my mind is so busy. I've been through a lot in my life, sir. I've lost a hundred thousand Tomans in my life. I thank the head and teachers of this school, but I can't, my mind isn't free to study. I'm so frustrated, I'm very miserable. I have a lot of debt. I have to pay 60 Tomans in interest every night. I don't know... I can't...my life is gone sir. I beg you, for the sake of God, to rescue me from this life, or withdraw me from this class.

[Location: in the same classroom] *Oh, God...I thank you...O, the great God, I thank you for creating me...for creating me.*

**Eighth voice:** God knows, I was in debt, and then a man, Mohamad Samnani, got me jailed. I sent a lot of letters to the officials, but nobody did anything for me. I have five children. I gave away two of them because of poverty, but still I have the other three.

**Ninth voice:** I'm twelve years old. I have a sister and a little brother. My sister is older than me. I also have a wretched mother. Can you do something for us? My mother said she would register me in this class and that maybe I can find a way out of here. My mother is there. We live in Jamshid [one of the streets of SN], my mother, my brother, all of us. My brother is small, even

smaller than me. My sister is fourteen. Can you do something for us? So we can get away from here. There are bad women and bad men here. They say nasty things. I can't stand it when they say nasty things to me.

**Tenth voice:** These are not [decent] mothers, their children they are only nine years old, eight years old, some of them ten years old, they are very young. They [mothers of the children] take them to Jamshid [one of the streets of SN] at night and use them, they sell their children to the drivers, to drunk men, they charge them with 40 Tomans...50 Tomans and let them stay with their children for an hour or so. I think it's a pity, we're rotten, but they should not be, they will be destroyed, the society will get corrupted.

**Eleventh voice:** We do it behind the hospital [apparently begging]...a few of us...at night. Just standing in the street, people pass by. Sometimes looking at us...they come and go...what can we do? We are hungry, hunger has no remedy, they put little money in our hands, we are forced to do so, we are hungry, and we have to pay the rent. I paid a lot of money this year to the prison [unclear].

**Twelfth voice:** My name is Roshan, I was seventeen when they cheated me and brought me here.

**The interviewer:** Who cheated you?

**Twelfth voice:** I don't know him at all. I don't know whether he is alive or dead now. He cheated me and took me to Shahr-e Now. He gave me drinks and raped me. Then I stayed there. It's almost thirty-five years now since I came here. It's been six years since this class has been established. Now it's been two years that I have got out of these dirty surroundings.

**The interviewer:** What are you doing now?



**Twelfth voice:** I sell oranges and make a good living. I can manage my life from selling oranges. I am satisfied. But now I need a rug or something...a mattress for sleeping. I am having a very hard time.

**The interviewer:** How long is it since you've been in these classes?

**Twelfth voice:** It's almost six years since I joined these classes. Ms. Akaberian [apparently one of the teachers] has been very kind to me. They sent my picture to *Zan-e Rooz* (Today's Woman) and Ms. Zafarani donated 50 Tomans for me. I bought myself some kitchen tools and accessories out of that money. Ms. Firouz gives me some money whenever she comes here. Ms. Nazmi has taught us religious lessons and prayers. I am really grateful to all of them.

**The interviewer:** Did you learn how to read?

**Twelfth voice:** No, I didn't try.

**The interviewer:** You yourself decided not to give it a try?

**Twelfth voice:** Yes, that's right, actually my hand-writing was really good, once I passed the exam, but I didn't follow it up any further. The teacher insisted a lot but I said "reading is useless for me, if you really mean it to help me, find me a job, so I would be rescued from these streets, now that I have been rescued from this business."

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## Interviews

Arshad, Lili (social worker). Interview by Samin Rashidbeigi. MP3 recorded. Tehran. 12, June 2013.

Shams, Abdolali (social worker). Interview by Samin Rashidbeigi. Transcribed. Shiraz. 23 July 2013.

## Videos

“Film Screening of Kamran Shirdel’s Films” YouTube Video. 2: 15: 7. Posted by StanfordISP. March 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPmrOiwMX1E>.

Shirdel, Kamran. “Women’s Quarter.” YouTube Video. 18: 5. Posted by mehranshargh. June 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SnSAdsF0zhI>

———. “Women’s Prison.” YouTube Video. 10: 20. Posted by shelterslullabies. March 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KswPA-TEF2w>