

Architectural Re-imagination of Shahrinaw: Modern Iranian Female Subjectivity and Spatial Exclusion

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Abstract

The beginning of the 20th century in Iran was a period of increased socio-political and economic affairs with Europe, accompanied with the state-driven modernization efforts and fundamental social and spatial changes. The spatial changes in Tehran increased the mobility of citizens and offered new sites of entertainment and transaction. In parallel and as a result of geo-political conflicts in the region and accelerated rural to urban migration, the male population of Tehran increased and caused an imbalance in gender ratio of the city; a condition which caused a surge in prostitution. In addition to the Islamic and moral discourses on prostitution, the rapid spread of the venereal diseases caused a notable public concern. These issues resulted in the public discontent and petitions asking for banishing the sex workers from Tehran. In 1921, the first group of sex workers were displaced beyond the city walls and through time, the area became the official re-light district of Tehran known as *Shahrinaw*. In January 1979, *Shahrinaw* was targeted by a group of Islamic revolutionaries and burnt down. Soon the neighbourhood was demolished, its inhabitants were arrested, executed or dispersed and a public park and cultural centre was built on its remnants of *Shahrinaw*, as it never existed before.

This dissertation explores the architectural history of *Shahrinaw*. The main aim of this historical and spatial analysis is to investigate the reciprocal interplay between ‘public women’ and ‘space’ and the way their interplay unfolds in *Shahrinaw*. Building upon a wide range of documents and historical fragments, this dissertation develops an intelligible representational narrative and an architectural re-imagination of *Shahrinaw* to better understand the relationship between modernizing gender relations and everyday spatial practices. This research concludes with the argument that the subjectivity of modern Iranian female is defined by her experiences of spatial exclusion and struggles over being included within the social space.

Keywords: *Shahrinaw*, Modernisation, Tehran, Spatial Exclusion, Female Subjectivity.

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'Hark! Do you hear the whisper of the shadows?

This happiness feels foreign to me.

I am accustomed to despair:

Hark! Do you hear the whisper of the shadows?

There, in the night, something is happening

The moon is red and anxious.

And, clinging to this roof

That could collapse at any moment,

The clouds, like a crowd of mourning women,

Await the birth of the rain.

One second, and then nothing'

Forough Farokhzad

Chapter One

The Beginning of an End

The red-light district of Tehran known as *Shahrinaw*¹ was officially demarcated on the outskirts of Tehran between 1907-09.² From 1953, it was also known as *Qal'ah* (The Ward) after an impassable tall brick wall was erected and circumscribed the area. The two coarse and rusty metal doors were only open to men who were seeking illicit pleasure. For more than seventy years, this space and its inhabitants were ignored but remained an integral part of modern Tehran.



Figure 1: Aerial photo of south-west Tehran depicting the early stage of demarcation of Shahrinaw by Walter MittelHolzer, 1925. ETH-Bibliothek Zürich. The broad circular field at the back is the Bagh-e-Shah garrison on the west of Tehran; the two streets at the front are Jamshid street (left) and Qavam-daftar (right). Jamshid Street will later become the eastern border of Shahrinaw where the wall will be erected, Qavam-daftar Street will later serve as one of the two main streets within Shahrinaw.

I received an urgent phone call...[he] told me that a crowd of 'beards' was threatening to burn down the entire Qal'ah...by the time that we arrived...black smoke was rising from a few wrecked little houses nearby. Several women stood in the street, screeching with rage and fear and cursing their persecutors. The rioters, a couple of dozen bearded young men in black shirts carrying torches and cans of kerosene...I ran to the police station...I begged and berated...Those women, I Pleaded, might be guilty of a sin in the eye of religion, but surely...didn't deserve to die on that account'³

1 Shahrinaw translates to the New City.

2 Hasan Ezam Qodsi, *Tarikh-E Sad Saley-E Iran [My Diaries: 100-Year History of Iran]* (Tehran, 1963).

3 Sattareh Farman-Farmaian and Dona Munker, *Daughter of Persia: A Woman's Journey from Her Father's Harem through the Islamic Revolution* (Broadway Books, 2006). pp. 408-409

The 29th of January 1979 was the beginning of *Shahrinaw*'s bitter end. Islamic revolutionaries were getting ready to receive Ayatollah Khomeini back in Iran after fourteen years of exile. It is not known why, on that cold day in the middle of winter, the revolutionary crowd embarked on a witch-hunt and marched towards the south of Tehran to vent their rage on the walled area of *Shahrinaw*. The revolution was finally reaching its spring – what better way to celebrate this event than with the ancient tradition of lighting a fire;⁴ a fire symbolising purification and promising the end of the darkness. This fire was a tool to remove the ill-favoured stain from the face of the city.

Around midday, a large crowd gathered and set *Shams* brewery on fire. On their way to *Shahrinaw*, they burned down all the bars, cafes and cabarets. By five in the evening *Shahrinaw* was surrounded and soon the angry mob – some might even have been regular visitors – broke the main gate and poured into the neighbourhood.⁵

*'Smoke, dust, shouting and commotion; A large crowd is watching... Women with bare head and feet running out of burning houses screaming and coughing... they find themselves in a circle of angry men hitting them with belts, sticks and brass knuckles. A vigorous man comes forward and cuts a woman's long hair... [another woman shouts:] How come the yesterday's clients became religious all of a sudden?'*⁶

The next day, the headline of *Ittilā'āt* newspaper read: 'The South and the West of Tehran was Burning in Blaze'. The newspaper article reported on violent physical encounters between the mob and women of *Shahrinaw* which resulted in numerous injuries and several unconfirmed deaths.⁷ A counter-protest formed in Tehran University the day after the incident in opposition to the violent acts of the revolutionaries.⁸ *Ayatollah Tāliqānī*⁹ denounced the violent assault and proclaimed that the inhabitants of *Shahrinaw* were themselves victims and must be rehabilitated and redirected into the society.¹⁰

4 *Chahār-Shanbah-Sourī* is an Iranian tradition rooted in Zoroastrianism. As part of this tradition, people light a fire on the eve of last Wednesday of the year, jump over it and wish for a good health in the following year.

5 'Ittilā'at 15722,' January 30, 1979, p.8; 'Kayhan 10626,' January 31, 1979, p.3.

6 Bahram Beyzaei, آینه های روبرو [*Facing Mirrors*], 1983. p.7

7 'Ittilā'at 15722'.

8 'Kayhan 10626'.

9 *Tāliqānī* was one of the Iranian Revolutionary leaders

10 'Kayhan 10626'.



Figure 2: 'The South and the West of Tehran was Burning in Blaze', Source: Ittila'at, 1572, Bahman 10, 1357/January 30, 1979

Despite this moderate stance, *Shahrinaw* continued to function on the threshold of uncertainty for a year after the establishment of the Islamic government.¹¹ The Central Committee of the Islamic Revolution prosecuted three prominent female leaders of *Shahrinaw* under the revolutionary law: *Pari bolandeh*; *Ashraf char-cheshm*; and *Soraya tarkeh*.¹² These women were hastily executed by firing squad on 12th July 1979.¹³ Meanwhile a banner was put up at the iron gate of *Shahrinaw* by the newly established department of Fight Against Vice (mubārizah bā munkarāt):

*'To the brothers who are the visitors of the Ward: What would you have done if other people did such shameful acts to your honour?'*¹⁴

Additionally, a public evacuation notice was distributed amongst the remaining residents of *Shahrinaw*. Persistent residents who declined to leave the district - mostly outcast women with

11 'Javanan-e-Emrūz, No. 683', January 1980.

12 In order: (The tall Pari alias Sakineh Ghasemi), (The four-eyed Ashraf alias Zahra Mafi) and (Skinny Soraya alias Saheb Afsari)

13 "Kayhan 10755," July 12, 1979, p.1.

14 'Javanan-e-Emrūz, No. 683', January 1980, pp.12-14; Jairan Gahan, 'Red-Light Tehran: Prostitution, Intimately Public Islam, and the Rule of the Sovereign, 1910-1980', 2017.



Figure 3: Javanan-e-Emruz Magazine, Title: 'The doors of Shahrinaw closed forever' no 683, 20 February 1980

no other place to go - were forcefully removed from the premises and the doors of *Shahrinaw* were closed forever on July 1980.¹⁵

Aligholi Foudazi, a member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, was one of the guards in charge of evacuation and demolishing of *Shahrinaw* in 1979 and 80. Foudazi recalls that the order of demolition of *Shahrinaw* was issued by department of Fight Against Vice in 1979.¹⁶ The guards were stationed within the walls of *Shahrinaw* and after a home-to-home inspection, they demolished 600 houses away from the eyes of the public over three days.¹⁷

*[Foudazi] I am saying this after 38 years that we did the right thing, but unfortunately we couldn't organize the women and return them to the society. We transferred them to the social welfare organization but due to the lack of resources they had to let most of the women and their children go'*¹⁸

15 'Javanan-e-Emruz, No. 670', November 1979.

16 It is not clear who gave the official order of demolition. In different sources there are different people held responsible

17 In his interview with ILNA (Iranian Labour News Agency) ILNA 5th March 2017,

18 In his interview with ILNA (Iranian Labour News Agency) ILNA 5th March 2017,



Figure 4: Satellite image of Shahrinaw before destruction, September 1972, Source: National Cartographic Centre of Iran



Figure 5: Satellite image of Shahrinaw after destruction, September 1993, Source: National Cartographic Centre of Iran



Figure 6: A demolished brothel in Shahrinaw, 1980, photographer Unknown, National Library and Archive of I. R. Iran

The public memory of *Shahrinaw* faded out after the district was physically erased, and its inhabitants were dispersed. The physical removal of *Shahrinaw* created a spatial void in the middle of Tehran for almost two decades.¹⁹ In 1997, Tehran Municipality inaugurated the *Rāzī* park and cultural complex, built on top of the remnants of *Shahrinaw*. The complex includes a variety of public services such as library, movie theatre, artificial lake and amusement park. Nowadays, citizens of Tehran, most probably those under the age of forty, can hardly recall *Shahrinaw* and its removal.

The history of *Shahrinaw* as explained above summarizes the complex layers of power dynamics, gender relations and social transformations in the 20th century Iran. The iconic restraining wall and iron gates of *Shahrinaw* portray the neighbourhood as a containing space and as the materialization of the society's reaction to the unfamiliar conditions of modernity in Iran. These newly emerged conditions can be investigated through the presence of disorderly bodies within the space for the first time. The feminist historian Judith Walkowitz used the term *public women* to describe the women out of place.²⁰ The society's response to the presence of public women was their segregation and ideally elimination from the city which resulted in creation of in-between spaces such as female mental ward, female prison and red-light district. Following the philosopher Michel Foucault, *Shahrinaw* can be considered as a

19 There is not much information about the abandoned site of *Shahrinaw* between 1980 and 1997 (eight years of which overlapped with Iran-Iraq war, 1980-1988).

20 Judith R Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (University of Chicago Press, 2013).



'heterotopia of deviation' on the edge of Tehran, isolating and alienating its presumably unfit and disorderly inhabitants from the city while signifying intense, disturbing, incompatible or transforming spatial qualities.²¹ To better understand the condition of *Shahrinaw* as a heterotopia and the reasons behind its inception and violent end, one must investigate the social, cultural and political circumstances that collectively gave birth to realization of this space.

This dissertation starts by exploring the creation process of *Shahrinaw*; how it was planned, built, controlled and finally demolished under a patriarchal society. The main aim of this dissertation is to investigate the reciprocal interplay between 'public women' and 'space' and the way their interplay unfolds in *Shahrinaw*. The social status of 'public women' within society is directly linked to the novel socio-cultural relations which emerge during the process of modernization and transformation of the city. To better understand these relations, this research focuses on Tehran as a traditional Islamic city on the verge of modernization and asks how modernizing gender relations informed and reshaped everyday spatial practices in *Shahrinaw*. As will become apparent, the creation of *Shahrinaw* was intertwined with political and economic issues as well as social discourses on public hygiene, anxieties about the spread of venereal diseases and concerns with the Islamic image of Tehran. This research investigates *Shahrinaw* as a spatial solution to conceal the newly emerged and unwanted condition of street solicitation and prostitution which was booming at the turn of the century in Tehran.

This dissertation is inspired by Kaveh Golestan's photographic series called '*Untitled, the prostitute Series 1975-77*' held at the Tate Britain Prints and Drawing Rooms collection. In this series, Golestan has documented the life of sex-workers of *Shahrinaw* over the course of two years. The photo collection depicts melancholic life of *Shahrinaw*'s women in a powerful way. Golestan uses photography as a medium that reveals the truth. He was deeply touched by the rough life condition of people of the ward specially the sex-workers. He described *Shahrinaw* as a cage which separates the prostitutes from the society - as the criminals and keeps them in an inhumane condition. Golestan suggests that the underlying causes of its creation and the whole organisation of *Shahrinaw* require a structural reform and a stern reconsideration.

*'I want to show you images that would be like and slap in your face...to shatter your security...you can look away, turn off, hide your identity like murderers but you cannot stop the truth...no one can'*²²

◀ *Figure 7: Razi Park and Cultural centre in centre of image. Source: Google Earth, 2020*

21 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, Pantheon Books, 1978.

22 Kaveh Golestan in the documentary 'Recording the Truth' in 1991



Figure 8: 'The Ward in Another Look: They built a cage for a few days'. a report by Kaveh Golestan, Ayandegan Magazine, No 2536

This research also reflects on my personal desire to explore the architectural history of *Shahrinaw* not only as an architect but also a woman – to re-imagine the space which was home, prison, workspace, hospital, and school for many women and their children for more than seventy years.

The architect and theorist Juhani Pallasmaa argue that 'people inhabit the architectural space with their entire body, through movement, memory and imagination'.²³ I believe that to be able to tell the spatial story of *Shahrinaw*, one must try to inhabit the memories and imagination of the bodies which were moving within and experiencing the space. Gaining a 'historical epistemology' based on the remaining historical fragments – including visual, written and oral history – from *Shahrinaw* is a complex task.²⁴ Understanding and evaluating the space starts with the everyday experience of inhabitation.²⁵ As architectural historians we explore the spaces that we do not necessarily experience. In the case of *Shahrinaw* the space

23 Robert McCarter and Juhani Pallasmaa, *Understanding Architecture* (Phaidon Press, 2012). p. 5

24 Jane Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space & Architecture in Regency London* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002). pp.2 & 3

25 McCarter and Pallasmaa. p. 5

has been completely erased from the city and Golestan's photo collection only offers a static insight into that space.

The architectural historian Jane Rendell claims that 'The (hi)stories we tell of cities are also (hi)stories of ourselves.'²⁶ Similarly, for me, this dissertation is a personal journey from 'knowing' the space to 'knowing' the self. Through exploring the spatial experience and history of *Shahrinaw*, this journey defines me as a non-western feminist architectural historian, who herself is the product of the process of modernisation – and the exclusion of public women – from a transforming Tehran.

Figure 9: Untitled, the prostitute Series 1975-77' by Kaveh Golestan, held at the Tate Britain Prints and Drawing Rooms collection ►

26 Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space & Architecture in Regency London*. p. 3



Conceptual Framing

The theoretical framing of this research is based on three interwoven thematic cores: modernisation in the subaltern context, the transformation of gender relations in light of modernisation, and the biopolitics of controlling and regulating the heterotopic space of *Shahrinaw*. These themes overlap and complement each other and form the theoretical underpinning of this spatial exploration.

The turn of the twentieth century transformed the way of thinking and living of the Iranians dramatically. In historian Ervand Abrahamian's words 'Iran entered the Twentieth century with oxen and wooden plough, it exited with ... [a] nuclear program.'²⁷ Modernisation also transformed the built environment of the major cities in Iran. Tehran as Iran's capital developed in a tension between "deep-seated tradition and wild modernity"²⁸ and physically experienced massive transformation during successive waves of modernisation.²⁹ In a period of sixty years from the turn of the twentieth century to mid-1960s, the area of the city grew fourfold and reached 180 square kilometres. In the same period, the population of Tehran increased from 250,000 to 3 million.³⁰ On the surface, modernising efforts in Tehran managed to realise the material and technological advances of western modernism; however, the elitist 'political representation of the society'³¹ through the state-driven modernisation project resulted in a clash between the society's subjectivity and the imported modernism. This clash generated a sudden rupture in the relationship of the Iranian subjects with their historical background and ontological being which in the subsequent decades, affected the social, cultural and moral constructs of the society at different levels.

Historians have well documented the transformation of Tehran from a typical traditional pre-capitalist city to an urbanised and industrialised modern city.³² They also note that the creation of the first sites of leisure and display in the city at the beginning of 20th century enabled new modes of consumption and exchange.³³ Architecture and urban form are the two key domains that inform the making of modern identity.³⁴ In Tehran, the transformation of existing architectural and urban forms resulted in the dissolution of borders between private and public spheres and in turn, contributed to the increased public presence of women as part of their

27 Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran: Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton University Press, 1982). p.1

28 Asef Bayat, 'Tehran: Paradox City', *New Left Review*, 66 (2010), 99–122.

29 Amir Banimasoud, 'Iranian Contemporary Architecture', *Tehran: Memari-e-Gharn Publishing*, 2009.

30 Ali Madanipour, 'Early Modernization and the Foundations of Urban Growth in Tehran', *Fachzeitschrift Des VINI*, 2006; 'Statistical Centre of Iran'.

31 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Graham Riach, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (Macat International Limited London, 2016).

32 Ali Madanipour, *Tehran: The Making of a Metropolis* (Academy Press, 1998); Asma Mehan, "'Tabula Rasa" Planning: Creative Destruction and Building a New Urban Identity in Tehran', *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism*, 41.3 (2017), 210–20; Hamed Khosravi, Amir Djalali, and Francesco Marullo, 'Tehran. Life within Walls. A City, Its Territory and Forms of Dwelling' (Taylor & Francis, 2018); Bayat. p.99

33 Jane Rendell, "'Serpentine Allurements": Disorderly Bodies/Disorderly Spaces', *Intersections: Architectural Histories and Critical Theories*, London: Routledge, 2000. p. 248

34 Zeynep Çelik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontation: Algiers under French Rule*, 1997.

newly defined modern identity.

The character of modern Iranian female subject resonates with the concept of the 'public woman'. As Walkowitz defines it, the 'public woman' or the 'woman out of place' refers to the woman who is out and about in the city and who negates the public-private distinction so crucial to the liberal 'separate spheres' ideology.³⁵ A woman who moves freely through public space is a matter of concern for the patriarchal society, a disorderly body flouting the established patriarchal separation of masculine public space and feminised domesticity.³⁶ Feminist scholars have also discussed the female body as a commodity which is displayed, consumed and exchanged.³⁷ In patriarchal societies, women are at once objects of exchange moving among men, and subjects of consumption.³⁸ A modest woman is considered as private property belonging to the patriarchs while a prostitute is a public property.³⁹ Rendell argues that in patriarchal relations of ownership and exchange, women and the space in which they operate are represented as disorderly phenomena which require a permanent restraining boundary.⁴⁰ At the threshold of this bounded space the passage occurs from the outside to inside; a passage which is a metaphoric portrayal of sexual penetration.⁴¹ Hence, the wall of *Shahrinaw* resembles a border between inside and outside where *inside* refers to a space dedicated to sexual practices and intimate relations which usually take place within the boundary of home, and *outside* indicates the public space which presupposes specific forms of social and gender relations informed by norms, moral codes and religious beliefs.

The existing historical evidence reveal that a large group of the women of *Shahrinaw* had been sold by their male guardians or husbands, or in a few cases, were kidnapped and then sold by strangers.⁴² Also, the evidence uncovers a common practice of indebting the women of *Shahrinaw* by providing them with consumer goods for which they had to pay later.⁴³ This practice was done mostly by madams and procurers profiting from the exploitation of sex-workers bodies. These narratives signify the significant impact of economic relations of exchange in the transition from traditional patriarchal social forms to modern gender relations, when patriarchs –not always men– take up the role of capitalists and the bodies of the sex-workers become commodities on the market.

35 Walkowitz, Judith R. *City of dreadful delight: narratives of sexual danger in late-Victorian London*. University of Chicago Press, 2013. pp. 18-19

36 Rendell, "Serpentine Allurements": Disorderly Bodies/Disorderly Spaces'. p. 255

37 Luce Irigaray, 'This Sex Which Is Not One (1977)', *New York*, 1985; Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Knopf, 2010). pp. 613-633

38 Rendell, "Serpentine Allurements": Disorderly Bodies/Disorderly Spaces'. p. 248

39 Rendell, p. 248

40 Rendell, p. 256

41 Rendell, p. 256

42 S. Farmanfarmaian, *پیرامون روسپیگری در شهر تهران [About Prostitution in Tehran]* (Tehran: Institute of Social services, 1970), pp. 77-79; Hedayat. Hakimilahi, *با من به شهرنو بیایید [Come with Me to Shahrinaw]* (Tehran, 1946); Mahmoud Zand-Muqaddam, *قلعه [The Ward]* (Tehran: Maziyar Publishing House, 1958).

43 Farmanfarmaian. p. 214

The modernising urban domain of Tehran could be seen as the materialisation of the conflict between patriarchs seeking to control the body of their female properties – mothers, wives, daughters – and capitalists who were encouraging the public presence of the women as cheap labour, potential consumers and also as consumable commodities.⁴⁴ Within this polarised setting of conflict between the traditional and modernising social and gender relations, the state also undertook a role to frame the characteristics of an ideal modern Iranian woman. The discourse on the ideal woman started with the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11) and the 1936 Unveiling decree. The traditional portrayal of the Iranian woman was the product of centuries of religious and conservative beliefs within the patriarchal society: she was equal parts good wife and good mother.⁴⁵ By contrast, the modern ideal woman resembled her European counterparts and mirrored their lifestyle, choice of fashion, preferences and social presence.⁴⁶

The maternal role of Iranian woman was a point of conflict in attempts to frame the ideal female figure. This conflict was specifically surfaced within the debates on female criminality:⁴⁷ as historian Cyrus Schayegh states, in postwar Iran, “a criminal-woman is a failed mother-woman”. In this maternal economy, Schayegh notes, “prostitution is the mother of all crimes”.⁴⁸ The essential fear was that the transformation of everyday urban life, coupled with increased presence of women in the public realm and their integration into the labour market, would undermine their maternal role without providing any alternatives.⁴⁹ Therefore, it was argued that modernisation prepared the ground for crime by deconstructing the consolidated structures of family, marriage and motherhood and encouraging women to leave the private sphere and become active agents outside the home.⁵⁰

The history of *Shahrinaw* was shaped by efforts to regulate its spatial arrangement and the social and gender relations taking place within it. While *Shahrinaw* has not been extensively documented, some academic literature (See Gahan and Batmanghelichi) have deployed the Foucauldian notion of ‘heterotopia’ or ‘other spaces’ to theorise and explain its formation as an illusionary space designed to control and discipline.⁵¹ As a heterotopia, or as what Foucault termed as a ‘place of tolerance’ in ‘*History of Sexuality*’,⁵² *Shahrinaw* was operating under the conditions of controlled legality characterised by police surveillance, regular health checks, and a hierarchical socio-spatial organisation, which supported the practices taking place

44 Iain Borden and Jane Rendell, *Intersections: Architectural Histories and Critical Theories* (Psychology Press, 2000). p. 248

45 Soheila Torabi Farsani, زن ایرانی در گذار از سنت به مدرن [*Iranian Woman in Transition from Tradition to Modernity*] (Tehran: Niloufar, 2019). p. 51

46 Torabi Farsani. p. 91

47 Cyrus Schayegh, ‘Criminal-Women and Mother-Women: Sociocultural Transformations and the Critique of Criminality in Early Post-World War II Iran’, *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*, 2.3 (2006), 1–21.

48 Schayegh. p. 2

49 Schayegh. pp. 3-6

50 Schayegh. pp. 9-12

51 Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, *Diacritics*, 1986 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/464648>>.

52 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*. p. 4

within this space.⁵³ The surrounding wall of *Shahrinaw* was in fact an indicator of a level of tolerance towards the practice of prostitution. The wall was a disguise, making the pleasure quarter of Tehran invisible to the eye of the public. The wall was a physical boundary or border separating the heterotopia of *Shahrinaw* and the practices taking place within it from the everyday life outside. In this way, the heterotopia of *Shahrinaw* blurred the distinction between public and private spheres, between insider and outsider, by creating a safe haven and sense of sanctuary.⁵⁴ The spatial arrangement of this space was configured to promote a certain feeling of homeliness and to reproduce a crafted experience for its users and residents alike. The sense of ‘otherness’ is arguably an inextricable feature of *Shahrinaw*. As a bounded social and spatial unit, secluded from the general public and only accessible to a limited fragment of the population, *Shahrinaw* was perceived as a disturbing entity. This is evident in the history of oppositions to the space and the hostile attitude of the conservative element of society towards its existence and residents. Additionally, as a spatial entity, the otherness of *Shahrinaw* was manifested in its inscrutable wall, created a rupture with its surroundings, an ill-fitting black hole in the heart of Tehran.

There is also an explicit element of regulating power within *Shahrinaw*, both with regards to its internal social relations and gender dynamics, and more importantly, in relation to the wider urban landscape of Tehran. The disciplinary enclosure of *Shahrinaw* can be explored through the lens of biopolitics as a form of power exercised over the population. Foucault frames population as: ‘[a] political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power’s problem.’ The modern city enabled and provided the means for the societies to discipline life through space. It was through cities that governments assert the form of bio-politics to control the population through techniques of surveillance, registration, classification division of people and exclusion from space.⁵⁵ The trajectory of the spatial modernisation of Tehran alongside the modernisation of the state’s structure and formation of institutions of social control such as the police led to an increased level of surveillance and regulation. It was primarily through these social and governmental innovations that the assertion of biopolitical power over the population of sex-workers became possible. The top-down, hierarchical web of biopolitical power excludes the harmful elements of society to preserve the larger social body through a set of practices and conventions such as mandatory entry cards, health certificates, and health check-ups and monitoring. Disciplining the body of the prostitute through restricting her movements and through registering and regulating the social and gender relations are forms of exercising biopolitics in *Shahrinaw*.

53 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Vintage, 1979). p. 279

54 Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter, *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society* (Routledge, 2008). p. 153

55 John Pløger, ‘Foucault’s Dispositif and the City’, *Planning Theory*, 7.1 (2008), 51–70. p. 64

A Note on the Method

Shahrinaw was built by the state as a spatial solution to the novel socio-cultural problems of a modernising city. Exploring the conditions of *Shahrinaw* will generate an in-depth understanding of the historical development of Tehran in the 20th century, its process of modernisation and the transformation of gender relations during this time. However, as *Shahrinaw* does not exist anymore, understanding its socio-spatial attributes and space-gender relations necessitate a specifically designed research methodology.

The first stage of this research involved collecting information and historical fragments about *Shahrinaw*, its inhabitants and users. This was done by consulting various sources including cinematic representations, literary narrations, collective memories and archives. These materials can be categorized in three main groups: (1) visual representations, (2) literary representations and (3) archival documents.

- Visual representations of *Shahrinaw* were investigated through the analysis of (1) Kaveh Golestan's photo series on *Shahrinaw*⁵⁶, (2) Kamran Shirdel's Documentry 'Qal'ah'⁵⁷ and (3) three movies Tuti, Sooteh-Delan and Kandoo from 1970s.⁵⁸
- Literary sources include (1) a research report titled 'Prostitution in Tehran' conducted by Tehran School of Social Work 1970⁵⁹; (2) three ethnographic studies by Hakimilahi, Zand-Moghadam and Shahri⁶⁰; and lastly, (3) two novels, Tuti and Tehrān-e Maḳuf, and a screen play, Aineh-Hai-Rooberoo.⁶¹
- Archival documents include (1) a series of magazine and newspaper articles from the University of Manchester Digital Library; (2) official documents and correspondence related to *Shahrinaw* and the displacement of female sex workers to the area obtained from 'National Library and Archive of I.R Iran'; and (3) aerial photos of the neighbourhood from 1972 and 1993 obtained from Iran National Cartographic Centre.

The second stage of this research encompassed the incorporation and fusion of these wide range of documents and historical fragments in order to develop an intelligible representational narrative of spatial and gender relations in *Shahrinaw*. This stage was inspired by *Kintsugi*; the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery pieces by mending the breakage lines back into place with a gold lacquer mix. In *Kintsugi* philosophy, the cracks and the process of repairing the object are both invaluable elements of the object's history.⁶² The

56 'The Prostitution Series' 1975-77, Kaveh Golestan, Tate Modern Website

57 Qal'ah' (Woman's Quarter), Kamran Shirdel, 1965-80

58 Tuti (The Parrot), Zakaria Hashemi, 1977; Sooteh-Delan (Desiderium), Ali Hatami, 1978; Kandu (Beehive), Fereydun Gole, 1975

59 Farmanfarmaian, پیرامون روسپیگری در شهر تهران [*About Prostitution in Tehran*] (Tehran: Institute of Social services, 1970)

60 Jafar Shahri, *The Old Tehran* (Tehran, Iran: Moeen (in Farsi), 1993); Hakimilahi; Zand-Muqaddam.

61 Zakarya Hashemi, طوطی [*Tuti*], 1969; Sayyed Morteza Moshfeq-e Kazemi, *Tehrān-e Maḳuf* [تهران مخوف], 1922; Beyzaei.

62 In general, three types of joinery are used in *Kintsugi*. In the (1) Crack technique, the broken pieces of the object are arranged in their original formation and joined together using gold dust and resin. (2) The Piece method is used when a ceramic fragment is missing, and its empty space is commonly filled with golden lacquer mix.

artist Bouke de Vries has offered an alternative approach to Kintsugi which demonstrates that the recollected fragments cannot re-create the original piece but rather they form a phantom-like illusion of the object.⁶³ Similarly, this research attempted to creatively integrate bits of information to produce an extensive historical profile of the socio-spatial characteristics of *Shahrinaw* and ultimately, to reconstruct and reveal its forgotten history and spatial experience.



Figure 10: Left: Memory vessel 5, 18th century porcelain Chinese bowl, glass and walnut, 265x265x160mm. Unique. Artist: Bouke de Vries, 2013 / Right: Marine memory vessels, 2016, 18th century Chinese porcelain marine archaeology storage vessels Ø195x272mm. Artist: Bouke de Vries, 2016, source: www.boukedevries.com

In a few instances where existing historical evidence could not generate an encompassing image, parallel anecdotal narratives were used. The missing fragments were replaced by creative storytelling inspired by the representation of *Shahrinaw* in the social novels and movies of the time. This method of historical inquiry is inspired by the approach taken by Saidiya Hartman in her recent book *Wayward Lives* and is a modified type of ‘creative literary non-fiction’ method.⁶⁴ As a mode of historical storytelling, creative literary non-fiction acts as a catalyst; it lays the foundation with the use of historical evidence and then fills the gaps with first person accounts, experiences and stories.⁶⁵

Rendell argues that there is an obsession with ‘figures which traverse space’ in the fields of urban and architectural history.⁶⁶ The flaneur and prostitute are in the centre of the discussions about spatial experience as they constantly move within the socially produced space and conceive it. Through the eyes and personal narrative of these figures, the exploration of historical space becomes possible. Space, according to French Philosopher Henri Lefebvre, is a historical product and subject to social relations.⁶⁷ However feminist geographers such

Finally, (3) the Joint Call technique is used when a non-matching fragment replace a missing part of the original object.

63 Bouke de Vries is a London-based Dutch artist specializing in Ceramic art and porcelain.

64 See Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (WW Norton & Company, 2019).

65 Anita Sinner, *Unfolding the Unexpectedness of Uncertainty: Creative Nonfiction and the Lives of Becoming Teachers* (Springer, 2013).

66 Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space & Architecture in Regency London*. p.1

67 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford Blackwell, 1974), CXLII.

as Doreen Massey and Fran Tonkiss have criticised the idea of socially produced space for its disregard of gender dynamics and argued that gender relations play a critical role in production of space.⁶⁸ Additionally, the famous remark of the French philosopher and feminist theorist Simone de Beauvoir ‘one not born, but, rather *becomes* a woman’ formulates and frames gender as a repetitive performative act that is fluid and thus consolidated through time.⁶⁹

Thus, to explore and experience the spatial qualities of *Shahrinaw* a creatively crafted *urban explorer* is needed. The urban explorer is an amalgamation of multiple characters who were engaged with *Shahrinaw* in one way or another. All these characters merge into one and collectively shape the urban explorer who traverses the space and time, and will be our eyes to *Shahrinaw*. The urban explorer constantly transforms and adapts to the spaces that it explores. Its gender is subject to its performance in space; hence by moving through space and occupying different bodies, it can reveal the spatial story and gender relations of the space.

There are three main characters that collectively give birth to our *urban explorer*. The first character is *Hashim*, the protagonist of the novel and the movie *Tuti*: he is a macho character who wanders around Tehran and spends his nights at the red-light district. The second character is *Pari*, a fearless and famous madam in *Shahrinaw* who was arrested at the time of the Islamic Revolution and executed. Her character is represented multiple times in the literature on *Shahrinaw* by different writers. The third character is *Roshan* who appears in the *Qal’a* documentary by Shirdel: she was brought to *Shahrinaw* at the age of seventeen and lived there for thirty-five years. Although she is not a sex-worker anymore, it is impossible for her to separate her body from the space of *Shahrinaw* and leave it for good. She lives by selling oranges to the visitors. Each character offers a novel perspective on the space. Following their movements within space and seeing through their eyes reveal the architectural and urban experiences of the space. However, it must be acknowledged that these eyes do not offer an unfiltered view toward *Shahrinaw* but a subjective and socio-culturally specific perception.

During the process of undertaking this research, a few challenges emerged which require consideration. Due to the unexpected restrictions caused by COVID-19 pandemic, visiting the site itself and local archival resources was not feasible. Furthermore, the ethnographic studies and documentaries on *Shahrinaw* which were produced prior to the Islamic Revolution are now either forbidden, heavily censored or kept in private archives which makes them inaccessible. Additionally, most of the resources are in Farsi, with no official English translation – all the translations had to be done by me. Some of the nuances of the meanings and contextual elements of the narratives were lost, especially by translating idioms, slangs

68 Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013); Fran Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory: Social Relations and Urban Forms* (Polity, 2005).

69 De Beauvoir, p.3; Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, *Theatre Journal*, 40.4 (1988), 519–31.

and the informal language used by sex-workers. For example, it was extremely challenging to choose a proper English word for ‘prostitute’ or ‘sex-worker’; In Farsi there are a number of expressions to describe a woman who sells sex. These words usually have distinctive connotations. For example, *Fahisha* or *Maroufeh* refer to a woman who is recognized by her sin while *Tan-Foroush* means a woman who sells her body and is the closest to sex-worker. For the names of people and places, this research has adopted terms in harmony with the existing body of literature in English on *Shahrinaw*.

The contribution of this research is threefold. Historically, this research will offer new archival evidence to the existing literature on *Shahrinaw*. Theoretically, it develops the architectural and spatial analysis of the space. Finally, the main outcome of this research – in chapter three - is the architectural re-imagination of *Shahrinaw* through narrating a spatial story, producing series of architectural documents and presenting a visual collage. This outcome is particularly important because reviewing the existing literature and archival evidence revealed gaps in visual and architectural representations of *Shahrinaw*. This research aims to provide the opportunity for its reader to experience *Shahrinaw*, to inhabit it with their body, to walk within the space, touch its material, hear its tumult and see it as it was before destruction. If the reader becomes able to experience and re-imagine the phantom of *Shahrinaw*'s space by reading this dissertation, this thesis will have succeeded.

Chapter Two

Spatial History of Exclusion

Multiple studies have explored the history of *Shahrinaw* from various perspectives and disciplinary views such as politics and law, Islamic morality, feminist and gender studies.⁷⁰ This section is built upon the existing archival evidence and offers an alternative spatial account of the history of *Shahrinaw*. To this end, I will explore the history of *Shahrinaw* through ideas of *border* and *exclusion*. The spatial history of Tehran can be told by exploring the materialization and destruction of its three walls. Although the justification for the construction of these walls raise questions concerning their symbolic and non-defensive function, their existence had a real effect on the spatial perception of the city. These walls created a border which enforced the distinction between outside and inside and differentiated between those who reside within the walls and those who dwell outside of it.

When Tehran was selected as the capital of Qajars in 1785, it was nothing more than a village on the foot of Damavand mountain.⁷¹ Tehran's strategic location on the intersection of the East-to-West Silk Road and the North-to-South trading route transformed it from an insignificant peripheral village to a walled market town in the Middle Ages.⁷² Within a century, the population of Tehran increased from 15,000 to 250,000.⁷³ As mentioned before, Tehran's early history is entangled with the construction and presence of three walls. The first city wall was built in 1553 by the order of Shah Tahmāsp I (1524–76) the Safavid King⁷⁴ in order to give Tehran its first juridical and formal unity and allowed entry to the city through four main gates.⁷⁵ The second wall was erected during the reign of Fath'Alī Shāh, the second Qajar King (1797-1834) who envisioned the expansion of the city beyond the old wall towards the northern hills. The third and the last city wall was the materialization of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh's desire to establish the basis of a central modern government between 1848-96. It is important to note that these symbolic walls represent and practice the notion of difference and division. The power within the walls indicates who can stay and who should be excluded from the city.

By the end of the 19th century as Iran became increasingly exposed to Europe through diplomatic connections and trade, western science, technology and educational methods

70 See Samin Rashidbeigi, 'Shahr-e-Now, Tehran's Red-Light District (1909–1979): The State, "The Prostitute," The Soldier, and The Feminist' (Central European University, 2015); Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi, 'Red Lights in Parks: A Social History of Park-e Razi', *OIS 3 (2015)-Divercities: Competing Narratives and Urban Practices in Beirut, Cairo and Tehran*, 2015; Gahan, 'Red-Light Tehran: Prostitution, Intimately Public Islam, and the Rule of the Sovereign, 1910-1980'.

71 Mount Damavand, a potentially active volcano 5600-m high, is the highest peak in Iran and the highest volcano in Asia.

72 Bayat. p. 101

73 Hamed Khosravi, Amir Djalali, and Francesco Marullo, *Tehran: Life Within Walls: A City, Its Territory, and Forms of Dwelling* (Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2017). P. 64, Ali Madanipour, 'City Profile: Tehran', *Cities*, 16.1 (1999), p.57.

74 At this time Qazvin was the capital of Persia

75 Khosravi, Djalali, and Marullo, *Tehran: Life Within Walls: A City, Its Territory, and Forms of Dwelling*.p.67

were introduced and created a starting point for social reformation of the country.⁷⁶ Citizens of Tehran were among the first to witness a series of rapid structural changes including social and spatial transformation in the body of government and within the city itself.⁷⁷ The construction of first public park, modern streets and introduction of public transport system increased the mobility of citizens and offered new sites of entertainment and transaction. These changes coincided with the foundation of the modern police force (*idāra-yi nazmiyya va pulīs-i dāru'l-Khilafa*) in 1878 based on European concepts.⁷⁸ In the new police guidelines, the practice of prostitution became limited through criminalization of other acts such as whoremongering, wine drinking, gambling and animal fights. Therefore, the punishments for women caught in prostitution were arbitrary. In some occasions, these women were fined or jailed.⁷⁹ In other cases, the police was forcing them to perform community services. Young women were sent to Tughif-Khana (Detention-houses) to wash the clothes of soldiers and old women were sent to the mortuary to wash the dead bodies.⁸⁰ The police reports from the Muzaffarī period (1896–1907) show that the most common punishment for these women was forceful urban eviction from their neighbourhoods and cities – a practice known as *Nafie-Balad* in the Islamic law.⁸¹

modernisation also caused an increase in the male population of Tehran increased. The formation of the national army and the establishment of the Cossack brigade⁸² in 1879, as well as the geopolitical conflicts at the turn of the 20th century including the Anglo-Russian occupation of 1907, the First World War and waves of migration to the capital, affected the gender ratio of Tehran and resulted in a surge in prostitution.⁸³ Street solicitation became more popular, thus making visible a practice that was hidden before modernisation. Police reports from Muzaffarī period show that sex-workers were dispersed in the city and were no longer limited to specific neighbourhoods – e.g., Qājāriyyah alley, Arabs neighbourhood and *Shahrinaw*.⁸⁴ In addition to the Islamic and moral discourses on prostitution, the rapid spread of the venereal diseases caused a notable public concern. These issues resulted in the public discontent and petitions that asked for banishing of sex workers from Tehran.⁸⁵

76 Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton University Press, 1982); Banimasoud; Schayegh.

77 Bani Masoud, Amir. “Contemporary architecture of Iran.” Publication of Honar va Memari gharb, Tehran.(In persian) (2009). pp. 76-78

78 W M Floor, ‘The Police in Qājār Persia’, *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 123.2 (1973), 293–315.

79 Gahan, ‘Red-Light Tehran: Prostitution, Intimately Public Islam, and the Rule of the Sovereign, 1910-1980’. pp. 79-80

80 Gahan, pp. 79-80

81 *Nafi-Balad* is a form of punishment based on the Islamic law which forcefully evict the criminal from his/her neighbourhood and city. It aims to keep the sinful person from the Islamic land.

82 The Persian Cossack Brigade or Iranian Cossack Brigade was a Cossack-style cavalry unit formed in 1879 in Persia. It was modelled after the Caucasian Cossack regiments of the Imperial Russian Army.

83 Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 2018); Khosravi, Djalali, and Marullo, ‘Tehran. Life within Walls. A City, Its Territory and Forms of Dwelling’.

84 Gahan, ‘Red-Light Tehran: Prostitution, Intimately Public Islam, and the Rule of the Sovereign, 1910-1980’. p. 80

85 Gahan, ‘Red-Light Tehran: Prostitution, Intimately Public Islam, and the Rule of the Sovereign, 1910-1980’;



Figure 11: The location of Second and third walls of Tehran, Qazvin



Qazvin Gate and Shahrinaw drawn on Google earth map by the author



Figure 12: Petition against the residency of sex-workers in Tehran, 1919, Source: National Library and Archive of I. R. Iran

According to the historical evidence, the first traces of *Shahrinaw* appeared around 1907-1909.⁸⁶ The political figure and writer Hassan Ezam-Qodsi notes that after the relocation of the Moḥammad ‘Alī Shāh⁸⁷ and his Cossack soldiers to the Bagh-e-shah outside of Tehran, the royal family and court followed the Shah and a new neighbourhood started to develop in the surrounding area, later named *Shahrinaw* (the new city). The Shah was advised to relocate some of the sex workers from Qājāriyyah alley in Tehran to this new neighbourhood in order to avoid sexual assaults on women by Cossack soldiers.⁸⁸

“...in a day by using the military transport vehicles all the wrongdoing inhabitants of the [Qajar]alley was moved. It was a spectacular day which all people from different neighbourhoods gathered and watched. There was a very big caravanserai in Shahrinaw named Haj-Abdulmahmoüd-e-Banki, which the wrongdoing women were all thrown in there like sheep ...later houses were built and a neighbourhood shaped which was later named Shahrinaw...it is still standing and thriving.”⁸⁹

86 Qodsi. p. 202

87 the sixth king of the *Qajar* Dynasty and *Shah* of Persia (Iran) from 8 January 1907 to 16 July 1909.

88 Qodsi. pp. 202-203

89 Qodsi. p. 203

This narrative has been criticized by Gahan as it only takes into account the elitist and militant forces behind the relocation. By investigating the public petitions against prostitution in Tehran, it can be argued that this relocation was also a state response to the dissatisfaction with the growth and visibility of prostitution as an ‘act of public immorality’ within the neighbourhoods of Tehran.⁹⁰ The historian Jafar Shahri in the third volume of his book *The Old Tehran* describes *Shahrinaw* as a small hamlet outside the Qazvin Gate in the South-West of Tehran which was popular amongst lovers. This area, with its farmlands and gardens, coffee houses, opium houses and a couple of the brothels was favoured by Tehranis as a place to spend their long summer evenings. Shahri remarks that neighbourhood had a concentration of sex-workers by 1923.⁹¹

With the destruction of the third and last wall of Tehran between 1932-34 and the rapid expansion of the city in the next few decades, *Shahrinaw* became part of the 10th district of the city.⁹² The neighbourhood was located between the Bagh-e-shah military camp on the west-end and the train station at the south-end of the city.⁹³ *Shahrinaw* was offering its services as usual till the 1940s when the public dissatisfaction and concerns emerged again. A series of letters and petitions were sent to the officials and different organizations of the government complaining about the uncontrolled expansion of the neighbourhood. Motivated by concerns around morality, hygiene and street harassment, the locals petitioned to have *Shahrinaw* removed to a remote area outside of the city.⁹⁴ The petitioners and government had no concerns about the living conditions of the sex-workers. Archival correspondences of the time show that the government was without any solid plan to deal with this problem.

*‘In the past few years, the population of Tehran has increased noticeably, therefore some of the respectable families had to move to Jamshid and Ghavam streets in the 10th district of Tehran [the two main streets of Shahrinaw]. We were hoping that the government would relocate the wrongdoing women to another place.... the immorality of prostitutes has affected and will be affecting the faithful and respectable families ...it is the government’s responsibility to remove this repellent dump and move them to some other place away from the public eye...’*⁹⁵

90 Gahan, ‘Red-Light Tehran: Prostitution, Intimately Public Islam, and the Rule of the Sovereign, 1910-1980’. p. 85

91 Shahri. Vol. 3, P. 394-395

92 In 1938, the municipality announced Bāq-i Shāh as the new border at the west end of Tehran. Page 123

93 Gahan, ‘Red-Light Tehran: Prostitution, Intimately Public Islam, and the Rule of the Sovereign, 1910-1980’. p. 123

94 Gahan, ‘Red-Light Tehran: Prostitution, Intimately Public Islam, and the Rule of the Sovereign, 1910-1980’. p. 123

95 A petition written by Abbas Bahar-doust addressed to the prime minister of Iran.

شهری

جناب آقای قوام السلطنه

محترماً با استحضار عالی میسرمانند در چندی قبل بعلمت قلت جمعیت قسمتی از نواحی بخش ۱۰ جهت سکونت عده فواحش اختصاصی داد شد و بدین امر مرور در این نواحی شدت یافته بطوریکه فعلاً عده کثیری که تعداد آنها پیش از زمان سابق بوده در نواحی فوق به نحسازنسی و عملیات شرم آور مشغول میباشند .

چون در این چند سال اخیر بعلمت کثرت جمعیت تعداد زیاد از خانواده های اصیل و محترم از لحاظ ضیق محل اجباراً در حوالی بخش ۱۰ (خیابان جمشید و قوام نتر و استخر سوس متری) سکونت یافته بامید اینکه ولت مرکز دیگری برای فواحش فوق تهیه نماید و تاکنون چندین بار در این خصوص شرحی به وزارت کشور و مقامات صلاحیت دار نوشته شده متأسفانه تاکنون کوچکترین اقدامی در مورد تقاضا مذکور بعمل نیامده است .

علیهذا نظریاتیکه فساد اخلاق بطور شدید از طرف فواحش محلی بخانواده های اصیل تدربجا سرایت کرده و خواهد کرد و عملیات تظاهرات اشخاص بیکار و ولگرد بطور کلی باعث زحمت و سلب آسایش اهالی فوق میباشد و گذشته از این از نظر اخلاق و عفت و شرافت بوظیفه دولت است که هر چه زود تر شراین توده کثیف را از میان یک مشت مردمان اصیل خود بدهد و محل مناسبی که عفت عمومی را جریحه دار ننماید برای تود فوق تهیه شود و ضمناً در خصوص تقاضای شرعی و اخلاقی اهالی فوق اقدام جدی بعمل آرند در خاتمه عموم اهالی این بخش از دولت فعلی نتیجه اقدام جدی را منتظر و خواستارند .

بویژه در این موقع که یکمده مأمور بخته و صحیح العمل برای جلوگیری از تظاهرات و ولگردی فواحش با امر اکید باین بخش مأموریت یافته و کوچکترین عملی که بوجب آسایش سلنه این بخش است فرود آید نکرده اند و با اینلا جمعی و نفعت پرست از عمل مأمورین ناراضی هستند استدعا شده همین مأمورین در ستکار و تقویت روحی نمایند و اوامر اکیدی بشدت عمل برای متفرق کردن جمعیت تکین فحشاء صا در قبا و سیدد آسایش بهتری برای سکنه بخش ۱۰ فراهم و اولیاء امور را دعا گو باشند .

تقدیر عباس باشار دوست ادر بخش ۱۰ شهربان شهر تهران

در دست تهر باشار دوست

شماره ۴۴۵۳۹
تاریخ ۲۵/۰۲/۱۳۰۳

Figure 13: A petition wrote by Abbas Bashardost requesting the removal of sex-workers from Shahrinaw, source: National Library and Archive of I. R. Iran

Historical narratives also show that inhabitants of *Shahrinaw* played an important role in the British-American orchestrated coup d'état of 1953 which overthrew Mossadegh's government.⁹⁶ They were one of the main groups paid to attend pro-Shah demonstrations in Tehran. Between October and November 1953 – two months after the coup d'état – a series of meetings were held between Tehran municipality representatives, Tehran's Attorney general and district police chief to discuss the status of *Shahrinaw*. Perhaps the most important outcome of these meetings was the decision to limit the extents of *Shahrinaw* by building a wall around it. The wall was meant to regulate the neighbourhood by limiting access to the area to two gates on the northern and southern edges. Moreover, it was agreed to establish a police station and building a public toilet in the neighbourhood.⁹⁷ During this time there were also discussions on relocation of *Shahrinaw* to another marginal neighbourhood in Tehran. However, the idea was not materialised as it was rejected by the property owners and shopkeepers of *Shahrinaw* and more importantly, the budget to purchase the intended lands and properties was never provided.⁹⁸ Moreover, in 1955 a health clinic was added to *Shahrinaw* which subjected sex-workers to the mandatory and regular health check-ups and provided them with health cards as a way to control the spread of venereal diseases.⁹⁹ These series of changes transformed *Shahrinaw* to the official space of prostitution in Tehran.

The image of *Shahrinaw* that we are familiar with is mainly from the 1960s and 70s. During these decades, *Shahrinaw* experienced relative stability for the first time. It was also the moment when public opinion shifted from disgust and negligence towards compassion.¹⁰⁰ Different NGOs – Such as Tehran School of Social Work and Women Organization of Iran – started to pay attention to the neighbourhood and raised awareness about specific problems to do with the *Shahrinaw* and sex-workers. Moreover, the image of the area was widely disseminated through various media such as newspaper articles, novels, short stories, films and documentaries. By the end of 1970s, the district was a 13,500 square meters area – roughly as big as two football fields. The latest available demographic data shows that *Shahrinaw* was inhabited by more than 1500 female sex workers, 179 stores, 753 merchants and two theatre houses.¹⁰¹ The stable condition of *Shahrinaw* however did not last long and eventually came to an abrupt end by the Islamic Revolution.

96 Rashidbeigi p. 78; 'Asia-Ye-Javan, No.2', August 1979 p.35.

97 Rashidbeigi p. 81; Gahan p. 126.

98 Gahan, 'Red-Light Tehran: Prostitution, Intimately Public Islam, and the Rule of the Sovereign, 1910-1980'. p.129

99 The card system did not only subject the sex-workers of Shahrinaw but after a while other services (Including shopkeepers etc.) within the neighbourhood were also provided with special IDs to be able to enter the area. This was rejected by the shop owners since they did not want to be treated like the sex-workers.

100 Jairan Gahan, 'Intimating Tehran: The Figure of the Prostitute in Iranian Popular Literature, 1920s–1970s', in *Persian Literature and Modernity* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 165–84.

101 Farmanfarmaian p.291,292; Gahan p. 124.

Chapter Three

Architectural Re-imagination of Shahrinaw

The architectural historian K. Michael Hays argues that *imagination* is necessary if we want to treat architecture as a mode of knowledge. He believes that our thoughts are dependent on the material image. He also maintains that imagination, as the mental capacity of producing images, is interpretive and could fill the gap between perception and understanding.¹⁰²

Drawing on this interpretive conceptualisation of architectural imagination offered by Hays, in this section I will offer an architectural re-imagination of *Shahrinaw* in order to be able to perceive and understand the space of *Shahrinaw*. The architectural re-imagination of *Shahrinaw* is a journey through the depth of its dark, narrow alleys, and a peak into the yards and rooms of the brothels. This process is undertaken by offering experimental written and visual collages. These collages are developed around the spatial investigation of the *urban explorer* and present a visualised narrative of *Shahrinaw* while exemplifying spatial qualities and attributes of the neighbourhood at different scales.

As discussed in the previous chapters, the interplay between public women and space in modern Tehran starts by crossing a border, as bodies move from the private realm of the home to the urban street and in so doing resist the existing socio-spatial order. The spatial story of *Shahrinaw* revolves around a border which separates *Shahrinaw* from the city and three main thresholds which the urban explorer should pass in order to imagine the other side. These three thresholds are: the main gate of Shahrinaw, the door of the Brothel and the door to the sex-workers' rooms. These thresholds can be conceived of as one-way entries which confine the unwanted bodies inside and are open to the pursuer of pleasure.

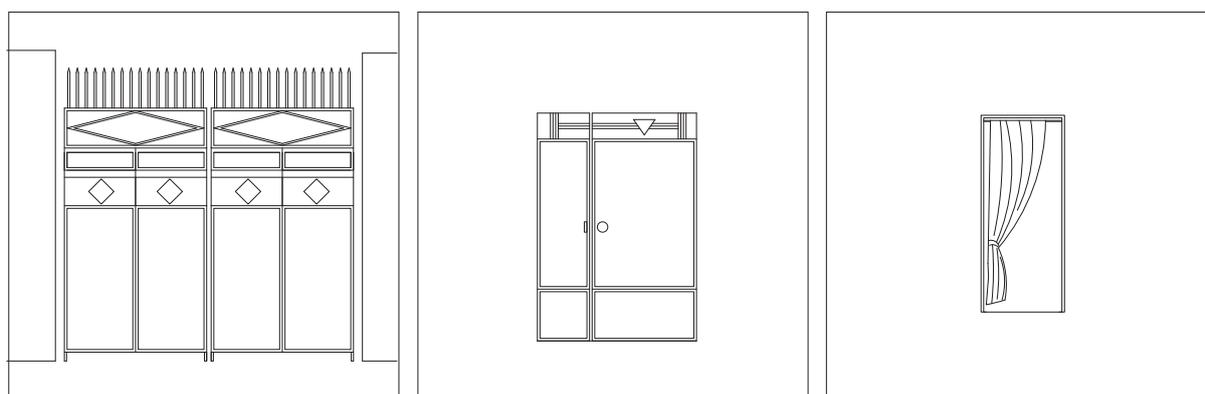


Figure 14: Three Thresholds of Shahrinaw, From left to right: 1. The main gate of Shahrinaw, 2. The door of brothel, 3. The door to the sex-worker's room

¹⁰² K Michael Hays, 'Architecture's Appearance and the Practices of Imagination', *Log*, 37 (2016), pp. 205–207.

Qazvin Square



Si-Merri Street

Haj-Abdolmohmoud Street

Jamshid Street

Qavam Street

Qanat Street

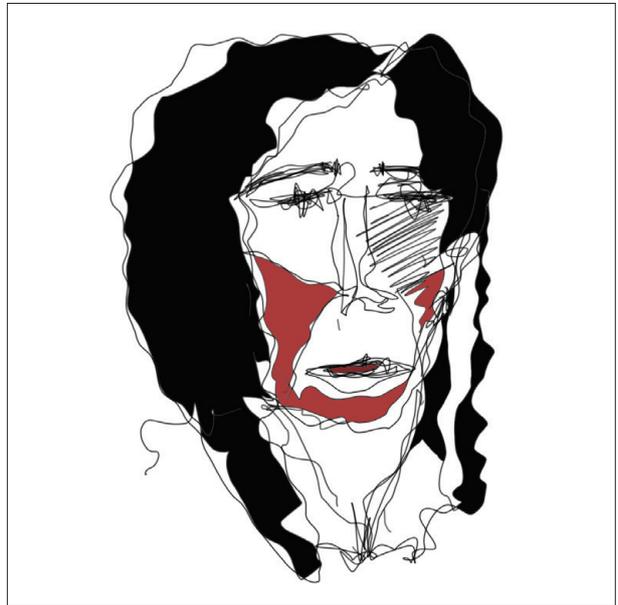
Sohrab Street

Entrance



25 M

32



◀ *Figure 15: Plan of Shahrinaw Drawn by the Author, 2020*
Figure 16: Three characters from top: 1. Hashim, 2. Pari, 3. Roshan, drawn by author, 2020 ▶

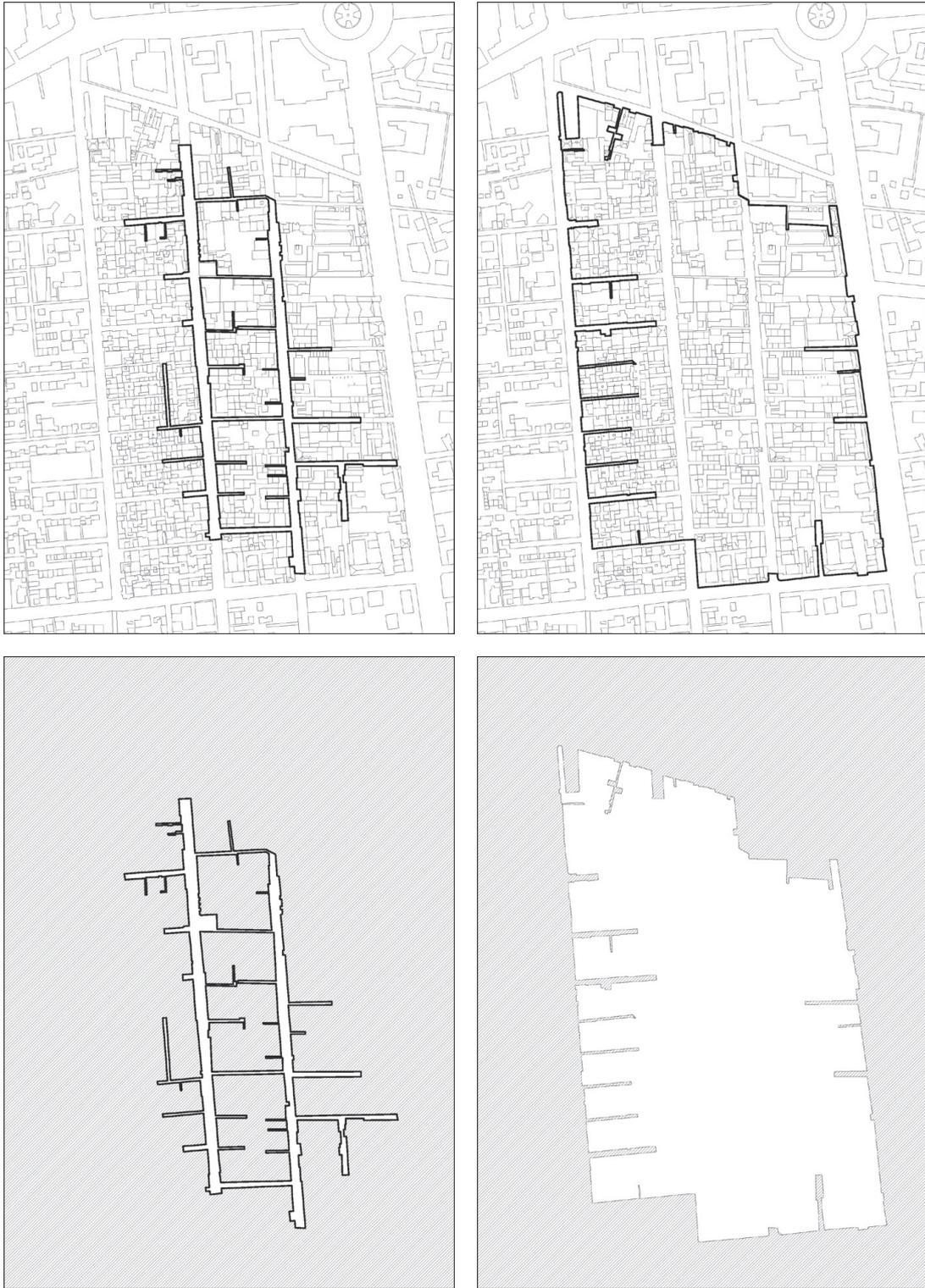


Figure 17: The border of Shahrinaw and the pathways within Shahrinaw, Drawn by the author 2020

[1: The Gate of Shahrinaw]

Hashim

Hashim and his friend Behrouz leave the cinema around seven in the evening, walk towards the Pahlavi cross and enter a tiny café. After a while, they both come out drunk and hail a taxi to *Shahrinaw*. Hashim, foolishly tries to conceal that they are heading to *Shahrinaw* by giving the name of a nearby street. ‘Going to *Shahrinaw* shouldn’t cause you any shame!’ Taxi driver replies. The two get out of the taxi in front of *Shokoofeh-No* cabaret just on the opposite side of the gate. The neighbourhood is buzzing with crowds of people and street vendors.

‘[Hashim] we walked into a bar to have two more beers before going to Shahrinaw... The main street of Shahrinaw is busier than any other street in Tehran... We are both drunk and reluctant...look! Here we are at the gate of Shahrinaw! We then passed through the crowd and entered from the southern gate.’ (Tuti, 1969, p.10)



Figure 18: Hashim and Behrouz entering Shahrinaw at night, the Movie Tuti, 1977



Figure 19: *Untitled, the prostitute Series 1975-77* by Kaveh Golestan, held at the Tate Britain Prints and Drawing Rooms collection

A soldier is on standby in front of the metal gate with its both doors open wide. There is a tin can on a wooden box beside the door, filled with the confiscated items from visitors, anything that is considered dangerous: long rusty spikes, old pocketknives and shoehorns. This gate is the only entrance to *Shahrinaw*, piercing the border of the district of pleasure. From here the ‘spatial story’ of *Shahrinaw* begins. By crossing this border through the iron metal gate, all the social and gender relations transform, and one is no longer limited to the social norms and morality of the outside.

After crossing the gate, Hashim faces a long straight street, gloomy, filled with dust and unpleasant smell with dirty pavements and muddy streams on both sides. At the edge of the pavements are the brothels standing in a row, mostly one story and some are two. The walls on both sides of the main street are made of red Cossack bricks, dated and musty – doors and windows are wooden with chipped and faded blue or green colours. A few steps on, an old lady is sitting on the pavement playing *Tar* and singing a melancholic song. Groups of women, wearing short wrinkly dresses in red, pink and purple, are standing in front of the open doors inviting the passers-by inside. Their backs are bare, and their faces are covered with a heavy mask of makeup.

The ward has two main streets, parallel to each other: *Haj-abdolmahmoud* and *Ghavam-Daftar*. These two streets are connected through thirty narrow alleys. A few lifeless trees are dispersed around the main streets. Looking around, Hashim finds many stores within the neighbourhood such as butchery, grocery, barbershops and brokers who sell or lend any kind of furniture, fans for the summer and heaters for the cold winters. There are also two theatres in the main street of *Shahrinaw*. Although the tickets are not very expensive, people always argue about the price and try to outsmart the ticket seller by using one ticket for two persons. Contrary to the theatre houses in the city, there is not a time slot available for shows. The actors are mostly sex-workers and men who work as guards and doorkeepers in the brothels. They collectively perform an endless show throughout the day during which people come and go, and the storyline constantly changes.

He goes inside the theatre for a while to watch the show. There are fifteen rows of chairs in the theatre hall, each with fourteen shabby wooden chairs. The ground is covered with cigarette stubs and soda bottle caps. The stage is five meters long and two meters deep. The backdrop is a dusty painting of a garden with a building in the distance; a few out of scale trees drawn with bright green colour, a pond with ducks on its side, and a few lions and deer.

'Dear Audience! Our show will start with singing and dancing and afterwards you will be seeing the play revenge for honour.'

Suddenly, two groups of men get into a fight and start to throw the shabby chairs around. He walks out of the theatre, lights a cigarette and starts to walk around aimlessly. An addicted, feeble man calls him from the shadows. 'hey boss! Welcome...do you want to come inside and have a look at ladies?' He follows the addict into an alley. Most of the brothels' doors are open wide, with doormen dosing off on shabby stools awaiting the costumers. The metal door is wide open, and a woman is smoking in front of it. He passes her and walks into the dim, narrow entry corridor of the brothel.

Figure 20: Untitled, the prostitute Series 1975-77' by Kaveh Golestan, held at the Tate Britain Prints and Drawing Rooms collection ►



[2: The Door of Brothel]

Pari

*'...what a great body Pari had. with her back to him, she put a cup on her head and delicately shaking her frilly dress, moving her hands in the air bend her back towards him. Her hair fell down till her forehead reached to his face ...'*¹⁰³

She is walking around, giving orders to the sex-workers and guiding the customers into the rooms. The courtyard is full of men waiting for their turn. They are waiting in groups around the muddy fountain and by the boxwoods as there is no place to sit in the waiting room. She shouts at a man who is sitting in the corner 'Get lost...I told you before that she has an important guest today! She wouldn't come out any time soon!' Pari looks beautiful in her long floral dress. Her hair is charmingly laid on her shoulders and her slender neck is encircled with golden necklaces. When she was only a teenager, she was sold by her father and brought to *Shahrinaw*. Soon she realised that she should not lose herself to this space. She was complaisant and trustworthy, qualities which helped her to become the Madam of a very well-known brothel after a few years. Her notorious beauty is well coupled with her intelligence, fearlessness and audacity.

*'ever since I can remember I was working in the Ward...there was always a queue in front of my door...I knew my job very well.'*¹⁰⁴

The rumours say that she had a bold presence in the 1953 coup. Some still remember her standing on the side of a car amongst men shouting, 'death to Mosaddegh'. After the coup and with the connections she made, Pari became even more powerful in the ward. Being a business savvy, she invested in commercial and political opportunities inside and outside the ward and expanded her business and connections beyond the boundaries of *Shahrinaw*. Soon she became a consequential figure within the ward and in the wider political and social domain.¹⁰⁵ The waiting room is bright and ornamented with vibrant and colourful wallpaper and curtains. Walls are covered with posters of singers and movie stars. There are rows of chairs for the waiting customers facing a broken TV. The room has a homely feeling to it, there are random porcelain figurines and flowerless vases around on the shelves. A radio in the corner is playing a melancholic music in the background. Pari is sitting behind her desk and keeping her eyes on the entrance while tapping a token in her hand with the rhythm of the music on the table. She seems a bit worried.

She is expecting the regular visit from the ward's mobsters tonight. They are coming to collect their monthly sum. This is in addition to the rent, the landlord's interest, the bribe to

103 Houshang Golshiri, در ولایت هوا [Dar Velayat-e-Hava] (Stockholm: Asr-e-Jadid, 1991).

104 Zand-Muqaddam. p. 2018

105 Soraya Batmanghelichi. pp. 16-17

the authorities and the everyday expenses of the brothel. '[She thinks:] I hope they don't pick a fight again and scare off the customers. I just paid off the police bribe to clear up the last month's mess.' The brothel owner expects Pari to ensure a hassle-free process of exchange and to guarantee a never-ending flow of profit. The rest is not his concern. Another man walks forward to buy a token; he sheepishly asks for a discount which disturbs Pari. '[She shouts:] get out...Do you think it is a charity?' The man pays for his token without saying anything. Pari calls Roshan and order her to take the man into her room. The man silently follows her.



Figure 21: Untitled, the prostitute Series 1975-77' by Kaveh Golestan, held at the Tate Britain Prints and Drawing Rooms collection



Figure 22: Waiting room of a brothel, Screenshot from Movie Kandoo, 1975

[3: The Door of Sex-worker's Room]

Roshan

She pulls back a dusty red curtain and invites the man in. The room is not very big and there is not much of furniture around. An old bed which take up the most space of the room is covered with a tattered mattress. A dusty carpet covered the ground, and similar to the waiting room, the walls are covered with posters taken from old magazines. The random arrangement of the posters suggest that they are only there to cover the damp and mouldy patches on the wall. Her identification card and health documents – the only proofs of her existence – are stored safe in a ragged cover and placed on top of the bed. A coat hanger, a small fan, a tissue box, an ashtray and finally a rubbish bin; that's all one can find in the room.



Figure 23: Untitled, the prostitute Series 1975-77' by Kaveh Golestan, held at the Tate Britain Prints and Drawing Rooms collection

Roshan was brought to *Shahrinaw* at the age of seventeen and has been living here for almost thirty years. She cannot even remember the face of the men who tricked her and then sold her to this place. This is her last night in this brothel; she has paid all her debt to the madam. A social worker at the *Shahrinaw's* social services school has promised to help her to get out of this place.

Roshan has been sleeping in the classroom for the past two years. Her attempt to leave the ward for good was not successful as no one in the city agrees to give her a job or a second chance. She sells oranges to make a living. Every day she picks up her orange basket and walks out of *Shahrinaw*. She has a spot in front of the *Shokoufeh-No* cabaret on the opposite side of the street from the main gate of *Shahrinaw*. She starts working around midday – as soon as people start to show up at *Shahrinaw*. She feels her body is bound to the space of *Shahrinaw*. There is no way to set herself free from this space.



Figure 24: The orange Seller lady, Screenshot from the *Qal'a* documentary by Kamran Shirdel, 1978

The presented spatial re-imagination of Shahrinaw was accompanied and supported by production of architectural documents of the space based on the acquired archival evidence. These reproduced architectural documents were also collated with the novels, movies and documentaries on *Shahrinaw* to ensure their accuracy. The body of knowledge acquired by this process reveals insightful spatial details of *Shahrinaw*. For instance, the redrawn plan of Shahrinaw as presented above in this chapter indicates that the reality of *Shahrinaw's* border was in fact in contrast to the conventional imagination as one coherent encircling wall. In reality, the border was materialised by a series of disconnected walls built in the middle of streets to limit traffic and unregulated access. The plan also highlights disparities in urban grain and building density across various parts of the neighbourhood.



Figure 25: Characters' movement pattern in Shahrinaw, From left to right: 1. Hashim, 2. Pari, 3. Roshan

In parallel, the spatial story of *Shahrinaw* which was formed around the movement of the urban explorer highlighted some critical insights on spatial functions and experiences, power hierarchies, the scale of movement, and the extent of mobility. Together, the reproduced architectural documents and the narrated spatial story collectively shaped the architectural reimagination of *Shahrinaw*; an outcome which offers a novel account of the space and generates a deeper understanding of the social and gender relations informed by and informing the space.



Figure 26: Festival of Masculinity, an illustration by the author, 2020

Conclusion

On bodies and exclusion

The spatial story of *Shahrinaw* – the red-light district of Tehran will conclude here. During this investigation, I put *Shahrinaw*'s architectural space at the centre of a historical exploration aimed at re-imagining its spatial experience in order to understand how space shaped identities and how in turn traversing bodies produced the space through gender relations. Instead of looking at *Shahrinaw* as an empty container, I explored it as a historical artefact which is both the medium and the product of layers of social relations.¹⁰⁶ This approach enabled me to tell a spatial story – a story which showcases seventy years of exclusion of disorderly bodies from the context of modern Tehran. This story reveals how this spatial exclusion affected not only female bodies, but also anyone who was considered unfit and disorderly for the patriarchal society of the time.

During this research, I positioned myself close to the subject matter and tried to find an answer to a critical question that I had been asking myself all along: who is the modern Iranian female subject, and why is she the way she is? According to Rendell 'the (hi)stories we tell of cities are also (hi)stories of ourselves'.¹⁰⁷ This suggests that historical knowledge is subjective and thus formed within the person who pursue it.¹⁰⁸ Soon after starting this research, it became clear to me that my spatial and historical understanding is determined by *who I am* and *what I pursue* – a feminist non-western architect and architectural historian who is the direct product of modernised spatial gender relations of Iran.

As it is explored in the previous chapters, during modernisation and transformation of Tehran, sex workers were among the first groups of women who passed the threshold of private to public. These disorderly bodies disrupted the long-established ideologies of patriarchal society on the role of women and the notion of property.¹⁰⁹ Wives, mothers and daughters were traditionally always confined to the private sphere. The presence of female bodies as commodities within the religious and traditional society of the time was equated with depravity and corruption.¹¹⁰ By taking their bodies to the market, sex workers facilitated the transaction between men and women and set the stage for a new and modern female subject in the city. This resulted in the formation of new gender relations which heavily informed the subjectivity of modern Iranian female. At this moment of crisis, the body of woman was occupying an in-between position, stuck between the patriarchal normative rules of the past and the new capitalist horizon ahead.

¹⁰⁶ Iain Borden and others, *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space* (MIT Press, 2002). p.34

¹⁰⁷ Borden and others. p.107

¹⁰⁸ Borden and others. p.107

¹⁰⁹ Borden and Rendell. p.263

¹¹⁰ Borden and Rendell, p.262; Schayegh., pp. 64-68

The in-between condition of the body of women soon became one of the main concerns of the Iranian society during the 20th century. The patriarchal society of Iran was pulled between long-established traditions, waves of modernisation and the need for reformation; this is why the society attempted to control disorderly female bodies through exclusionary strategies.¹¹¹ The consequence of efforts aimed at segregation of female bodies was the creation of heterotopic spaces such as *Shahrinaw*. As a space of exception, *Shahrinaw* made it possible for the state to exercise and practice the extents of its bio-power on excluded disorderly bodies.¹¹² After the destruction of *Shahrinaw* the oppression of marginal groups remained strong and continued to affect the everyday experiences of those who were considered as unfit for the Islamic patriarchal society.

It is my argument that the modern Iranian female subject can be defined through spatial exclusion and struggles over being included within the social space. Even today the public presence of disorderly female bodies in the city is frowned upon. There is a negative term in Farsi – Harjā’ī which translates to a person of easy virtue. However, in direct translation there is a notion of spatiality attached to this word as it translates to a person who belongs to everywhere. In everyday language, this word refers to the mobile women who traverse the public space instead of staying in the privacy of their home. This pejorative term is still widely in use to denunciate the individuals who try to pass the threshold from private to the public to claim their position in the modernising society. The patriarchal concerns within the Iranian society are still present and manifested in various discriminatory norms and rules against women in areas such as education, employment, marriage and citizenship. The combined effect of discrimination against women in these areas contributes to an increased segregation and elimination of women from the public sphere.

This dissertation is a representation built upon my personal perspective. It offers a new dimension to the existing discourses on *Shahrinaw* by representing its architectural experience and spatial arrangement. However, it should be acknowledged that there is a limitation inherent in the representational element of this study. The representation of *Shahrinaw* as presented in this research is created through the process of architectural re-imagination, a process which is not able to create the actual lost space but only a spatial phantom and a fraction of the reality.

111 Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space & Architecture in Regency London*. pp. 126-130

112 Gahan, ‘Red-Light Tehran: Prostitution, Intimately Public Islam, and the Rule of the Sovereign, 1910-1980’. p. 208

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