"WOMAN. LIFE. FREEDOM. QUEER. TRANS. LIBERATION"

Echoes of *Azadi*—Breaking Free from the Inner-Panopticon

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For *Woman, Life, Freedom, Queer, Trans, Liberation*.
Dedicated to the *shirzan* chanting *Azadi* in the streets of Iran.
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This thesis delves into the Islamic Republic of Iran's intricate construction and reinforcement of a cis-heteronormative national identity with an emphasis on the contemporary "Woman, Life, Freedom, Queer, Trans, Liberty" revolution. The study highlights the complex web of power dynamics, surveillance mechanisms, and regulatory frameworks that operate both within the public and private spheres. By utilizing a Foucauldian framework of the "inner-panopticon," this research exposes how the Iranian state's systematic imposition of heteronormative values extends beyond the confines of legal and social regulations, permeating the very fabric of individual consciousness. The paper contends that the omnipresent "War on Sex," a strategic deployment of sexuality as a political tool, has fostered an environment of fear and self-policing, particularly for non-male-conforming individuals. As a result, this paper also focuses on severe social marginalization of queer and trans Iranians within Iran and its diasporic communities. With a critical lens rooted in a queer anti-Orientalist framework, this paper scrutinizes the role of the invisible panopticon in perpetuating gender and sexuality policing within an authoritarian regime. Part 1 of the study establishes the theoretical underpinning of the inner-panopticon, contextualizes the War on Sex within the Islamic Republic's cis-heteropatriarchal agenda, and conducts a historical analysis of the nation's sexual economy. Part 2 examines the panoptic institutions, including the legal penal code, the educational system, and the enforcement of compulsory hijab, as prominent tools employed by the regime to reinforce its ideological control. By elucidating these mechanisms, the research offers a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted ways in which state-sanctioned oppression is perpetuated and how it impacts the cultural and societal discourse surrounding sex and sexuality in Iran.

Preface

"*They don't want freedom, they want nudity and sex*," expresses Hamid Rasaee, a former member of the Iranian parliament, in response to protests that started with the September 16th death of Mahsa Zhina Amini in the

hands of the morality police.[1] Mahsa Zhina Amini was killed in police custody for showing strands of hair that disobeyed the state's strict compulsory hijab law in Tehran. Her death became an uproar for *shirzan* around the country to rise against this brutality.[2]

Now entering the eighth month of protest, the uprising has turned into a revolution for *Azadi*, as Iranians inside Iran and in the diaspora are demanding regime change. Chanting "Woman, Life, Freedom," women are shown in videos burning their headscarves and cutting their hair as acts of resistance. An intersectional movement at its core, the revolution has extended its platform to acknowledge the grievances of the LGBTQ+ community, birthing the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom, Queer, Trans, Liberation." To quell protestors, the government has responded with bullets, arrests, tear gas, live ammunition, internet shutdowns, and the construction of a *Western* sexual narrative around protests. The Iranian authorities have created a narrative of "moral corruption," "prostitution," and "sexual promiscuity" to connect protestor's demands for freedom with, in their words, a "*Westernized* sexual revolution."[3] Far from the protestor's demands, this narrative exploits homosexuality and female sexuality as the aim of a woman-led revolution that demands freedom from the chains of the Islamic Republic.

An intersectional revolution like no other, Iranian youth, women, men, and nonbinary folks have risen against 43 years of tyranny that has wounded generation after generation. Yet, queer voices are still marginalized within the movements both inside and outside Iran, with many believing "now is not the time for queer liberation." This same rhetoric has been used for decades against women's rights, and now, with Iran undergoing a female-led revolution, queer Iranians are still being put in the margins. Since the start of the movement, there has been an increased visibility of the LGBTQ+ community by domestic and diasporic queer and trans protestors. There has also been an intensification of homophobic rhetoric in response to this visibility by Islamic Republic officials.

Introduction

Our voices have always been silenced.

I begin with a deep inhale, an inhale for all my queer and female-identifying ancestors who walked this path before me and whose footsteps are still visible today. An inhale for all queer and female-identifying Iranians that will walk this path after me. An inhale for those who were not afraid to revolt. An inhale for the echoes of *Azadi* in the streets of my homeland, Iran: the complete utter emancipation we've been dreaming of for decades.

Inhale.

It has not been easy to come here, both physically and spiritually. For this paper to come to life, I have had to feel deep within my soul, bringing two decades of suppressed stories to the surface. There is a need to acknowledge the unhealed trauma that surfaces to the level of research of such topics so close to one's heart. As Cherrie Moraga reminds me, "For a lesbian trying to survive in a heterosexist society, there is no easy way around these emotions."[4] For a queer Iranian in exile, trying to survive on a land 7,000 miles away from home, carrying the trauma of many years of repression on her back, there is no easy way around these emotions. I have had to come to terms with my own "inner-panopticon" that had silenced me for decades. There is no easy way around these emotions.

Exhale.

With another inhale, I also need to acknowledge my positionality.

Inhale.

I was born in Tehran and spent the first 18 years of my life in Iran, raised in an upper-middle-class family

1 Ehsan Mehrabi and Akhtar Safi, "'They Don't Want Freedom, They Want Nudity and Sex': A History of Sexual Accusations by the Regime," *IranWire*, October 6, 2022, https://iranwire.com/en/politics/108346-they-dont-want-freedom-they-want-nudity-and-sex-a-history-of-sexual-accusations-by-the-regime/.

2 *Shirzan* translates literally to a female lion and is used to describe strong, in-control, and unwavering female heroines; in my writing, any person who speaks against and doesn't bend down to injustice is a *shirzan* and I use it as a gender neutral term to refer to Iranian protestors fighting for freedom.

3 See "Chapter 2: The Islamic Republic's War on Sex."

4 Moraga, Cherríe. "La Guera," Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif.

Figure 1. Artwork illustrated by Sahar Ghorishi, directed by Katayoun.

in Elahieh.[5] Spending most of my summers in America, the land of the "free," I moved to Ohlone land for higher education.[6] Not by choice but by privilege. I was taught from a young age that there was no future for me in the country where I was born. Our futures and the futures of our parents were stripped away by the hands of the Islamic Republic. Today, *we* fight so our children can breathe and live on the land their ancestors lived on with the ability to immerse themselves in our beautiful culture, not thousands of miles away from home. Unlike many in the diaspora, my family didn't leave Iran after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Yet, although my parents stayed, they didn't want my brother and I to do so. Privileged with an American passport, we were conditioned to leave Iran in hopes of a brighter future. My American passport, or as many family members call it "my ticket out of hell," unlocked opportunities for me that many of my peers either had to fight for very hard or be denied.

Exhale.

Inhale.

It wasn't until I moved and was freed from the shackles of the Islamic Republic that I came to terms with my inner-panopticon that had woven in me threads of shame and guilt masking the tapestry of my queer identity. The fear to feel, the fear to accept, is not something our heteronormative patriarchal world is unfamiliar with, yet under the Islamic Republic this fear's construction is more complex. As a child growing up under the Islamic Republic, shame and guilt were instilled in me from a young age. Shame and guilt were instilled in *us* from a young age. It was not until I freed myself from the shackles of the Islamic Republic that I accepted my authentic self, and learned to breathe again. Today, as a queer Iranian woman, I write so my children can write, breathe so my children can breathe, and live so my children can live on the land their ancestors lived on with no consequences.

Exhale.

Inhale.

5 Situated in North Tehran, Elahieh is a prestigious and affluent neighborhood.

6 Berkeley, California sits on the territory of Xučyun, the ancestral and unceded land of the Chochenyo Ohlone, the successors of the historic and sovereign Verona Band of Alameda County. This land was and continues to be of great importance to the Ohlone people.

I use "I" as a symbol of all the atrocities queer Iranian women have been adhered to since birth. I acknowledge that my experience cannot unify our experiences as queer exiles of this regime, yet I believe that there is a point of uniformity within all our lives which growing up under the Islamic Republic has affected and continues to affect.

Exhale.

Different than the sources of the heteronormative patriarchy that has penetrated the West, the Islamic Republic's cis-heteronormative patriarchy is constructed within the borders of Islamo-nationalism, which deceitfully leads to the justification of homophobia with religious backing, creating an Iranian identity of forced conformity. Why, in one of the most intersectional youth-led movements in history, are the LGBTQ+ community being even more marginalized?[7] If you are demanding *Azadi*, shouldn't your freedom also include freedom for people to love one another?

Audre Lorde reminds us that "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even if her shackles are different from my own."[8] The calls for *Azadi* mean nothing until we recognize that our *Azadi* needs to be intersectional. Until the dreams of a free Iran include marginalized voices of the queer and trans community, ethnic minorities, and religious minorities, this freedom remains an illusion in which a cis-heteronormative patriarchal society is reconstructed.

Inhale.

Reading Shadee Abdi's "Staying I(ra)n" illuminated the power instilled in personal narratives. As a queer Iranian who was born and raised in Iran, my positionality has paved the way in which I view the world. It is obvious that my own experience, around queer embodiment, recognition, connection, and healing has had, and will always have, an effect in my writing.

In vulnerability lies strength.

Exhale.

With Zhina's death and the spark of the youth-led revolution, I began writing this paper focusing on female sexuality. It was months into my research, six months into the Iranian revolution, that it hit me: my project was missing a queer voice. Much like my own queer identity (silenced for 18 years), there was an invisible underlayer missing in my work. Voices of queer and trans Iranians, whose echoes in "Queer, Life, Freedom" are systematically being silenced, were buried deep within my own writing. There was/is/always has been a necessity to center my work around the LGBTQ+ fight for freedom. It was impossible for me not to shift my focus. Analysis of the revolution without acknowledging queer and trans voices is not possible, and this exclusion is exactly what is taking place. There are queerphobic and transphobic narratives unfolding in protests, in chants, on the TV before me.

When I began this journey of trying to capture and analyze the ongoing revolution, I knew it wouldn't be easy. I soon found myself attending every panel and Instagram live, watching every news analysis, and working my best to stay engaged while also organizing demonstrations, campaigns, and informational panels in the Bay Area. It was and still remains the least I could do. Although many started calling me an activist, none of these actions were by choice but by *duty*. My shared experience with everyone chanting in the streets of my homeland, and the fact that any of the deaths could have been me, instilled in me a duty to echo the voices of queer and trans protestors on the ground from 7,000 miles away in the diaspora. Queer and trans Iranians have always been part of this movement. Two weeks before Zhina's death, Sareh Hamedani, and Elham Choubdar were sentenced to death for the crime of *promoting homosexuality*.[9] A shirt I made to wear at demonstrations for Iran included Zhina's name on the front and the LGBTQ+ flag colors on the back. Many times, I experienced uncomfortable stares and comments, deepening my tolerance of homophobia in the Iranian community.

It was this experience that made me realize that it is not only necessary to examine the ways in which the Iranian authorities exploit sexuality in their national discourse, but also why the cis-heteronormative narrative

7 The movement in Iran encompasses all religious, ethnic, sexual, and gender minorities, calling for a new government under which we can all live together without marginalization.

8 Lorde, Audre. "Keynote address presented at the National Women's Studies Association Conference," Storrs, Connecticut, June 1981.

9 See "Chapter 4: Inside the Iranian Legal Penal Code" to understand this ruling.

has penetrated society to the extent that many Iranians embody a homophobic identity which has had lethal consequences. A Foucauldian lens helps me understand the Iranian state's imposition of a cis-heteronormative national identity and the way the Islamic Republic governs its society and maintains control. The imposition of the Iranian national identity creates a panopticon whereby individuals are under constant surveillance, rules, and regulations. The result is widespread fear and anxiety that extends from the public sphere to the private sphere, creating a self-surveilling system where individuals internalize social, cultural, and political norms.

Using a queer anti-Orientalist framework, this paper will examine the War on Sex and the institution of the invisible panopticon and how it has been used as a means of maintaining the state's political power through various means, including sexual legislation, health policies, education, family planning, media, and more. By examining the War on Sex and how it has become a cultural phenomenon that shapes the discourse around sex and sexuality, we can better understand the role of gender and sexuality policing in an authoritarian regime and the ways in which state projects reinforce this oppression through the inner- and outer-panopticon. The paper has been divided into two parts. The first part of the paper will examine the theoretical framework I instill in my writing, the inner-panopticon, and expand upon the Islamic Republic's War on Sex and Sexuality to maintain its cis-heteropatriarchal objective. This part also includes a historical analysis of the construction of Iran's sexual economy under the Islamic Republic, and how media and family planning institutions have been used as tools to convey the regime's ideology. The second part of this paper includes panoptic institutions put in place that act as the regime's agents of surveillance. The institutions examined in this paper are the legal penal code, education, and compulsory hijab.

Methodology and framework: A queer anti-Orientalist analysis

As a critical scholar of the Gender and Women Studies department at UC Berkeley, I have learned to embrace my curiosity, create new pathways, and "dismantle the master's house."[10] One of the greatest challenges I encountered in this project was the lack of academic scholarship on queer Iranians of my generation in or outside Iran. There was a pressure to use academic scholarship that is peer-reviewed. We remain confined to Western hegemonic epistemology that has always been produced by and benefited the white cis-heteropatriarchal systems of knowledge; thus, I had to find sources of my own to bypass the contribution to colonial epistemologies.

Queer and trans voices are systematically being erased in scholarship, not just in Iran but all over the world. As a result, it became apparent to me that relying solely on traditional research methods would not suffice in creating a safe and inclusive space for queer and trans Iranians. Instead, I recognized the need to incorporate empowering sources that are representative of the experiences and perspectives of queer and trans Iranians. To achieve this goal, I sought out unconventional research approaches that would circumvent the heteronormative lens that often pervades many sources and further marginalizes queer and trans communities. Through these efforts, I strive to ensure that my research is not only informative but also inclusive, empowering, and respectful of the diversity that exists within the queer and trans communities of Iran and beyond. With bell hooks's words in my ears, "The margin is a sign of domination but simultaneously a site of radical resistance," I actively resist this exclusionary and marginalizing narrative through my methodologies and frameworks in a queer anti-Orientalist analysis.[11]

I use queer here not as the umbrella term for the LGBTQ+ identity but as a way of thinking against the prediction of outcomes and the binaries of the world. This queer perspective allows me to look beyond the ordinary events and politics of Iran, revealing an underlying layer of analysis that is deeply rooted in the battles of the citizens. Thus, a queer analysis is a nonbinary epistemology of Iran's political history that will allow me to examine the nonbinary gaps in Iranian sexual politics. This nonbinary way of thinking allowed me to utilize unconventional tools of research such as open source media, news articles, my own lived experience, and informal

10 Lorde, Audre, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," *Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Crossing Press, 2007): 110–114.

11 hooks, bell, "Marginality as a Site of Resistance," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Trinh T. Minh-Ha, Cornel West, Felix Gonzales-Torres, Russell Ferguson, and Martha Gever (New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), 341–343.

interviews, or what I would like to call "healing conversations."[12] As an Open Source investigator, I think bringing media into academic research is crucial to undergo the elitism and binaries in research. Social media has been one of the most powerful tools for Iranians on the ground, as it is the only way their voices can be captured (if the internet does not get shut down). So, a major difference between the revolution unfolding and the Iranian revolution of 1979 is that Iranian youth are connected to the rest of the world through media, and therefore, this key tool cannot be undermined. My research maintains a queer lens to bring to the surface queer and trans voices that are lost deep within scholarship and the movement. It is important to me to build upon lived experiences of queer Iranians to maintain this lens and also humanize my research. I do not want my work to contribute to cis-heteronormative knowledge production, and through my multi-methodologies, I seek to resist the academic epistemologies that are not centered around queer and trans voices.

The second part of my analysis framework is an anti-Orientalist framework. In Iran's democratic theocracy, religion is politics and politics is religion. Gender and sexuality are also almost exclusively observed through a cis-heteronormative lens. As Moallem writes, "To break with the universalizing impulses of dominant masculinized Western cultures, we need theories and practices that are transnational and feminist in nature."[13] In Iran, all politics are vulnerable to becoming falsely justified by the sharia law.[14] However, the Islamic Republic has implemented a religiopolitical government approach that employs religion to justify many discriminatory legal norms. So, it becomes crucial to maintain an anti-Orientalist lens since Orientalist Islamaphobic perspectives too often hijack the interpretation of Iranian gender politics.

In using an anti-Orientalist analysis, I need to acknowledge the weaknesses and discrepancies that exist in applying a European philosopher's analysis of surveillance through the panopticon and governmentality to my analysis of Iran, an inter-complex system of power that Foucault did not anticipate nor have the expertise to do so.[15] I recognize Foucault's positionality as a 20th-century philosopher in Europe. Although Foucault could not have anticipated the events that followed after the Iranian revolution, his theories of the panopticon and governmentality can be applied using a queer anti-Orientalist narrative to understand the effect of authoritarian surveillance on discipline, government, and punishment.

Another part of this anti-Orientalism analysis is the consciousness of my word choices. I have tried to maintain the essence of some Farsi words in order for the reader to understand the revolution better. One of the words that appears in my writing a lot is the word *Azadi*. In direct translation, *Azadi* translates to freedom or liberation, as the slogan "*Zan, Zendegi, Azadi*" is translated to "Woman, Life, Freedom." Yet, as my mentor, Professor Moallem, reminds me, freedom cannot be generalized. What *Azadi* means to Iranians is not the same as what freedom means in the English language. In Farsi, *Azadi* is not directly translated to freedom. It is not positive nor negative. To emphasize the words of Professor Moallem, "it is not freedom to or freedom from." *Azadi* is utter, complete, and whole human emancipation. Therefore, throughout my writing, I have maintained using the word *Azadi* instead of freedom to capture the essence of the word in an anti-Orientalist manner. We exist in a diaspora fueled by the assimilation of word choices and ideas placed for us by Western standards. Following Edward Said's footsteps, I aim to highlight these parts and shift this assimilation through acts of resistance in my methodology and writing.

In an effort to actively resist marginalized spaces in academia, I am reminded of Dr. Shadee Abdi's work on the impact of personal narratives.

I We have been silenced for too long.

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12 I acknowledge that news agencies are influenced by various factors, some of which may be undisclosed. However, I incorporate their narratives into my work because they largely represent the prevailing perspectives on Iran, both domestically and internationally.

13 Moallem, Minoo, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran* (University of California Press, 2005).

14 Sharia law is a set of principles derived from Islamic religious texts and traditions that guide the moral and legal framework among Muslim communities.

15 Michel Foucault traveled to Iran twice on the eve of the victory of the Iranian Islamic Revolution. His writings incorporate a romanticization of the revolution ignoring the authoritarian elements. He believed that the Iranian revolution had potential to challenge Western political and cultural dominance.

In an effort to both give power to my lived experience and humanize my research, I bring in my own lived experience in Iran as evidence. It is obvious that my own experience around queer embodiment, recognition, connection, and healing has had, and will always have, an effect on my writing. Personal narratives are politica methods that challenge traditional forms of research "by directly interweaving the personal into the political."[16] The personal has always been political.

In the same effort, I also implement informal interviews, referred to as "healing conversations," emphasizing the healing power of conversations that can be omitted in the formality of interviews. Individuals I converse with include my mother, my grandmother, and diasporic queer Iranians who grew up in Iran and were schooled under Iran's education system.

For the section on the Islamic Penal Code, I could not find a source that was translated well and included all the notes necessary for a complete analysis. Therefore, I translated these articles. I have used my mother tongue, Farsi, to translate many documents, readings, and news articles used in this paper.

Part I. The war on sex and the inner panopticon

In the *History of Sexuality*, French philosopher Michel Foucault argues that the modern state has increasingly sought to regulate and control sexual behavior as a means of maintaining social order, control, discipline, and power.[17] As Foucault explains, in the late 18th century, government sexual regulations became ingrained in legislative discourse that was implemented in a variety of means, including laws, medical and health policies, social norms, and institutions governing the sexual economy of their population. He also suggests that this regulation takes place through various institutional and cultural mechanisms that have developed a "scientific" understanding of sexuality. Foucault illustrates ways in which governments can use social institutions, such as schools and media, to shape and influence sexual attitudes and behaviors. In a similar manner, in its exertion of political control, the Islamic Republic constructed a cis-heteropatriarchal sexual economy to execute its political rulings and discourse as well as maintain social order and control.[18,19] The Iranian state has played a significant role in regulating sexuality and establishing a cis-heteronormative identity through various mechanisms that have been embedded in society, culture, law, health, policy, and even the Iranian identity. Upon its inception in 1979, not only did the new Islamic Republic governance attempt to reform all the laws, medical policies, and culture, but it also took over school curriculum and media production to reflect their ideological and moral values. Additionally, the Islamic Republic of Iran adheres to a strict interpretation of sharia law, which prioritizes traditional gender roles and discourages any form of sexual identity that deviates from heterosexual norms.

Acknowledging the limitations of applying a Western philosopher's lens to Iranian political power, an incredibly complex intricate system of power in which Islam and politics are intertwined, I utilize a Foucauldian lens to examine how the Iranian government is exploiting sexuality as a tool to further its political objective.[20] In the case of the Islamic Republic's governance, the concepts of governmentality and the panopticon, as articulated by Foucault, serve as valuable tools for comprehending how the Iranian government exercises control and enforces discipline upon its populace.[21]

Since its rise to power, the Iranian state has constructed a cis-heteronormative national identity that is perpetuated and maintained through a panoptic system of power where individuals are subject to constant monitoring, rules, regulations, and governmentality. In this manner, citizens are disciplined through social norms

16 Abdi, Shadee, "Staying I(ra)n: Narrating Queer Identity from Within the Persian Closet," *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 10, no. 2 (2014): 1–20.

17 Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality* (Vintage Books, 1990).

18 Afary, Janet, "The Sexual Economy of the Islamic Republic," *Iranian Studies* 42, no. 1 (2009): 5–26.

19 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*.

20 I acknowledge that Michel Foucault did not decipher the complexity of what has taken place in Iran's political and social society. Foucualt visited Iran twice in the midst of the 1979 revolution, yet he did not live long enough to see the aftermath.

21 Foucault introduced the concept of governmentality in his lectures in 1978, and 1979 at the College de France, and these lectures remain the only first hand and genuine sources on this topic. Although there are many analyses of the concept, due to lack of space, I cannot go into detail in this paper but I will focus on how power functions in Iranian society.

and legal measures that regulate behavior and thus become part of the "culture," further policing citizens. These mechanisms have marginalized, and continue to marginalize, queer and trans individuals through a self-surveilling system that has lethal consequences, literally.[22]

Chapter 1. The inner-panopticon

Panopticon (noun) /pænˈɔp.tɪ.kɔn/ derives from the Greek word *panoptēs*, meaning all-seeing. In the late 18th century, English philosopher Jeremy Bentham invented a prison system implementing a social control mechanism that became a comprehensive symbol for modern authority and discipline in the West. In design, the panopticon is a disciplinary concept materialized through the construction of a central watch tower encircled by visible prison cells. Positioned within this arrangement, a guard possesses the ability to oversee each cell and its occupants, while the inmates remain unable to see into the tower. In Foucault's *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, he describes the features and function of the panopticon in the modern age. Foucault's analysis of Bentham's Panopticon extends beyond the prison walls and suggests that the panopticon creates an invisible form of power that maintains social control. Although in Bentham's Panopticon it is an "architectural figure" made for the criminal justice system, in Foucault's analysis the panoptic structure or "panopticism" goes beyond the prison walls.

The panopticon, as a metaphor for power systems for Foucault, operates by inducing a perpetual state of observation and surveillance, which in turn engenders self-regulation and internalization of discipline among those who are subjected to it. The main effect of the panopticon is "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power."[23] In practice, the panopticon acts as a prison. Inside the panoptic prison, each inmate is in a cell kept under constant surveillance by a central watch tower. The watchdog can see every inmate at all times; however, the inmate, aware of this possibility, cannot see the watchdog and does not know when they are being watched. The panopticon, thus, creates the feeling of constant-surveillance.[24]

"The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen."[25] Through visibility, discipline becomes a conscience-propagating mind-mechanism. Visibility as a concept, much like transparency, often carries a sense of freedom; however, in the case of the panopticon, "visibility is a trap," as visibility leads to punishment. In the panopticon, visibility is a tactic used for control.[26]

In Iranian society, much like in the Foucauldian panopticon, the citizen is under constant surveillance. Drawing from Foucault's framework, the Iranian citizen assumes the role of the inmate, while the regime embodies the central watchtower. The Iranian subject, thus, is seen but does not see; the Iranian subject becomes the object of information, never a subject in communication. Consequently, the Iranian subject exists in a state of visibility without agency, observed but never afforded the opportunity to observe in return. In the Panoptic Prison structure, inmates know they are prisoners. In the case of Iran, however, this is not the case.

Within the disciplinary framework imposed by social institutions, authority is internalized, resulting in a form of self-regulation where the mind becomes the watchtower and the body, the inmate. Over the past four decades of Islamic Republic governance, this surveillance has become normalized, rendering it nearly

22 In Iran, where homosexuality is punishable by death, the LGBTQ+ community faces severe consequences, including heightened mental health disorders such as depression and increased rates of suicide attempts. Furthermore, instances of violence against LGBTQ+ individuals are alarmingly high, as evidenced by the tragic case of Alireza Fazeli Monfared, who was kidnapped and brutally murdered due to his sexual orientation in 2021. Read more in Chapter 4.

23 Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (Vintage Books, 1995), 195–228.

24 Jeremy Bentham's design of the panopticon (18th century) allowed for a prison where inmates were under constant surveillance.

25 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 202.

26 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 200.

imperceptible. To adapt to this constant monitoring, individuals have internalized the panopticon, constructing an "inner-panopticon" within their minds.

Through this conceptual lens, I propose the notion that the Iranian state's imposition of a heteronormative national identity resides within this inner-panopticon. This theory elucidates the constant monitoring, imposition of rules, and exercise of control over the Iranian subject through various mechanisms of power. In this manner, the surveillance extends beyond the public sphere and into the private sphere. Rules and regulations carry a high punishment, and as a result fear and anxiety are spread not only throughout society, but within the individual as well. Thus, the government no longer needs to regulate at the individual level because this invisible panopticon (at the border of visibility) creates a self-surveilling system extending beyond mere physical visibility into the realm of psychological and internalized surveillance. In that, the panopticon surpasses the imposed regulations, penetrating the mind and body. Through fear, individuals become prisoners in their bodies guarded by the inner-panopticon in creating anxiety in their mind, policing themselves through a self-surveilling system that follows social, cultural, and political norms that are embedded by the political system in place. The panopticon has thus bypassed not only society but also the mind, body, and soul, with fear becoming the Islamic Republic's greatest weapon of governance.

Shedding light on the inner-panopticon with a gendered queer lens, it is revealed that with the institution of the Islamic Republic and the construction of Iran's sexual economy in 1979, the new system of government enabled a panoptic system of power. In this new system, the War on Sex infiltrated laws, institutions, curricula, and media to reinforce the discriminatory utilization of sexuality as a political tool and establish a cis-heteropatriarchal national identity to regulate and control sexual behavior as a means of maintaining social order and discipline.

Power politics play a key role in Iran's modern sexual and identity politics. The Islamic Republic's indoctrination of national identity is confined to the non-heterosexual and non-cisgendered, excluding sexuality, gender, and sex altogether.[27] The cis-heteronormative-gendered-religiopolitical ideology penetrates the individual as soon as they step into society.

Moreover, the state's promotion of a heteronormative national identity can create a culture of homophobia and transphobia that further reinforces marginalization of the LGBTQ+ community. Examined through an inner-panoptic lens, the surveillance and regulation around cis-heteronormativity can and has gone unnoticed, becoming internalized. The internalization of queerphobia and transphobia, then, is a result of the state's instillment of fear manifesting in the inner-panopticon, leading to self-repression and a lack of acceptance of one's own gender and sexual identities. Furthermore, this phenomenon has the potential to obliterate LGBTQ+ identities and erase their experiences and voices from public discourse. The state's cis-heteronormative national identity has traumatic repercussions that can lead to depression and isolation, triggering a sense of detachment and despair among the LGBTQ+ community. The constant reinforcement of the national identity on citizens through social insititutions perpetuates the inner-panopticon's consequences, rendering it challenging for individuals to seek solace and affirmation for their authentic selves both from themselves and society.

Over coffee, I talked about this with Helia, a fellow classmate I have the honor to call a friend. Helia grew up in Isfahan and came to Turtle Island at the age of seventeen.[28] They are a recent graduate of UC Berkeley and an expert chef in the Bay Area. Together, we're trying to understand why both of us spent the majority of our lives afraid of our own sexual desires. We spent the hour sharing our own stories and relationships with the state, religion, sexuality, and mental health.

"You said you had suppressed your sexuality even though you weren't raised religious. Me too. Why is that?" Helia asks me during our "healing" conversation.

"I think it could be the same idea of conformity and self-governance you were talking about earlier."

They agree with me.

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27 The non-heterosexual only exists in the Iranian legal system and culture as mentally ill. This nonrecognition of sexuality perpetuates and reproduces queerphobia, transphobia, and queer- and trans-phobic acts of violence.

28 Isfahan is a city in central Iran that is famous for its Perso–Islamic architecture, grand boulevards, covered bridges, palaces, tiled mosques, and minarets.

"How much of these heteronormative ideologies did you see and learn about growing up? How much did your theology or Quran teachers or school put these fearful thoughts into your mind from a young age? If you don't do this, you'll go to hell and whatever . . ."

I stay silent as the conversation has brought up for me many forcibly forgotten memories from mandatory religious class.

"I remember when I was eight, a teacher of mine said if I don't wear the hijab they'll hang me by my ponytail in hell," I tell Helia. "I remember crying for a week and being cautious with my headscarf in school." They share a similar experience.

"Point is that even when we come from non-religious backgrounds, so much of this fear is embedded into our society and our systems within the society, and that's why it works so well!" Helia tells me. "Because if you teach people from a young age that their sexuality, their bodies, their hair, their desires, and thoughts, and emotions and questions will make them burn for eternity or have significantly negative consequences on their lives, the fear does its job."

Chapter 2. The Islamic Republic's war on sex

As Karim Sadjadpour argues in his article, *The Ayatollah Under the Bed(sheets)*, "[In Iran] all politics may not be sexual but all sex is political."[29] Lawmakers, authorities, scholars, members of parliament, and even the Supreme Leader spend hours discussing sex, condemning sex, punishing people for having sex, and finding ways to abolish the threat of non-authorized heterosexual sex and non-heterosexual sex in society. Television, radio, and social media platforms have become clerics' philosophical sex advice and education sessions, sometimes even in surprisingly vicious detail.[30,31] Posters and propaganda content for compulsory hijab all over cities and on TV warn of the link between immodest dress for women and arousal for men. Even fatwas have been given offering cures and purification methods for masturbators.[32] In other words, everything in the Islamic Republic is linked to sex, everything, yet sex is heavily criminalized.

"*If they arouse sexual desires in any given country, if they spread unrestrained mixing of men and women, and if they lead youth to behavior to which instincts naturally incline them, there will no longer be any need for artillery and guns against that nation*," expresses Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, in a 2005 state TV address referring to his fear that the United States is targeting Iranian youth to spread "cultural values that lead to moral corruption."[33] He recalls an article in Iranian news regarding an American political center's senior official allegedly ordering America to "send them miniskirts instead of bombs."[34] The Iranian authorities have spent the majority of their time in the office finding ways to battle the *Jang-e Narm*, "Soft War," of the West. This *Jang-e Narm* is even taught in schools and is believed to be the modern-day war of the West to culturally pollute and invade Iranian society through official and unofficial media.[35] There have been multiple religious clerics, such as Khamenei, that have expressed their concern about Westernized cultures targeting the youth with the strategy of seeking female promiscuity and offering counteractions that need to take place. The Islamic Republic's fear of sexual promiscuity begs the question: could the sexual emancipation of the nation be the biggest threat to the Islamic Republic? Is this why the regime is preventing the *Woman, Life, Freedom* movement and even resorting

29 Sadjadpour, Karim, "The Ayatollah Under the Bed(sheets)," *Foreign Policy*, no. 193, May/June 2012: 74–80.

30 An Iranian cleric refers to a religious leader within the Islamic clergy of Iran, typically associated with Shia Islam. These clerics play significant roles in shaping religious, social, and political matters within the country. They often hold positions of authority within religious institutions, mosques, and seminaries, and their influence extends to various aspects of Iranian society.

31 Navai, Ramita, "High Heels and Hijabs: Iran's Sexual Revolution," *New Statesman*, August 1, 2014.

32 A fatwa is a ruling or legal opinion given by an Islamic scholar on a specific issue or question.

33 Ali Khamenei, "Ali Khamenei, 2003," *Counter Extremism Project*, https://www.counterextremism.com/content/ali-khamenei-2003.

34 "Iranian Leader Khamenei: Iran's Enemies Want to Destroy It with Miniskirts." MEMRI, January 6, 2005.

35 Translated from IRNA news (which is heavily mediated by IRI ideology),
"«ترور، عملیات مخفی و جنگ نرم» برنامه دشمن برای تضعیف ایران"

to killing young children?[36] The regime's mandated media and cis-heteronormative propaganda certainly seem to support this idea. Through media, the Islamic regime has established its ideology and perpetuated the inner-panopticon to discipline, surveil, and punish those who challenge their strict social norms.

A segment aired on the 20:30 news program on Channel 2 in April 2022 (seven months into the *Woman, Life, Freedom* movement), could perhaps answer the questions above.

"What are the *Woman, Life, Freedom* protestors demanding in regard to women's liberation?" asks the IRIB reporter in a special news program on State TV Channel 2.[37,38] Immediately after, a video emphasized with a "trigger warning" is played. The video begins with a yellow triangular icon signaling caution: "Watching this program is not suggested for children and youth to maintain health and mental health." The report begins by showing different clips of sexual rights activists during the 2020 Iranian *Me Too* movement who were interviewed by diaspora news channel *Iran International*, condemning the impact of the "*Western sexual revolution*."[39] The report then focuses on different unrelated clips of queer activists and protestors in diaspora demonstrations interpreting the presence of the LGBTQ+ community as a sign of "sexual deviation" and "immoral" goals of this revolution. In the final minute, videos of women walking around the streets of Iran without wearing the compulsory headscarf are shown as the "puzzle piece" that connects the ongoing revolution and the protestor's demands of a free Iran to "unbridled" sex and sexuality.[40]

One of the speeches shown is from Iranian-born and Berlin-based LGBTQ+ activist Melika Zar during the October 2nd protests in Berlin.[41] While the original speech states, "democracy is only possible when the rights of all marginalized communities including rights of the LGBTQ+ community are recognized after the fall of the Islamic Republic," the edited clip only shows the part of the speech emphasizing the active presence of the LGBTQ+ community in these protests. This is an example of state-produced propaganda in response to ongoing protests strengthening the Iranian state's widespread systematic hatred against queer and trans individuals. This marginalizing effort constructs the narrative of homosexuaity as "sexual promiscuity" that allows for the further stigmatization of homosexuality and the portrayal of sexual orientation as mental illness. Thus, in a systematic effort of hate speech and propaganda, the Islamic Republic uses the image of the "homosexual" to not only demonize and ostracize the LGBTQ+ community but also to quell ongoing protests and maintain social order in perpetuating their cis-heteronormative and sexist agenda. This is not the first time the regime has strengthened its grip on protestors through propaganda. As Moallem and Shakhsari write, "The wholesale treatment of protesters as foreign functionaries or regime change protesters by either the Iranian state or the regime-change apparatus, undermines the agency of Iranian protesters, while subjecting them to sheer violence."[42]

The Islamic Republic was grounded upon ideas of bringing back *morality* to an Iranian society that had been ostracized from its Islamic roots. Prior to the 1979 revolution, religious authorities strategically linked their religious thinking with anti-Western ideologies that had emerged during that time, contributing to the construction of a discourse of "Westernized impurity" that emerged during the late Pahlavi era before the revolution. This discourse spread throughout a nation fed up with the Shah, who saw benefits to Westernization. As a result, the religious anti-Westernization ideology became quite popular among anti-Shah groups. Similarly, Ayatollah

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36 Since September 2022, the IRI has killed at least 44 children and injured many more in a bid to crush the spirit of resistance among the country's youth and retain their iron grip on power at any cost (Amnesty International, 2022).

37 IRIB is the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcast.

38 20:30 is produced by the central news unit of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is under the supervision of the political deputy of this organization. This program is a short news segment of about 15 to 20 minutes that airs at 8:30 pm every day, on Iran's Islamic Republic of Iran's 2 Television Network.

39 It is important to note that Iranian authorities often view diaspora news channels, such as Iran International, with suspicion and criticism, accusing them of disseminating false information intended to undermine the Iranian government and labeling such channels as tools of foreign governments or entities seeking to destabilize Iran.

40 Translated from 20:30 (۲۰:۳۰ news segment channel 2). n.d.
"انقلاب جنسی متولیان شعار زن زندگی آزادی، آزادی زن را در چه می‌بینند؟" https://www.aparat.com/v/TMmuj.

41 On October 2, 2022, over 80,000 people from around the world gathered in Berlin to demonstrate against the Islamic Republic in support of *Woman, Life, Freedom*.

42 Moallem, Minoo, and Sima Shakhsari, "Whose Revolution? A Reflection on the Iranian Uprisings | Iran," *A Journal for Body and Gender Research* 5, no. 3 (2019).

Khomeini used videotapes to spread his religious anti-Westernization ideologies that attracted many.[43] The late supreme leader, Ayatollah Khomeini's 1970 book, *Islamic Government* (*Hokumat-e Eslami*), uncovers his way of thinking that in the seventies, "sexual vice" was corrupting the youth of Iran, "destroying entire generations," and retracting them from their work on promoting Islam.[44] The revolution of 1979 not only brought with it a presumably theocratic democracy but also an obsessive battle with sex in an effort to establish a cis-heterosexual national sexuality.

The notion that "Islamism has enforced a harsh form of sexual repression on the Iranian people" is an Orientalist viewing of this battle and does not convey the complexity of what has taken place.[45] In the Iranian context, Minoo Moallem notes that modernization and Westernization did not challenge or change patriarchy, but rather divided it into hegemonic and subordinated semiotic regimes that compete for control over women's bodies and minds.[46] This patriarchal control over women's bodies and sexuality is a central subject in religious and cultural discourse and converges with hegemonic notions of sexuality that privilege heteronormativity. As a result, gendered and sexual citizenship in Iran is both created and contested as sites of exclusion. The patriarchal nature of Iranian society is further reinforced by the state's control over the media and public discourse, which often perpetuates traditional gender roles and heteronormative values. This systemic oppression of women and queer individuals has led to ongoing protests and movements for change, reform, and ultimately *Azadi*, as marginalized groups push back against the dominant power structures that seek to control their bodies, lives, and minds.

The War on Sex, as I argue in this paper, is the battle to establish a cis-heteronormative sexual national identity that was planted in Iranian society by the Islamic Republic and has penetrated the law, the culture, the discourse, and the mind through the inner-panopticon, resulting in many fatalities that continue to endanger many civilians (both inside Iran and in the diaspora) to this day. After all, Mahsa Zhina Amini was a victim of the War on Sex; she was killed based on hijab rules deemed as mandatory to prevent the "arousal" of the opposite sex. What I refer to as the War on Sex in this paper embodies the greater use of sexuality as an object of desire to serve the state's political goal. The Iranian regime has used sex as a political instrument and even as a weapon to reinforce control of society, especially among non-male-conforming individuals. Masked as Islamic, the War on Sex is embedded within the law.[47] It has been instituted within societal gaps to reinforce the fear of sex as a threat to society and justification for violating gender norms. The Islamic clerics have been preoccupied with people's sexual lives since the institution of the Islamic Republic and continue to marginalize women and queer individuals with religious justifications.

Chapter 3. The construction of Iran's sexual economy

Following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the Islamic Republic underwent a sweeping transformation that extended to every aspect of society, from legal systems and healthcare policies to educational curricula and media production, ultimately penetrating and influencing the very fabric of Iranian culture. Before his coming to power, Ayatollah Khomeini advocated that "Islam wants to safeguard women's nobility" and "prevent moral corruption."[48] However, what Khomeini did not make clear was what he meant by "safeguarding" and "morality." After his rise to power in 1979, Khomeini's words became clear when he created a constitution that enforced his

43 Jones, Stephen, "The Islamic Republic of Iran: An Introduction." *House of Commons Library*, 2007, https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4b41bca92.pdf.

44 Khomeini, Ruhollah, *Islamic Government* (Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Work, 1970).

45 Afary, "The Sexual Economy," 5–26.

46 Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister.*

47 I say masked because many of these laws do not appear in the Quran and are discriminatory towards marginalized groups in society. The Islamic republic has masked its War on Sex and framed it as Islamic, when in reality it does not convey an Islamic essence.

48 "Part 4: Khomeini & Khamenei on Women | The Iran Primer." *The Iran Primer*, December 8, 2020, https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2020/dec/08/part-4-khomeini-khamenei-women.

notion of morality to the nation by instituting a cis-heteropatriarchal, sexist, queerphobic, and misogynistic set of laws.[49]

Donya Zarrinnegar states that "the sexual economy of Iranian Islamism was rooted in negating women's authority over their sexual and reproductive abilities."[50] Although Zarrinnegar fails to recognize the ways in which the government excludes queer and trans individuals in the same manner and contributes to this exclusion, her observation remains integral to analyzing Iran's sexual politics and economy.

As soon as the regime had substantial authority, it established a new juridical discourse on sexuality that aimed to construct the cis-heteropatriarchy, increasing the power of the state and men over women's sexuality. This discourse also extended to reproductive functions while reversing modern trends in love and marriage, and heavily decriminalizing homosexuality in an effort of alleged *de-Westernization*.[51] The new penal code exclusively granted guardianship authority to men over female family members by positioning the husband or male guardian as "the head of the family."[52] The state also lowered the age of marriage from 18 years old to 9 years for girls (now 13 years for girls) and from 20 to 15 years for boys as well as legalizing *sigheh*—temporary marriages—among many other discriminatory laws such as the compulsory hijab.[53,54]

The immoral sexual exploitation of individuals creates a paradox that in return constructs the taboo categorization of sex and sexuality and perpetuates the regime's War on Sex through its sexual economy. In theory, the sexual economy is a complex and multifaceted concept in which sexual desires and behaviors are shaped by social, political, and economic factors that can be misused by authoritarian governments to institute their political purposes. Iran's sexual economy thus is the cycle in which the invisible War on Sex infiltrates laws, institutions, curricula, and media to reinforce discriminatory utilization of sexuality as a political tool to reproduce women and queer people's subordinate position in society which strengthens the Islamic Republic's political agenda and control.[55] At times when in their favor, the Iranian government has used their sexual economy to produce some advances to the health and education of women, and at other times, the Islamic state pushed patriarchal interpretations of gender norms which were constructed through the enforcement of different institutions. Despite these shifts, the Iranian sexual economy remains steadfast in its primary goal of preserving a cis-heteronormative national sexual identity. Family planning laws, sexual education, and the legal penal code are great examples of how the Islamic Republic's political objective has always been prioritized.

Iran was once seen as a model of population control and praised for its family planning laws by the end of the 20th century when annual rates of population growth significantly decreased.[56] Initially, the IRI implemented a natalist approach. As a result, the state banned abortions and limited access to birth control, which was previously permitted. Offering monetary compensation, the IRI offered a plot of land for couples with seven or more children to build a home.[57] The eight-year-long Iran-Iraq war began in 1980, and families who sent their sons to war were once again encouraged to birth children, and compensated in return with food coupons, monetary rewards, and increased educational opportunities. In 1986, the fertility rate had gone from 6.3 in 1976 to 7.0, offering a

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49 Morse, Michelle Milford. "Gender Discrimination Is Enshrined in Law. That Needs to Change." *United Nations Foundation*, March 8, 2022, https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/gender-discrimination-is-enshrined-in-law-that-needs-to- change/.

50 Zarrinnegar, Donya, "Agents of Change: Women's Sexual Uprisings in Modern," *Intersect* 15, no. 2.

51 Afary, "The Sexual Economy."

52 Article 1105 in the Islamic Republic penal code.

53 *Sigheh* or temporary marriages allows for an authorized sexual relationship without the formal marriage contract under religious ruling. This has allowed men to marry a woman for a pre-determined period of time, have intimate relations with her, and then leave her without consequences. Although many accounts of *sigheh* have pointed towards the exploitation of female sexuality for male pleasure, it can also provide sexual autonomy for female individuals that want to have sex outside of the legalized marriage unit, yet it is less common.

54 See Part 2 for more information on this topic.

55 Or constructs the lack of existence thereof.

56 Zarrinnegar, "Agents of Change."

57 Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Sexuality, Rights, and Islam: Competing Gender Discourses in Post-Revolutionary Iran," in *Women in Iran: From 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, ed. Lois Beck and Guity Nashat (University of Illinois Press, 2004), 206.

dramatic population expansion from 34 million to 49 million.[58,59] Two years later in 1988, the war ended and the government was faced with a population explosion and a disastrous economy. Supported by Ayatollah Khomeini, the government implemented family planning policies. For example, reproductive health was integrated into religious teachings as part of state health policy. In 1989, even birth control was reinstated.

Additionally, the state asked for the assistance of the UN Fund for Population Activities in order to implement a plan to encourage birth spacing of three to four years, discouraging early and late pregnancy, and limiting family size at first to three, and later to two, children. There was a significant drop in fertility rates and an increase in the average marriage age of women at first marriage from 19 in 1976 to 22 in 1996. Another study showed that at least 74 percent of women of childbearing age were using contraceptives. However, the government refused to increase the legal age of marriage. The age of marriage remained 9 "to serve men's sexual interests" and perpetuate child abuse and child marriage.[60] *Sigheh* remained legal as well, which contributed to female sex trades and the spread of venereal diseases.[61] The Islamic Republic exhibited that it was willing to deliver a more liberal discourse on sexuality if it suited its purposes, which in this case was population control. Yet, other issues such as child marriage, unequal inheritance, and violence against women remained untouched. "The secret of the Islamic state's sexual economy," as Janet Afary calls it, shows that the state's policies regarding sexual conduct were contradictory, promoting smaller families through unrestricted access to sex while failing to address the need for policies that would benefit women. This interference with individual sexual conduct caused a dichotomy in the state's policies. It became clear that women's empowerment was hardly the goal of the Islamic Republic. For the IRI, family planning has always been about politics, constraint, and controlling women's bodies. Although this issue is not just related to Iran, the Iranian authorities' abuse of family planning to control women's bodies and lives has played a big part in the emerging culture and discourse around sex and their execution of the War on Sex.[62]

Mohammad Khatami served as the Minister of Culture for ten years before he was elected as president in 1997. Known as a reformist, he mandated art, media, and cinema as much had been banned post-revolution. Khatami's presidency coincided with a "sexual revolution" taking place in Iran as his office brought progressive changes for women's rights. During Khatami's presidency, the severity of hijab for children was reduced, and girls were allowed to wear colorful uniforms in school.[63] At this time, the parliament saw a shift in gender norms as many women entered the political realm gaining seats in the Parliament. The age of marriage was even changed to 13 for girls and 15 for boys. Although this increase in the legal marriage age was still far from the average marriage age, it was still seen as a win for women's rights as there was a backlash from conservative parliament members.[64] As Pardis Mahdavi explains in her book *Passionate Uprisings: Iran's Sexual Revolution*, Khatami's presidency and the reduced severity of the hijab mandate allowed the rise of the "millimeter revolution" which was a term used to describe the headscarf being pushed back millimeter by millimeter and women's ability to show more strands of hair.[65] Family planning laws during Khatami's presidency also led to the institution of fifteen thousand "health houses," which were mobile clinics providing family planning and health services to more than 80 percent of Iran's rural population.[66] Khatami left his legacy as a reformist, instilling hope in the Iranian youth that reform in the Islamic Republic was possible. Reformist Khatami also tried to ratify the United Nations treaty, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). However, anti-reformists, especially clerics, pushed back against such efforts, stating that ratifying CEDAW would be "waging

58 Abubakar Dungus, "Iran's Other Revolution," *IranSource: Populi* 27, no. 2 (2000): 1–8.

59 Akbar Aghajanian, "A New Direction in Population Policy and Family Planning in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Asia-Pacific Population Journal* 10, no. 1 (March 1995): 3–22.

60 Afary, "The Sexual Economy."

61 Mir-Hosseini, "Sexuality, Rights, and Islam."

62 Afary, "The Sexual Economy."

63 Prior to this mandate, all uniforms were black as wearing colorful clothing was seen as demanding attention from the opposite sex.

64 Mahdavi, Pardis, *Passionate Uprisings: Iran's Sexual Revolution* (Stanford University Press, 2009).

65 Mahdavi, *Passionate Uprisings*.

66 Larsen, Janet, "Iran: A Model for Family Planning?" *The Globalist*, August 3, 2003.

war on god" and reproducing Westernized ideologies.[67]

Similarly, any efforts to reform the law to include women's rights regarding divorce, hijab, and inheritance were rejected. President Khatami's eight years of Presidency in the early 2000s created an "illusion of openness" not only for women's rights and sexual freedom but also for political expression, among other things.[68] Once again, it became clear that women's empowerment was never the goal of the Islamist state, and even if the president was an advocate to institute such laws, the greater authoritarian regime would block it.

After eight years of presidency, Khatami was opposed by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who started his election campaign by expressing a backlash against the "sexual revolution" taking place in Iran. As journalist Christopher de Bellaigue reported at the time, many of Ahmadinejad's supporters were deeply concerned with the "dramatic rise in prostitution, marital infidelities, and drug addiction," which was blamed on reformists' cultural and social policies.[69] Although these cases were prevalent in Iranian society even before Khatami's presidency, Ahmadinejad used conservative concerns as part of his campaign strategy. Dehnamaki, a prominent Iranian conservative filmmaker, even released a documentary on "Poverty & Prostitution" to feed into Ahmadinejad's campaign. Shot in Tehran, Kish Island, and Dubai, the documentary features interviews with young women, girls, and married women who feel they are forced to work as prostitutes to earn a living. The film also contains some interviews with young men who are the clients of prostitutes.[70] Ahmadinejad utilized the sexual revolution and the rise of sex workers in his campaign to appeal to his conservative followers, arguing that Khatami's reforms have led to "women being on the loose" and Ahmadinejad's strict laws and ban on contraceptives would fix this "problem."[71] Ahmadinejad believed that a stronger Iran is one with nuclear capability and populated with suggesting that to achieve this women should have more part-time than full-time jobs in order to take care of their family. With his rise to power Ahmadinejad immediately banned contraceptives, believing that Iran's population must rise. He arranged low-interest loans for newly married couples, thus encouraging the institution of marriage, and promised not only to reduce the staggering unemployment rate, but also to provide more generous financial support for young couples. However, as the Iranian youth had become familiar with the benefits of birth control, Ahmadinejad's laws put them under a more sexual constraint with many having to find expensive contraceptives through black markets.[72]

Even recently, the "rejuvenation of the population and support of the family" plan was ratified in 2020 to boost flagging population growth. According to human rights groups, "the new law will restrict women's access to abortions, lead to unwanted pregnancies and the birth of children with congenital defects, and increase the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS."[73] Prompted widespread criticism boomed across the country as economic woes, strict restrictions, and changing gender norms are the main causes young couples are refusing to bear children. "Instead of resolving economic problems, [authorities] want to further interfere in our lives," suggests a resident of Tehran.[74] It is true that authorities once again exploit female sexuality to implement their political aim of a population boost. Another theory by political critics suggests that the reason behind these family planning laws during extreme economic turmoil could be the government's strategy to exploit a new generation they can further control and constraint in order to maintain their social and political control on society.[75]

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67 Vahdati, Mahnaz, "Women's Political Empowerment and CEDAW: The Case of Iran and Turkey" (Wilson Center, August 30, 2021).

68 Mahdavi, *Passionate Uprisings*.

69 Mahdavi, *Passionate Uprisings*.

70 Dehnamaki, Massoud, "Poverty & Prostitution," 2004.

71 Jones, "The Islamic Republic of Iran: An introduction."

72 Afary, "The Sexual Economy."

73 Human Rights Watch, "Iran: Population Law Violates Women's Rights," November 10, 2021.

74 Sadjadpour, "The Ayatollah Under the Bed(sheets)."

75 Sharifi, Nafiseh, "The Religious Sexual Education in Post-Revolutionary Iran: Redefining Tamkin and the Control of Sexuality," *Gender and Research* 5, no. 2, 2020): 1–16.

Part II. Panoptic Institutions

Chapter 4. Inside the Iranian legal penal code

> We belong to a society where pedophilia is legal and justified according to the shari'a, yet a free and voluntary sexual relationship, between two homosexual adults, is considered a crime. (Jamshid, MAHA magazine,[76] 2005)

In 1925, Iran introduced its first penal code which brought together the format of the Napoleonic Code and Shia-Islamic jurisprudence.[77] In this penal code, *livat* (anal intercourse between men), alongside adultery and rape, carried the death penalty. As Najmabadi explains, however, the 1925 code was concerned with non-consensual same-sex acts; the guideline merely provides an example of a person in the position of power forcing another individual into *livat*. The penalty for *livat* was later cut back to ten years of imprisonment, and female same-sex acts were not mentioned or penalized under the 1925 penal code at all. In *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, Najmabadi describes why there was a need for a law against homosexuality. European tourists in the 19th century misread homosociality among Iranians as indicative of homosexuality.[78] This misinterpretation led to a perceived "need to explain" ordinary homosocial interactions to Europeans, in order to counteract the backward labeling imposed by the Western-colonial gaze of these tourists.[79]

In this manner, the colonial gaze overlooks Iranian history and is influenced by false colonial discourses, and texts circulating about them. Iranians, thus, feel the "need to justify" their actions within colonial frameworks for the colonial's viewing thus creating an internalized orientalist gaze on their ordinary homosocial interactions and labelling them within the Western-colonial gaze as homosexual. Thus, the *modern* construction of homophobia as it exists in Iranian society today is a consequence of Iranian colonial modernity and the internalization of the Western-orientalost-colonial gaze in the 19th century. There existed the notion, both from the Europeans and Iranians influenced by Europeans, that same-sex desire is a consequence of sex segregation, which then categorized homosexuality as a sort of "illness" or practice that "men do before they settle into their heterosexual procreative sex with wives, or what women do if they are not satisfied with their husbands' performances."[80] Najmabadi criticizes this notion as it justifies temporary homosexualities as a consequence of hetero-socialized Iranian modernity. The penal code of 1925, is another example of how even before the inception of the Islamic Republic, the Iranian state has used legislation to construct a cis-heterosexual Iranian identity. However, this political agenda is now stronger than ever.

In contrast to the 1925 penal code, the penal code established after the Islamic Republic explicitly criminalizes consensual same-sex intimacy. The 1979 Iranian Revolution welcomed the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran: a democratic theocracy in theory, yet neither a democracy nor a theocracy in practice. As the name suggests, in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), the system of government is entangled with religion, and the penal code follows the Islamic Sharia law. Veiled under a false assumption of Islam, religion in the IRI has been used as a tool for political governance that justifies many discriminatory practices against women, trans, and queer individuals, legitimizing the cis-heteropatriarchy that has roots in coloniality.[81] Islam within the Islamic Republic is constantly weaponized to justify laws that discriminate against citizens.[82]

After the formation of the Islamic Republic, a new constitution was created in accordance with Sharia

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76 MAHA (translating to "us" or "we" in farsi) is the first online Iranian Queer e-magazine that began its publication from inside Iran in 2004.

77 Karimi, Aryan, and Zohreh Bayatarizi, "Dangerous Positions: Male Homosexuality in the New Penal Code of Iran," *Punishment & Society* 21, no. 4 (July 2018).

78 Homosociality indicates same-sex relationships that are not of a romantic or sexual nature.

79 Najmabadi, Afsaneh, *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (University of California Press, 2005): 40–57.

80 Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*.

81 There is a distinction between political Islam and Islam. Political Islam is what is taking place in the IRI.

82 Human Rights Watch, "Human Rights Issues Regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran." August 29, 2011.

law. The implementation of the new constitution had grave consequences for the Iranian people—depriving them of fundamental liberties such as freedom of expression, the right to protest, and the pursuit of pleasure and love. Under the guise of Islamic law, the constitution imposed compulsory hijab and flagrantly violated women's bodily autonomy; it stripped them of their right to dress, sing, attend sporting events, travel freely without male consent, or obtain a divorce or equal inheritance.[83] Queer individuals were also rendered invisible in the eyes of the law with homosexuality heavily criminalized and carrying capital punishment. Yet, despite the pervasive deprivation of rights, the regime has continued to justify its actions as being in the interest of the people and the Islamic faith. This serves to obscure its oppressive tactics, fostering a false sense of security among citizens ensnared within the state's panoptic control.

In many ways, the legal code has lethal consequences and perpetuates the War on Sex against women and homosexuals. As a legal institution, the IRI penal code formally ingrained a sexist, misogynistic, and homophobic set of laws with severe punishments that actively reproduce the cis-heteronormative Iranian identity. My research examines the lack of analysis and attention given to legislation criminalizing homosexuality, with a specific focus on the criminalization of lesbianism, within scholarly discourses.[84] This section of my study delves into articles of the new 2013 penal code that pertain to same-sex sexual acts, examining how these laws differ from previous iterations. Additionally, I explore how they are systematically encoded to regulate and control the cis-heteronormative patriarchal national identity. It's important to note that reading these laws can be unsettling due to their graphic and disturbing nature. However, this discomfort prompts reflection on whether the taboo nature of sex and sexuality contributes to the scarcity of scholarly examination. The new penal code of 2013 contains eight articles addressing homosexuality."[85]

- **Article 233:** *Livat* is defined as penetration of a man's sex organ (penis), up to the point of circumcision, into another male person's anus.
- **Article 234:** The *hadd* punishment for *livat* shall be the death penalty for the insertive/active party if he has committed *livat* by using force, coercion, or in cases where he meets the conditions for *ihsan*; otherwise, he shall be sentenced to one hundred lashes.[86]
  - The *hadd* punishment for the receptive/passive party, in any case (whether or not he meets the conditions for *ihsan*) shall be the death penalty.
  - If the insertive/active party is a non-Muslim and the receptive/passive party is a Muslim, the *hadd* punishment for the insertive/active party shall be the death penalty.
- **Article 235:** *Tafkhiz* is defined as putting a man's sex organ (penis) between the thighs or buttocks of another male person.
  - Note: Penetration in the ruling of *Tahfkhiz* is less than circumcision.
- **Article 236:** In the case of *tafkhiz*, the *hadd* punishment of one hundred lashes is carried for the active party and the passive party and there is no difference.
- **Article 237:** Homosexual acts (*hamjensgarayi*) of a male person in cases other than *livat* and *afkhiz*, such as kissing or touching as a result of lust, shall be punishable by thirty-one to seventy-four lashes of *ta'zir* punishment of the sixth grade.[87]
  - Note 1: The ruling of this article is also valid for female individuals.
  - Note 2: The provision of this article does not include the cases that are legally subject to the *hadd* punishment
- **Article 238:** *Musaheqeh* is defined as where a female person puts her sex organ on the sex organ of another person of the same sex.

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83 Bruno, Greg, "Religion and Politics in Iran," Council on Foreign Relations, 19 June 19, 2008.

84 Surprisingly, there are many articles examining the *hadd* punishment for same-sex male intercourse.

85 Dalirrad, Mohammad, "Azarbayijan: Daneshgah Pazhuheshgah Qanun va Mashmoliteh" in *The Complete Islamic Penal Code (Majmooe-ye Qanoon-e Eslami)*: 233–241.

86 Specific category of punishments in Islamic jurisprudence that are prescribed by Sharia law for certain offenses. These offenses are considered to be of a serious nature and are typically associated with violations of religious or moral principles.

87 The word used in this article is *hamjensgarayi*—literally meaning same-sex orientation or homosexuality, which is the preferred word for LGBTQ+ activists in Iran as opposed to the previously more common and rather derogatory *hamjensbazi*.

- **Article 239:** The *hadd* punishment for *musaheqeh* shall be one hundred lashes.
- **Article 240:** Regarding the hadd punishment for *musaheqeh*, there is no difference between the active or passive parties or between Muslims and non-Muslims.
- **Article 241:** In the cases of indecent offenses, in the absence of admissible legal evidence and the denial from the accused, any type of investigation and interrogation in order to discover hidden affairs and things concealed from the public eye shall be prohibited.

In comparison to the first penal code instituted in 1991, which had 22 articles on the subject of homosexuality, this penal code only contains eight articles. The law astutely acknowledges that same-sex desires can manifest through non-coital acts such as kissing and touching as well as concedes the existence of a "tendency" or "orientation." Despite exceeding religious law by criminalizing this proclivity, the law employs more elevated language that is advocated for by the LGBTQ+ community; word choices used in this article necessitate much attention. For the first time, the word *hamgensgarayi* is used in a legal context, yet only referring to male homosexuals. The term *hamjensgarayi*, meaning same-sex orientation or homosexuality, has become the preferred descriptor among LGBTQ+ activists in Iran. It supplants the once-common and derogatory term *hamjensbazi*, a phrase that translates directly to "playing (fooling around) with the same sex." Thus, it can be argued that homosexuality is at once legally recognized but also punished. Article 241 also indicates what Karimi and Bayatarizi espouse a "don't ask, don't tell" approach toward homosexual acts. Without evidence, authorities cannot entrap people or interrogate them.

For female same-sex intercourse, the article has left behind the previous criminalization of bed-sharing among naked same-sex individuals.[88] One could posit that the rationale behind imposing a harsher penalty for male same-sex intercourse, specifically on the passive partner, lies in the fact that lesbian sex is not explicitly addressed in the Islamic jurist's playbook and is not perceived as involving penetration. This discrepancy in punishment for homosexual acts based on gender could be interpreted as delegitimizing the lesbian experience due to the lack of any prescribed sanctions for female same-sex activity. In essence, the absence of detailed recognition and criminalization of lesbian sex within the legal system could be viewed as marginalizing and invalidating the experiences of women who engage in same-sex relationships. It is worth noting that the lack of formal detailed recognition of lesbian sex within the Islamic legal system also means that the act is not subject to the death penalty—as is the case with male same-sex intercourse in Iran and some other countries. This presents a silver lining for queer women, as they are spared the harshest of punishments. However, the lack of written law has not prohibited the authorities' sentencing to death of lesbians. This was the case for Zahra Saddiqi Hamedani and Elham Choubdar who were LGBTQ+ activist inside Iran and were convicted on charges of "corruption on earth" and "promoting sexcuality."[89] These convictions could have cost their lives based on false accusations and sham trials behind closed doors. This highlights the vulnerability of queer women to arbitrary and unjust treatment within the legal system, despite the absence of explicit legal penalties for lesbian sex.[90]At times even, the regime has used the pretense of other crimes, such as sexual assault, to execute LGBTQ+ Iranians.[91]

For male same-sex intercourse, Article 234 introduces a rather new distinction between the "active" (top) and "passive" (bottom) partners. In a counter-intuitive manner, the penetrating man (active), receives more leniency than the one who is penetrated (passive). It is also worth noting that the punishment is dependent on the depth of penetration. How the authorities can find such evidence remains a mystery.

What is the reasoning behind the penal code's use of binary categorizations for male and female homosexuals, as well as its additional differentiation between individuals based on their preferred sexual roles, religious affiliations, and marital statuses? The complex analysis of this topic would not have been possible

88 Referring to Article 134 of the previous legal code which stated: If two women, who are not blood related, lay naked under the same cover without any necessity, they shall be punished by less than one hundred lashes as *ta'zir*. If their act is repeated and after each time the *ta'zir* punishment is executed, on the fourth occasion they shall receive one hundred lashes.

89 "Good News: Sareh Sedighi-Hamadani's Death Sentence Overturned," Amnesty International, 2023.

90 Sareh and Elham were both released in March 2023 following the advocacy efforts of human rights organizations and activists shaming the Iranian authorities.

91 "Iran-United States Department of State." U.S. Department of State, December 7, 2023.

without my queer anti-Orientalist framework. As studied by Karimi and Bayatarizi, a "phallocentric hierarchy of sexual acts and desires" is constructed which divides the penetrating top from a penetrated bottom.[92] To understand this phenomenon, we have to view it from the perspective of Muslim jurists. In terms of the *sharia* and traditional Islam, intercourse is only defined in a cis-heteronormative penetrative manner as the "male act of phallic penetration." Thus, through this lens, sex involves an active male and a passive female in their (*natural)* gender roles in which penetration is seen as the "natural expression" of male sexuality. When this (severely outdated) cis-heteronormative framework is applied to a non-heterosexual relationship, same-sex acts cannot be understood. So, if a man's supposed *natural* desire is to lawfully penetrate a woman, the desire to penetrate another male in same-sex intercourse is seen as *unnatural* and sinful. As a result, from this perspective, the male subject who takes a top role is acting in accordance with their *masculine* gender role and *the natural* desire to penetrate, even if it does not take place with women. Thus, the "active" individual is not subjected to death but merely a hundred lashes.

On the other hand, the male identifying individual who takes a bottom role in same-sex intercourse, and "allows himself to be penetrated," is not acting in accordance with their masculine gender role because (in accordance with this way of thinking) there is no natural force compelling a male's desire to be penetrated. Thus, the passive partner in homosexual relationships is often unjustly stigmatized as having failed to uphold traditional masculine ideals and is subsequently marginalized from society through capital punishment.

Conversely, the active partner is typically viewed as conforming to societal norms of masculinity and may even receive certain privileges, with the exception of cases involving rape or adultery.[93] For a country that takes pride in its protection of morality, the exploitation of individuals on the basis of gender roles portrayed in these laws is discriminatory, repugnant, and immoral. Additionally, through this observation, the female individual is falsely seen as a "passive" object with no sexual autonomy for the enjoyment of the masculine desire. The penal code as a discriminatory institution reproduces itself in citizen behavior and tradition through the inner-panopticon. This, in return, constructs the taboo categorization of sex and sexuality and perpetuates the regime's War on Sex and sexuality beyond the legal system and through the sexual economy and the inner-panopticon. An example of this manifestation can be seen in the act of honor killings.

Romina Afshari was only 14 years old when her father beheaded her in her sleep in May 2020 due to her dating at her age and bringing "shame" to the family's "honor."[94] Usually, according to the penal code, the punishment for such crimes is *qesas* ("retribution"). However Article 301 of the Iranian regime's Penal Code exempts guardians (the men who is the head of the household) who kill their children and grandchildren from qesas, and does not provide alternative sentences for the perpetrator.[95] Romina Afsahri's dad was sentenced to nine years in prison, sparking unrest on social media, with commentators critiquing the unjust trial that leads to 24 years of prison for someone not abiding by compulsory hijab, but only nine years for killing your own daughter.

A year later, in May 2021, another tragic honor killing occurred where a young Iranian man named Ali Fazeli Monfared, known to his friends and family as Alireza, was beheaded by a group of male relatives on the basis of his sexuality. Alireza was a 20-year-old gay man living in the neighborhood of Mahal Tasviye Shekar in Ahvaz Iran. According to a report by 6rang (The Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network), Alireza's half brother opened an envelope containing Alireza's military exemption card indicating that he was gay, which is permissible under paragraph 5, Article 7 of the new military exemption law.[96] Unfortunately, this revelation of Alireza's sexual identity resulted in the tragic killing two days after he received this envolope. One aspect of the Iranian

92 Karimi and Bayatarizi, "Dangerous Positions."

93 Ibrahim, Nur Amali, "Homophobic Muslims: Emerging trends in multireligious Singapore." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58 no. 4, 2016): 955–981.

94 Esfandiari, Golnaz, "Gruesome Death of Iranian Teenager Shows Shame of 'Honor' Killings." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty. June 8, 2020.

95 "Iran: Women Fearing 'Honour'-Based Violence." May 2022.

96 Based on a new article in the military exemption law in 2020, it does allow exemption due to sexual identity. However, this exemption is dismissed as a "psychological and mental disorder," which pushes the individual to seek sex conversion therapy, encouraging heteronormatization of same-sex desire and effectively isolates them from society. Read more: 6rangiran. "12:16 PM · Aug 14, 2020. Tweet." Twitter, August 14, 2020, https://twitter.com/6rangiran/status/1294216298336067584.

legal framework stipulates that individuals who commit murder in defense of "honor" are exempt from facing the death penalty if their victim is deemed to have committed a *hadd* crime.[97] As mentioned in Article 234–241 earlier in this part, consensual same-sex relations fall within the scope of *hadd* crimes. While the imposition of the death penalty is universally condemned, the practice of reducing sentences for murders based on the identity of the victim, particularly LGBTQ+ individuals, fosters an environment of impunity and places vulnerable members of the community at significant risk. Romina Afshari and Alireza Fazeli Monfared were both brutally murdered in acts of honor killings, neither of them protected due to the authorities' failure to prevent, investigate, sanction, and provide reparations for acts of killings. Their brutal murders expose the deadly consequences of the War on Sex and state-fueled misogyny and homophobia.

To comprehend this tragic instance further, one has to understand the extremely complex existential and culturally influenced power *aberoo* holds in the Iranian world. The word *aberoo* literally translates 'to the water of the face' in Farsi. The pure water facade has to be kept at all times to show a shining face. "*Aberoom raft*," (my *aberoo* is gone) is a phrase used in instances where shame is brought to the person, thus most members in Iranian society would rather die, or in this case kill, rather than having their *aberoo* stripped away. Thus Romina and Alireza's stories illuminate how government-instilled norms have infiltrated from the public to the private sphere of social norms to the extent to which deviation from the national identity can threaten the family's *aberoo*, bringing shame upon the individual. The shame however instills fear, and fear is what keeps the inner-panopticon running.

Chapter 5. Inside the classroom: Panoptic institutions, sexual education, and tamkin *in the Islamic Republic*

My mother was only eight years old when the Islamic Republic took power, but she remembers how everything changed. Her co-gender British elementary school was shut down and replaced by a segregated public school whose curriculum was mandated by the Islamic Republic. At first, my mother recalls, the hijab was not mandatory for elementary school girls, but as she got older, they mandated the *maghnae*—a head covering that provides an opening for the face—as part of the all-black school uniform. Unlike my mother, I had to wear the *maghnae* and the state-authorized uniform since the beginning of first grade. We are comparing our school experiences in Iran. She recalls the early days of the schooling system under the Islamic Republic. For her and her friends, getting used to the photo of Ayatollah Khomeini in every classroom and on the first page of every textbook was a distinct memory as well. I remember this, too, from my schooldays. I show her photos of schoolchildren that have been circulating across social media: schoolgirls posing in the classrooms in front of images of supreme leaders with their hair showing or they are even ripping the faces of the supreme leaders from the textbooks.[98] My mother smiles, looking at the image, stating that my generation gives her hope. "It was as if we were constantly being watched," she says, referring to the images inside the classroom and everywhere around us.

As Foucualt illustrates, the government can use social institutions, such as schools, to shape and influence sexual attitudes and behaviors.[99] The schooling system in the Islamic Republic reinforces cis-heteropatriarchy and traditional gender roles, using surveillance and discipline to regulate student behavior and enforce conformity. Mandatory uniforms, strict dress codes, and gender segregation can all be seen as measures constructing a panopticon-like environment, where students are constantly aware of being watched, and monitored, leading to self-regulation (inner-panopticon) and internalized discipline.

Segregation of schools by gender, for example, is one of these mechanisms. The practice of segregating schools by gender in the Islamic Republic has been justified as a means of upholding strict interpretations of Islamic gender norms, while also protecting students from potentially "immoral" behavior. By separating male and female students, the government aimed to prevent any inappropriate interactions, such as romantic relationships

97 "Iran: Why was Alireza Fazeli Monfared Murdered?", Amnesty International, May 2021.

98 Since the beginning of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement, schoolchildren have been at the heart of the movement. Through posing without the mandatory Maghnae, in front of the photo of the supreme leader, schoolchildren are breaking free for the outer and inner-panopticon instilled upon them by the education system. https://twitter.com/FA59612572/status/1600136052085116928.

99 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*.

or physical contact, that were deemed contrary to Islamic values, while also providing an environment that is conducive to learning and focused on virtues such as modesty and chastity.[100]

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education has a hold on all K–12 textbooks; thus, the curriculum is heavily regulated and conveys the regime's political ideology. As Naimi and Jon argue, at the primary and secondary school level, the transmission of official ideology to students is evident in the content of social and religious studies, as well as Farsi language textbooks.[101] These materials emphasize the importance of topics such as marriage, gender-specific roles in the family, family values, and the (hetero)normative pathways of life, all of which are portrayed as the authoritative regime of truth. To effectively convey this information to young students, many of these textbooks rely on illustrations accompanied by short descriptions. By using this approach, the regime instills its values and beliefs in the minds of students at a young age, perpetuating its ideological agenda and maintaining control over the population.[102] For example, from sociology to Farsi textbooks, the representation remains heteronormative in every example of families depicted emphasizing traditional gender roles. For instance, the image of the mother is often portrayed holding a baby, taking care of children, or cooking, while the father is usually shown driving the car and going to work outside the house.[103]

In secondary school, religious studies textbooks contain many notions aruond transitioning from childhood to adulthood, where the epitome of this transition is marked by marriage and the establishment of one's own family.[104] These textbooks are designed to uphold and strengthen values that align with the dominant religious doctrine. For instance, in a chapter entitled, "The Basis of Relationships" found in the Religious Studies (III) textbook for secondary school students, the author cites the Quran to emphasize that, "for God, the family is the most important institution that is created by the relationships between man and woman and can be fruitful by bearing children."[105] In another example, in 12th grade, a new mandatory class is added to everyone's schedules titled, "Family Management and Lifestyle," which is different for girls and boys. The girls' version includes different chapters with different scenarios one might encounter upon high school graduation. Chapter 1 of the 2020–2021 school yearbook begins with an image of a girl in full head covering sitting in a classroom but clearly not paying attention.[106] This image of the girl, pious and obedient to the regime's ideologies, perpetuates IRI ideologies, constructing the image of the young Iranian woman who abides by the Islamic dress code. In its pages lies a tale of a young girl, Maryam, whose wandering mind in school is preoccupied with thoughts of her suitor, who had visited her house a few times. Amidst her confusion about whether marriage is the right choice for her, Maryam seeks advice from her female relatives, who offer a litany of reasons for her to pursue the institution, including warnings of future regrets and the potential scarcity of suitors. These instances are illustrative of how the Islamic Republic's reach extends beyond mere societal norms, penetrating the very walls of the classroom and planting the seeds of cis-heteropatriarchal political ideology within the minds of schoolchildren.[107]

Moreover, the role of teachers in instilling and perpetuating these ideologies in students cannot be ignored. In a healing conversation with a friend who prefers to stay anonymous, she recalls: "There was a time our *moalem-e-dini* said if you eat pork, you will end up with pig-like tendencies and become gay and that's why people in the West are gay."[108] While this statement may seem absurd to some, it is not far from reality, as both of our experiences have shown that our *moalem-e-dini*'s have often provided false information, instilling fear and discouraging us from deviating from the cis-heteronormative national identity. In another instance, my friend recalls her teacher stating that "no one should hear a girl's laughter (as it is arousing), so if you're laughing loudly, you'll go to

100 Moinipour, Shabnam, "Iran's Educational System and the Institutionalization of Gender Inequality," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 2022).

101 Naeimi, Mohammad, and Jon I. Kjaran, "Schooling (hetero)normative practices in the Islamic Republic of Iran." *Sexuality, Society and Learning* 22, no. 3, 2020): 243–259.

102 Ministry of Education, *Social Studies (III), Primary School* (Ministry of Education, 2020).

103 Moinipour, "Iran's Educational System."

104 Naeimi and Kjaran, "Schooling (hetero)normative practices in the Islamic Republic of Iran."

105 Ministry of Education, *Religious Studies (III), Secondary School* (Ministry of Education, 2016).

106 Ministry of Education, زندگی سبک و خانواده مدیریت, *High School*.

107 Ministry of Education, زندگی سبک و خانواده مدیریت, *High School.*

108 *Moalem-e-dini* means religious teacher.

hell." Similarly, I remember my teacher saying that "looking into the eyes of the opposite sex is a sin." Inevitably, despite our efforts to resist, these teachings seeped into our daily lives, leaving a lasting impact. This way, the inner-panopticon consciously or unconsciously transforms some teachers into agents of the IRI's ideology, tasked with disciplining and molding the young generation according to its prescribed norms and values.

I asked my mother if she remembered any discussions or discourses regarding sex when she was in school. To my disbelief, she tells me that they used to study the religious manuals of the clerics in religious classes and their teacher would uncover proper sexual conduct, rituals, and purification methods required after sex which were included, in great detail, in the manuals.[109]

It is indeed true that soon after coming to power, the Islamic Republic took an interesting approach toward sexual content. Only banning what they deemed as "Westernized" and "progressive" sexual content, the regime enforced close readings of religious manuals as a part of mandatory religion classes.[110] The religious manuals provided extensive information on the ablution of genitals, restoration of *taharat* (ritual cleansing) and the anatomical and biological differences between men and women from a religious perspective. According to these religious manuals, *shahvat* (sexual desire) and an interest in *jama* (intercourse) were seen as stronger in women than in men—yet women's *haya* (modesty) disallowed them to act and thus men's *gheyrat* (honor) controlled excessive female desire.[111] However, due to the taboo nature of sex—although sexual conduct such as sodomy, and bestiality were mentioned in the manuals—schoolchildren were never offered definitions or explanations and if they asked, their questions would often be left unanswered. Even in universities, a two-unit course on Khomeini's religious manual became a mandatory study for undergraduate students, and remains mandatory to this day.[112]

A closer look into Khomeini's books reveals that he spent much time defining and examining ways individuals can remain pure with explicit instructions on how to purify themselves on different sexual occasions, including "sodomy with a cow, a ewe, or a camel" and limitations of sexual penetration.[113] A very disturbing reading, *Tahrir-Al-Wasilah* reveals Ayatollah Khomeini's permissibility on sexual experiences with girls of all ages with the exception of intercourse.[114] The text, targeted towards a male audience, reveals that sexual intercourse is prohibited to anyone who has a wife less than nine years of age—whether she is his permanent or temporary wife.[115] However, Khomeini explains other forms of sexual pleasures are permitted, such as "touching with lust, hugging, and rubbing penis between the buttocks and thighs; even if she is a nursing baby."[116] No words do justice in interpreting the brutality this passage unravels toward children, girls, babies, and animals. This passage, written as a guide for a Shia Jurist during his time as Supreme Leader in 1986, reveals the immoral, unjust vision of sexual intimacy with children and animals, which Western critics criticize as "promoting pedophilia." I would not necessarily label the reading as pedophilic because the word pedophilia embodies Western roots and has been used to label many laws in Middle Eastern countries as "backward," enabling Islamaphobic ideologies in the West. Also, pedophilia does not capture the intensity of the injustice of promoting child sexual abuse that takes place in this passage. This text also maintains a heterosexual ideology in which sexual intercourse is only defined by penetrative sex, once again giving more power to male genitalia and establishing the female subject as obedient to the male subject, as there no mention of consent. Many young generations of Iranians treat these passages as a comedic relief, reading them for laughter since what is stated is so out of touch with reality. We must ask ourselves why Khomeini even talks about sex with children and animals and why religious manuals, especially texts like this, were a compulsory part of religion classes. It is also important to note that these clerical

109 Sharifi, "The Religious Sexual Education in Post-Revolutionary Iran."

110 These religion classes—*Kelas-e-Dini*—became mandated after the institution of the IRI where students had to study Islam, and if they were not Muslim they could be placed in other classes reading a different religion.

111 Mir-Hosseini, "Sexuality, Rights, and Islam," 206.

112 Khomeini, *Islamic Government*.

113 Readers might find this quote triggering as there are mentions of pedophilia and rape.

114 Khomeini, *Islamic Government*.

115 Sexual intercourse is defined as penetrative sex.

116 "Forced Girl Child Marriages in the Islamic Republic of Iran." OHCHR, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/ForcedMarriage/NGO/JusticeForIran.pdf.

manuals either did not acknowledge homosexuality or mentioned it as a great sin deepening the erasure of queer individuals.

Fortunately, religious manuals are no longer instituted in K–12 education curricula, yet this book remains the main text in a two-unit mandatory university course titled, "Imam Khomeini's Political Thought."[117] The fact that formal sexual education in Iran remains taboo, and religious teachings are the only source of sexual content creates a paradox that penetrates society with a lack of knowledge and misconceptions about sexual health and limited access to resources, both of which may lead to lethal consequences. Additionally, the manual perpetuates heteronormative behaviors and toxic masculinity which enables victim-blaming—giving additional authority to men in Iran's cis-heteropatriarchal society. The teaching of sexual content in religious classes has changed since the first days of the Islamic Republic, having an effect on the discourses and ideologies emerging in every generation regarding sex and sexuality.

Professor Nafiseh Sharifi recalls a Sociology class she taught at Al Zahra University in the past decade where the students were more eager to learn about Gender Studies than Sociology, thinking that the former would offer them knowledge regarding sexual experiences.[118,119] She recalls a religious student asking her, "How can we make sure before marriage that our suitor does not have any sexual problems?" In Sharifi's experience, receiving questions about sexual problems and health was not out of the ordinary. To her disbelief, however, she did not expect her students to feel comfortable enough to speak about taboo topics with their professor as this was not the case when she was in university. These conversations reveal the lack of sexual education and its implications in society. As Sharifi explains, technology and social media have been the main resource for schoolchildren to gather sex-related information, yet in more religious and Islamic families where the use of technology is censored, students turn to their trusted teachers for sexual education as these taboo matters cannot be discussed with family members.

I recall from my own experience in 12th grade when my literature teacher would teach us Kegel exercises to train our vaginas, improve our genitalia blood flow, and increase sexual arousal for our future suitors.[120] She would advise us on sexual intercourse, encouraging us to engage in sodomy prior to marriage if we are dating because of the shame of not being a virgin and the cost of "hymen repair surgery."[121] Although many of my classmates, like myself, took her advice in a more comedic way, a few more religious classmates took this advice to heart and would meet with our teacher separately to ask more questions in private. After all, this was all the sexual education we received in all our years of education in Iran. In terms of sex education, sex and sexuality remain taboo topics and are not to be talked about in schools. Additionally, these teachings fail to acknowledge that women's bodies are more than childbearing vehicles, feeding into the IRI image of women as passive objects of male desire and pleasure.

Sexual education is a human right, and government-mandated sexual education has been proven to ensure accurate and comprehensive information, promote equity, and address social issues in different societies.[122] According to Foucault, sexual education is not merely about providing information, but also about shaping and controlling people's sexual desires, behaviors, and identities.[123] Foucault states that sex education is an example of the intersection of knowledge and power in society and has been exploited as a governmental tactic to shape and control people's behaviors.[124] So, in a country such as Iran, where sex remains a taboo subject and sex education

117 I confirm this based on my own experience attending school in Iran.

118 Al-Zahra University is a prestigious all female University in Tehran.

119 Sharifi, "The Religious Sexual Education in Post-Revolutionary Iran."

120 The school I attended was an all-girls high school.

121 Hymenoplasty is a surgery aiming at reconstructing the hymen which is thought to be torn upon first intercourse. Although hymen surgery can be a source of female empowerment, giving sexual autonomy to women observing religion, at its root it remains a patriarchal creation with the aim of female conformity to religious virtuos and societal expectations of purity and chastity.

122 Blackburn, Mollie, *Comprehensive Sex Education: Why It Matters and What It Looks Like* (Midwest Plains and Equity Center), 2022.

123 Afary, "The Sexual Economy of the Islamic Republic."

124 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*.

is omitted from the school curriculum, how is the population learning about sex, thinking about sex, and learning to think about sex?

Though there is no sex education in schools, premarital sexual education workshops are mandatory for couples before they are officially married. Such workshops were ratified in 1991, and their main purpose is to educate young married couples about the importance of sexual relations for maintaining a successful and happy marriage.[125] The workshops are different for women and men and are only open for couples who obtain proof of their engagement license. In the women's workshop, a female speaker with a seminary background teaches her audience "how to choose sexy underwear, how to initiate sex, how to write amorous and sexy text messages, and how to experience and enjoy different sexual positions with her husband."[126] The speaker does not show or use any photos or videos, yet describes in great detail ways to give and receive pleasure and encourages the audience not to be ashamed of sex and having an active role during sexual intercourse. *Tamkin*, however, remains the main topic in this workshop.

Tamkin, defined by Cleric Dehnavi, is "a husband's right and a wife's duty."[127] Legal marriage contracts set obligations for men and women revolving around *Tamkin*: "It is a wife's duty to 'live under her husband's roof and be sexually available to him at almost any time, and it is a husband's duty to provide his wife with shelter, food, and clothing."[128] Nafiseh Sharifi recalls her experience in a premarital workshop and how the lecturer reminded the audience that women's place would be in hell if they did not sexually submit to their husbands.[129] Studies show that the content of the premarital sex education workshops has changed and modernized with modernity, yet *tamkin* remains the main topic.[130] Religious sex education in Iran thus has an informatory effect that creates an emancipatory illusion. Similar to Foucault's depiction of disciplinary power, the Iranian government uses these premarital workshops to inform young Iranians about sex while executing its own political Islamic agenda in reinforcing the creation of the modern "proper Iranian woman" and reinstituting familial gender roles and the wife's duty in *tamkin* and pleasing her husband. As Afsaneh Najmabadi argues, the emancipatory aspect of modern sexual education for women provided a "place in the nation" for women and "opportunities to become citizens."[131] However, this "place" is only achieved through the internalization and self-policing of enforced women's disciplinary practices in their domestic lives. Similarly, although premarital sex education is thought to create sexually satisfied men and women in Iran, "it provides couples with the religious ground on which to ask for sexual satisfaction and sexual pleasure in marriage."[132] The teachings not only remain heteronormative but also reinstitute discriminatory domestic practices perpetuating the government's War on Sex. The requirement that these workshops be limited to individuals about to get married, reflects and reinforces the Islamic belief in the importance of abstaining from sexual activity before marriage. However, it is also important to consider the benefits these workshops have in educating men and women about female pleasure and sexual needs.

In a study on the effectiveness of the Premarital Education Program in 2015, it was concluded that the premarital workshops do not supply marrying couples with an adequate education to fulfill their knowledge and skills in withholding a successful marriage.[133] The study found that the high rate of divorce, unwanted pregnancies, and failed marriages in Iran can be attributed to a lack of adequate sexual education. In order to effectively implement premarital education in the country, it is necessary to raise awareness, allocate sufficient resources, tailor the program to the target group's needs, and have an accountable system in place.[134]

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125 Sharifi, "The Religious Sexual Education in Post-Revolutionary Iran."

126 Sharifi, "The Religious Sexual Education in Post-Revolutionary Iran."

127 Ayatollah Hossein Dehnavi, a celebrity cleric who had a talk show.

128 Navai, "High heels and hijabs: Iran's sexual revolution."

129 Mir-Hosseini. "Sexuality, Rights, and Islam," 15.

130 Mir-Hosseini. "Sexuality, Rights, and Islam," 15.

131 Najmabadi, Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards.

132 Sharifi, "The Religious Sexual Education in Post-Revolutionary Iran."

133 "Effectiveness of the Premarital Education Programme in Iran." *Hindawi*, https://www.hindawi.com/journals/isrn/2014/964087/#introduction.

134 Zarrinnegar, "Agents of Change."

In an article titled, "Sexuality and Sex Education in Iran No Longer a Taboo," Roshanak Zanganeh, a diaspora artist who was born in Iran, talks about the benefits and sexual emancipation that the premarital program offers young Iranians.[135] Yet, in my opinion, the article reveals that there is a significant difference in the understanding of the need for sexual education between the younger and older generations of Iranians. It is important to recognize that premarital sexual education workshops are part of the government's family planning program to control the population and reinstitute Islamic gender roles to control domestic life further and perpetuate the inner-panopticon. Thus, unlike the title of Zanganeh's article suggests, efficient sex education does remain taboo in Iran.

Chapter 6. Compulsory hijab: The War on Sex or the War on Hair?

The Compulsory Hijab Law and the morality police that was created as an institution to enforce the dress code are the perfect examples of the Islamic Republic's War on Sex. In fact, compulsory hijab is never stated in the Quran or *Hadith*; the word *hijab* is only mentioned seven times in the Quran in reference to "a symbol of separation between public life and private life at the time of the Prophet."[136,137] Although in *Surah-an Nour* of the Quran, it is mentioned that women and men should dress modestly, cover their beauty, lower their graze, and guard their modesty, the religious text never explicitly mentions that hijab must be worn in a compulsory manner as is mandated in Iran today.[138] Therefore it becomes clear that the meaning given to hijab by the government today differs from the true Islamic nature of the hijab. The mandate on compulsory hijab is an exploitation of religion for political purposes, as it uses the belief in the hijab as a religious obligation to justify state control over women's dress and appearance.

Soon after the inception of the Islamic Republic and Khomeini's official declaration as the Supreme Leader, Khomeini immediately addressed the issue of women's clothing in a speech. He announced that women would be allowed to enter public workplaces only if they complied with the compulsory hijab law that was to be put in place.[139] This speech ignited the first anti-government demonstration in the history of the Islamic Republic. On International Women's Day in 1979, thousands of veiled and unveiled women took to the streets to protest Khomeini's mandate on compulsory hijab—my grandmother among them. Chanting, "In the spring of freedom, women's rights are missing," the protestors were violently attacked by military forces that would later become instituted as the morality police. This early rise for women's freedom of choice and against state-imposed dress code was the dawn of many "years of socioeconomic marginalization of women who rejected the imposition of the compulsory hijab."[140] My grandmother recalls her resistance to the mandatory hijab in its early days, "I spent a year leaving my house without a hijab, yet gradually, I had no other choice. The authorities threatened to close my pharmacy," she tells me. As a result of involvement in that pioneering movement, many well-educated Iranian women—including doctors, nurses, and teachers—lost their jobs. Additionally, many women who did not adhere to state-imposed dress codes lost their right to education or to return to work.

To justify the hijab mandate, Khomeini issued a fatwa stating, "Women have been prohibited from showing off their beauty in order to attract men or cause *fitna* . . . [for] if this love for beauty and members of the opposite sex is found somewhere other than the framework of the family, the stability of the family will be undermined."[141] *Fitna*, the term Khomeini uses to oppose the potential exposure of women's hair, is the same word used to

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135 Zanganeh, Roshnak. "Sexuality and Sex Education in Iran: No Longer a Taboo." Qantara.de, December 1, 2005, https://en.qantara.de/en/article/sexuality-and-sex-education-in-iran-no-longer-a-taboo. Accessed December 20, 2022.

136 The Hadith is the collected traditions of the Prophet Muhammad or Shia Imams, based on their sayings and actions.

137 "How Does the Qur'an Address the Issue of Muslim Woman's Veil or 'Hijab'?" www.asma-lamrabet.com.

138 *The Quran*, Surah-an-Nour, verse 31.

139 "Dahe-Sarkoob Eterazat e Zed Hokoomati dar Iran" *Euronews*. September 27, 2022. https://per.euronews.com/2022/09/27/history-of-4-decades-of-repression-in-iran.

140 "Hijab in Iran: From Religious to Political Symbol." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, October 13, 2022, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/88152.

141 *Fitna* is defined as upheaval or sedition. Imam Khomeini considered showing off one's physical attraction to men asis a kind of *fitna*.

describe the opposition Green Movement after President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's disputed reelection in 2009.[142] Although modesty in dress code was suggested for both men and women in the Quran, as the fatwa suggests, compulsory hijab was mandated to prevent the sexual arousal of men in the presence of women's beauty. In other words, by instituting women's bodies and hair as an object of desire controlled by the state, the headscarf becomes a political weapon employed by the Islamic regime to ensure men's purity and thus further marginalizes women in Iranian society. In this manner, the state successfully exerts control over Iranians' private lives by inducing fear of punishment in Iranian women who do not comply with the compulsory hijab. This fear is then reproduced in society through the inner-panopticon, which perpetuates social order (in this case, the compulsory hijab) in Iranian society. One could argue that the rejection of the compulsory hijab is an act of resistance against the inner-panopticon, and a means through which Iranian women demand *Azadi*.

In a clubhouse discussion on the issue of Women's Rights, Ali Motahari—a conservative reformist who was the second deputy of the Parliament until 2021—stated: "*not wearing hijab for women isn't freedom. . . . Men in Iran are aroused by unveiled women. It's like an animal instinct. Western men aren't aroused because they're sick. . . . God wants us to get aroused. Men must be aroused. It is good that a young man is aroused by seeing the hand of a woman.*"[143,144]

Motahari's views reflect the mainstream thinking among the Islamic Republic's political establishment and its followers, perpetuating the War on Sex. Women's hair has always been viewed by the Iranian regime as rebellious and counter–Islamic revolutionary.[145] Khomeini and his counterparts had the desire to establish an anti-Western society that was free from Western economic influence and promoted the region's Islamic culture. This desire led to the construction of the "proper Iranian woman" who was veiled, heterosexual, observed the regime's political Islam conservatively, submitted to her husband, and was a modest follower of the Islamic Republic. To the Iranian authorities, women's rights or the vision of the emancipated woman have always been Western concepts that have no space in the Islamic Republic. This constructed discourse thus emerged among the supporters of the Islamic Republic and spread with governmental propaganda instituted in school books and laws. Following this ideology, four years after Khomeini's speech, the Iranian Parliament legally mandated the hijab law by instituting 74 lashes as a punishment for women who do not cover their hair.[146] These punishments have changed over the years, sometimes resulting in more lashing, heavy prison sentences, or even death—as was the case for Mahsa Zhina Amini.

Through compulsory Hijab, the authorities have justified the discriminatory control over women's sexuality and appearance. In this manner, they constructed a discourse of criticism based on false Islamic justification intertwined with the Republic's commitment to anti-Westernization to target women in a strategic manner. In this discourse, Iranian women defying the compulsory hijab rule are labeled as *Western whores*. In the same strategical tactic, any act resisting the Islamic Republic—anti-regime protests, for example—becomes labeled as "Western" by the government as well.[147]

To ensure the Islamic Republic's ideals are being practiced in society, the Islamic Revolution Committee, known as the *Komiteh*, emerged in the 1980s. It became the first rural police force to command the enforcement of so-called Islamic laws in society, such as the compulsory hijab. Seen as an extension of the IRI's governmentality and public panopticon, the *Komiteh* is justified as a police enforcement set to fulfill an Islamic duty, "commanding the right and forbidding the wrong"—*amr be marouf va nahi az monkar*. As Mustafa Akyol suggests, "The Islamic concept of 'commanding the right and forbidding the wrong' is applied across the Muslim world to

142 Sadjadpour, "The Ayatollah Under the Bed(sheets)."

143 Clubhouse is a popular social media platform.

144 Presidential Candidate: "Not Wearing Hijab" is Like an Animal Instinct - MSF." My Stealthy Freedom, April 12, 2021, https://www.mystealthyfreedom.org/presidential-candidate-not-wearing-hijab-is-like-an-animal-instinct/.

145 It is important to note that the state's war with women's hair did not begin with the IRI, as during the Pahlavi reign there was a ban on the hijab as an act of Westernization. It is also important to note that the state's war on hair is not unique to Iranian society.

146 Knipp, Kersten. "Why Iranian authorities enforce veil wearing – DW – 12/21/2020." *DW*, December 21, 2020, https://www.dw.com/en/why-iranian-authorities-force-women-to-wear-a-veil/a-56014027.

147 "Hijab in Iran: From Religious to Political Symbol." 2022. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/88152.

curtail personal liberties and police morality, but this interpretation is questionable."[148] This concept appears in the Quran as a duty of every Muslim to ensure all piety and the punishment of all impiety. However, the extension of this duty as a police institution that imprisons, attacks, and punishes individuals with lashes, among other punishments, highlights the exploitation of this Islamic duty as an excuse for the Iranian government to further deepen its control and execute its political agenda.

Other than enforcing veiling in society, the *Komiteh* also ensures the "prevention of Western poisons" in society, such as non-segregated partying, public affection, and dancing in the streets. It acts as an agent to implement and discipline the cis-heteropatriarchy and ensure Iranian citizens are adhering to the "proper" behavior mandated by the IRI. For instance, in 2014, a group of young men and women who made a music video of themselves dancing to the Pharrell Williams song "Happy" were arrested, and sentenced to up to one year in prison and 91 lashes.[149] The individuals involved in the video were compelled to confess on state television, claiming they were misled into creating the video and issuing apologies. They were charged with violating Islamic laws that prohibit mixed-gender dancing.[150] My parents spent the night of their engagement in jail for the same reason—a non-segregated engagement ceremony, women not wearing hijab, dancing, mixed-gender interactions, and alcohol.

Ironically, it was in Quran class that we were taught "there is no compulsion in religion," and scholars have been questioning the dubious nature of the "commanding the right and forbidding the wrong" concept for centuries.[151] Different translations offer different interpretations of the verse.[152] There is no doubt, however, that the political interpretation of this concept has led to the politicization of Islamic duty and the exploitation of individualized ideology for authoritarian political benefit—a phenomenon that also fuels the inner-panopticon. This concept is often cited as a justification for Islamic activism and social reform. However, it can also be exploited by authoritarian regimes in order to justify their own oppressive actions. These regimes may claim to be promoting the right and forbidding the wrong, but in reality, they may be using this concept as a cover for their own authoritarianism and repression of dissent. It is important to remember that the concept of "commanding the right and forbidding the wrong" should be a positive force in society and not used to justify oppression or injustice, as is, unfortunately, the case with the Iranian morality police.

The Iranian *Gasht-e-Ershad* (morality police) was publicly mandated in 2005 and is mainly fixated on controlling women.[153] The *Gasht-e-Ershad* is the leading agency tasked to enforce Iran's Islamic code of conduct in public. They are empowered to "admonish suspects, impose fines, or arrest members of the public."[154] Because of the vague definition of their responsibilities, the suspects vary based on the guard's observation. However, women who are not observing the dress mandate or wearing their headscarves loosely are the primary targets. This raises the question: does women's hair pose an existential threat to the Islamic Republic?

Hair, a symbol of feminine sexuality and desire, has taken on an enormous symbolic significance not just in Iranian society but around the world. For decades, women have been showing their resistance to the regime with their hair as a weapon. Upon the killing of Mahsa Zhina Amini on September 16, 2022 by the morality police, women in Iran and around the globe began burning their headscarves and cutting their hair to show their defiance to the Islamic Republic as an act of resistance in nationwide anti-regime protests.[155] Since the institution

148 Akyol, Mustafa. "The Dubious Roots of Religious Police in Islam." Cato Institute, December 5, 2022, https://www.cato.org/commentary/dubious-roots-religious-police-islam.

149 WNYC Iranian Youths Arrested for Dancing to Pharrell's 'Happy'. Podcast, https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/takeaway/segments/iranian-youth-arrested-dancing-pharrells-happy.

150 BBC News. "Iran: Happy Video Dancers Sentenced to 91 Lashes and Jail." BBC, September 19, 2014. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29272732.

151 Ghobadzadeh, Naser, "Shiite Discourses on Sovereignty." In *Religious Secularity: Shiite Repudiation of the Islamic State* (Oxford University Press, 2014): 30-72.

152 *The Quran*, Sura Al Baqareh, Verse 256.

153 The Morality Police mainly focuses on women's dress code however it is also mandated to monitor men's hair and dress as well. Men are not allowed to have westernized hairstyles or show their legs.

154 Al-Bashir, President Omar. "Who are Islamic 'morality police'?" *BBC*, April 22, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36101150.

155 Since the start of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement in the aftermath of Mahsa Zhina Amini's killing, the Iranian diaspora has been very active standing in solidarity with the people on the ground and echoing their demands of *Azadi*.

of the Islamic Republic, the headscarf has been exploited as a form of clothing oppressing women to ensure their modesty and prevent the sexual arousal of male members in society. Cutting one's hair has a deep-rooted history in Iranian society: "In the history of Iran, when women didn't have enough power to stand up, they cut their hair. It has always been a symbol of rebellion and to start a fight."[156] The compulsory headscarf for Iranian women can be paralleled to chains on the enslaved; thus, when women—marginalized members controlled by the state—ignite their headscarves on fire and wave them in the air, they signify that the Islamic Republic can no longer exploit them for its political benefit. These women have emancipated themselves from the chains of their inner-panopticon and the *outer-panopticon* of the Islamic Republic. By cutting their hair, they signify cutting the chokehold of authorities that have been controlling them for decades.

A BBC headline from the beginning of the movement read: "Iran unrest: Women burn headscarves at anti-hijab protests."[157] The mislabeling of the *Woman, Life, Freedom, Queer, Trans, Liberation* movement as "Anti-Hijab protests" by prominent Western news outlets, including BBC, NBC, and VOA, underscores a broader issue rooted in Orientalist narratives surrounding the hijab. This misrepresentation reflects a failure to grasp the nuanced motivations behind the movement and perpetuates stereotypes about the hijab as inherently oppressive. By reducing the multifaceted struggle for women's rights and freedom in Iran to a simplistic narrative centered on the hijab, these outlets overlook the complex socio-political dynamics at play. This mischaracterization is emblematic of the Western Orientalist lens, which tends to homogenize and essentialize diverse cultural practices, such as the wearing of the hijab, through a narrow and often distorted perspective. Such framing not only overlooks the agency and autonomy of Iranian women but also reinforces hegemonic discourses that position the hijab as a symbol of patriarchal oppression within Western contexts. From this Western orientalist lens, the hijab—a visible marker of Islamic identity—has been associated with oppression and terrorism, making Muslim women targets of prejudice and discrimination. In France, for example, the wearing of abayas in public schools was recently banned.[158] This ban, rooted in Islamophobia, disables many opportunities for Muslim girls who wear the abaya, further exacerbating societal discrimination and limiting their educational access and inclusion. The hijab's role in Islamophobic connotations further exacerbates prejudice and discrimination by governments and societies. It is crucial to acknowledge that while Iran is not the sole country where women's dress and sexuality are policed, the experiences of Iranian women remain unparalleled. The focal point of the Iranian movement extends beyond the hijab. Contrary to the Orientalist portrayal, Iranians—both men and women—are advocating for an Iran of *Azadi*, wherein individuals have the freedom to express themselves through how they dress including whether or not to wear the hijab. This resistance addresses broader systemic injustices perpetuated by the Iranian regime, not solely focused on the hijab itself.

Chapter 7. Queer, trans, Azadi*: Breaking free from the inner-panopticon*

In 2007, during a speech at Columbia University, then-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said, "In Iran, we do not have homosexuals like in your country."[159] He was asked about the status of gay people in Iran and thus emphasized that "such a phenomenon does not exist in our country." This denial reflects the Iranian government's efforts to uphold a national Muslim-heteronormative identity, effectively erasing and marginalizing queer individuals within Iranian society. Despite this official stance, Iran has always been queer and the LGBTQ+ community has always sought visibility, often resorting to underground or online channels, especially in recent times, due to pervasive discrimination against them. On the website *Queering the Map*, Iran's map displays numerous pins

156 "Iran protests: Why is cutting hair an act of rebellion?" *Euronews*, October 6, 2022, https://www.euronews.com/culture/2022/10/06/iran-protests-why-is-cutting-hair-an-act-of-rebellion.

157 Gritten, Davis and Oliver Snow. "Iran Unrest: Women Burn Headscarves at Anti-Hijab Protests." BBC News, *BBC*, September 21, 2022, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-62967381.

158 "France: Authorities Must Repeal Discriminatory Ban on the Wearing of Abaya in Public Schools." *Amnesty International*, October 11, 2023, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur21/7280/2023/en/.

159 "There Are No Homosexuals in Iran | Edition Patrick Frey." 2018. Editionpatrickfrey.com. April 26, 2018. https://www.editionpatrickfrey.com/en/books/there-are-no-homosexuals-iran.

indicating the presence of queer individuals in the country.[160] However, compared to many Western nations, the number of pins is considerably lower. This disparity may stem from factors such as limited accessibility to the website due to internet restrictions and the pervasive fear of exposure among LGBTQ+ individuals. Similar patterns are observed in Arab nations, while regions like the US and Europe boast a significantly higher density of pins on the map.

Despite government efforts to suppress LGBTQ+ visibility, queer and trans Iranians have found ways to assert their presence. Underground publications such as the LGBTQ+ E-magazine *MAHA*—translating to "us" or "we"—established in 2005, distributed PDFs to their readers through email bypassing the website shutdowns many Iranian homosexual websites were experiencing by Authorities at that time.[161] In another example, due to restrictions, surveillance and targeting of individuals on dating apps such as Tinder, Iranian LGBTQ+ utilize queer- and trans-specific dating apps such as Hornet and Manjam.[162]

In "From Homoerotics of Exile to Homopolitics of Diaspora," Sima Shakhsari explains how weblogs and cyberspace became a place of hypervisibility for Iranian queers in the early digital age of 2000s.[163] It is also important to note that Ahmadinejad's speech also gave a platform for Western media to build a narrative for Iranian queers inside Iran and banking on queer Iranians—often refugees—in exile, the media was able to create a narrative of queer Iranians leaving the country of the oppressed (Iran) to live in an exile of freedom (West) which has orientalist connotations and fails to acknowledge the culture, attempts for visibility, and humanness of the LGBTQ+ community that is living within Iran today. This perspective is very common in Iranian diaspora groups outside of Iran as well with many diasporic communities still excluding LGBTQ+ Iranians due to their linging inner-panopticon—what they believe to be taboo. As Sima Shakhsari notes, "Iranian queers have historically been denied a legitimate space in diasporic imaginations of the nation."[164]

The uprising ignited by Mahsa Zhina Amini's killing after September 2022 once again demonstrated the visibility of LGBTQ+ Iranians in Iran, with many protestors taking to the streets holding the Pride flag and writing slogans such as "this is the voice of the LGBTQ," "Queer. Trans, Liberation," and "the time is now" on walls. Many queer hashtags connected to the movement began trending on X such as *#man_queer_hastam* (#I_am_queer), and *#queer_trans_rahayi* (#Queer_Trans_Liberty).[165,166] Images of same-sex couples kissing in different locations also emerged on X with hashtags of *#Azad*, *#Iran-Queer*, and *#Woman_Life_Freedom* once again showcasing that the fight for LGBTQ+ rights also lies within the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. They are not only fighting on social media, "they hold each other's hands in the streets and kiss each other so that the city gets used to seeing them," expresses Arya Yekta—Iranian LGBTQ+ activist—in an interview with RadioZamaneh regarding the queer movement surging in Iran.[167] As Arya notes, for the first time in Iranian history the LGBTQ+ community is standing and fighting alongside Woman symbolizing the unity inherent in their respective struggles. I agree with Arya that this represents a pivotal moment in Iran's queer history. It marks the first instance where women, who have endured multiple forms of oppression due to the regime's War on Sex and discriminatory laws, recognize the similarity between their own struggles and those faced by the queer community, as both are rooted in the broader

160 Queering the Map is a community-based online collaborative and counter-mapping platform on which users submit their personal queer experiences to specific locations on a single collective map.

161 "Interview with Gay Activist in Iran." 2024. *Glapn.org*. 2024. https://www.glapn.org/sodomylaws/world/iran/irnews020.htm.

162 "Apps, Arrests and Abuse in Egypt, Lebanon and Iran." 2018. https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/LGBTQ-Apps-Arrest-and-Abuse-report_22.2.18.pdf.

163 Shakhsari, Sima. "From Homoerotics of Exile to Homopolitics of Diaspora: Cyberspace, the War on Terror, and the Hypervisible Iranian Queer." Journal of Middle East Women's Studies 8, no. 3 (2012): 14–40. https://doi.org/10.2979/jmiddeastwomstud.8.3.14.

164 "From Homoerotics of Exile to Homopolitics of Diaspora: Cyberspace, the War on Terror, and the Hypervisible Iranian Queer on JSTOR." Berkeley.edu, 2021, www-jstor-org.libproxy.berkeley.edu/stable/10.2979/jmiddeastwomstud.

165 #من_کوئیر_هستم

166 #کوئیر_ترنس_رهایی

167 "جامعه کوییر و انقلاب ژینا در گفت‌وگو با آریا یکتا". 2023. رادیو زمانه, Radiozamaneh.com. March 19, 2023. https://www.radiozamaneh.com/757669.

War on Sex. This share of empathy has fostered solidarity between these two groups, amplifying their visibility on social and political fronts.

In the diaspora, protests were held across the globe against the Islamic Republic often accompanied by the open presence of diaspora—many carrying the rainbow or trans flag for visibility. Major demonstrations in cities like Berlin, San Francisco, and Washington DC provided platforms for representatives from the queer community to articulate their demands alongside advocates for religious and ethnic minorities. In October 2022, I initiated and helped organize a global student March for Iran on university campuses all around the globe. Footage received from students in Berlin vividly captured the birth of the inclusive slogan. Students marching, and chanting '*Women, Life, Freedom, Queer, Trans, Liberation*,' '*Zan, Zendegi, Azadi, Queer, Trans, Rahayi*.'[168]

Woman, Life, Freedom, Queer, Trans, Liberation has birthed an intersectional movement that is not only demanding change on the political realm but also penetrating the cultural realm and demanding a more inclusive society where everyone can live regardless of their sexual identity. Making possible the ability to imagine an Iran not shackled to the Iranian regime, this movement has planted a seed of hope in Iranian society. Iranians are not only calling for a separation of government and religion, a demolition of theocracy in this case, but they are also fighting for an end to oppression and patriarchal misogynistic ruling, the *breaking free* of the inner-panopticon and the end to the War on Sex. Unlike the Arab Springs where Tunisian revolutionaries would call for "Bread, Water, and No Ben Ali," which limited the protestors to the political sphere alone, Iranian protestors are chanting "Women, Life, Freedom, Queer, Trans, Liberty" which stretches beyond the boundaries of political emancipation and breeds a Marxian human emancipation. As Angela Davis stated in a message of solidarity, this slogan penetrates the stronghold created by the Iranian regime, cultivating hope for an end to racial capitalism, misogyny, and economic repression, and striving for a more habitable future for all beings on this planet.[169]

Before this movement, I had never allowed myself to imagine what an *Azad* Iran would look like. Recognizing the inability to imagine an *Azad* Iran as an extension of the regime's power, I wanted to see the possibilities that this question would unveil. In October 2022, in an Instagram post I asked our followers of the Instagram page Middle East Matters "What does a free Iran look like to you?/ایران آزاد برای شما چگونه است؟"[170]

The following are anonymous responses to this question that I have handpicked from among 3.074 responses:

- "Woman, queer people, and religious minorities, and ethnic minorities can express themselves freely without censorship in a free Iran."
- "A free Iran is where the LGBTQ+ can be themselves."
- "In a free Iran trans and queer folks can live comfortably without getting executed."
- "For me, if I live in an Iran that is free, I can go out with my girlfriend and kiss her in a romantic place and nobody has the right to kill or bully us."
- "A free Iran is an Iran where homosexuals and sexual minorities don't get hurt."

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis presents a critical analysis of the intersectionality of power dynamics, sexuality, gender identity, and political governance in Iran through a queer anti-Orientalist lens in a multi-methodological method utilizing auto-ethnography,interviews, discourse analysis, media analysis, legal analysis, and lived experience. The research illuminates the fight for *Azadi* and marginalization of queer and trans voices both within and outside of Iran.

Through a queer anti-Orientalist framework, this paper highlights the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, and power dynamics within Iranian society, shedding light on the complex challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in navigating a deeply entrenched heteronormative and patriarchal legal and societal landscape.

168 I could not find information on the birth of this slogan, nor can I confirm whether it was birthed in Iran or in the diaspora but I have stated here the first time I saw this slogan.

169 "Angela Davis expresses her solidarity with protesters in Iran." ANF, 7 October 2022.

170 I am the advocacy director of this youth-run organization with the aim to amplify, and assist voices that do not circulate on mainstream media. I have translated these answers from Farsi.

Moreover, the application of an anti-Orientalist framework allowed for a critical examination of how the Iranian government exploits sexuality as a tool to further its political objectives and perpetuate religio-cis-heteronormative ideologies. Through the lens of Foucauldian concepts such as governmentality and the panopticon, I analyzed the mechanisms of power and control deployed by the IRI to regulate and discipline its populace. Through state-produced propaganda and panoptic institutions a systemic marginalization and demonization of queer and trans individuals as threats to societal norms and stability is revealed.

Chapter 1 of this paper explains the phenomenon of the inner-panopticon. Using a Foucauldian lens, it examines that the Iranian Regime's imposition of a cis-heteronormative Muslim national identity is not limited to a mere set of regulations but a pervasive panopticon system that exercises control over its citizens. This system is reinforced by constant monitoring, strict rules, regulations, and governmentality, which marginalizes queer and trans individuals through a self-surveilling mechanism that has fatal consequences. Punishments for breaking rules and regulations are severe, causing fear and anxiety not only at a societal level, but also within the individual. The panopticon extends beyond the public sphere and into the private, regulating behavior and penetrating the mind and body. As a result, individuals become prisoners in their own bodies; they are closely monitored by an inner-panopticon which perpetuates self-policing through a self-surveilling system that aligns with social, cultural, and political norms embedded by the political system in place. Fear becomes the tool of the Islamic Republic for power and control, bypassing not only society but also the mind, body, and soul.

The discussion of the Islamic Republic's War on Sex in **Chapter 2** explores the pervasive influence of the IRI's agenda on sexuality, gender norms, and reproductive policies, elucidating how these facets intertwine to serve the regime's political objectives. Drawing from Karim Sadjadpour's notion that "all politics may not be sexual but all sex is political," this chapter delves into the state's extensive preoccupation with regulating and controlling sexual behavior, evident in legislative frameworks, media narratives, and societal discourse. The Islamic Republic employs a "War on Sex" strategy to reinforce cis-heteronormative values, marginalize female-identifying individuals, ethnic, religious, and gender minorities, and maintain its authoritarian grip on society. Through an analysis of historical and contemporary developments, including governmental policies on family planning, reproductive health, and gender norms, **Chapter 3** demonstrates the complex interplay between state control, societal norms, and individual agency in shaping Iran's sexual economy. Titled, "The Construction of Iran's Sexual Economy," it contends that the regime's manipulation of sexuality and reproduction serves as a mechanism for political power consolidation, perpetuating systemic oppression and inhibiting genuine progress towards gender equality and *Azadi* in Iranian society.

Part 2 of the paper delves into the panoptic institutions in place which are rooted in the War on Sex and perpetuate the inner-panopticon. **Chapter 4,** "Inside the Iranian Legal Penal Code," sheds light on historical and contemporary legal frameworks surrounding homosexuality in Iran, particularly focusing on the penal codes established in 1925 and after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. It discusses how colonial discourses and the internalization of Western colonial gaze influenced the construction of homophobia in Iranian society, leading to the criminalization of consensual same-sex intimacy under the Islamic Republic's penal code. The analysis of the 2013 penal code reveals the discriminatory nature of the legal system, with harsher penalties for male same-sex acts compared to female same-sex acts. The paper also explores the societal implications of these laws, including honor killings and the perpetuation of cis-heteropatriarchy through panoptic institutions such as the education system.

The exploration of sexual education and *tamkin* in **Chapter 5** offers a complex insight into the intersection of religious teachings, governmental control, and societal perceptions of sex and sexuality within the Islamic Republic. From the early days of the Islamic Republic to present times, the approach towards sexual content has evolved, yet remnants of traditional values and religious teachings persist in shaping attitudes and behaviors surrounding sex. The absence of formal sexual education in school curricula perpetuates misconceptions and limited knowledge about sexual health, leading to potentially harmful consequences. Premarital sexual education workshops, while aiming to educate young couples about sexual relations, also serve as a means to reinforce traditional gender roles and control domestic life according to Islamic principles. Despite efforts to modernize these workshops, the persistence of tamkin as a central theme underscores the ongoing influence of religious teachings in shaping sexual attitudes and behaviors. The discrepancy between younger and older generations'

understanding of the need for sexual education reflects broader societal shifts and challenges in addressing taboo topics surrounding sex in Iran. Ultimately, the complex interplay of religious, governmental, and societal factors underscores the necessity of comprehensive sexual education to promote accurate information, equity, and address social issues in Iranian society.

In **Chapter 6**, "Compulsory Hijab: The War on Sex or the War on Hair?" the Compulsory Hijab Law in Iran stands as a stark example of the Islamic Republic's broader War on Sex, highlighting the intersection of religious doctrine, political ideology, and societal control. Rooted in a selective interpretation of religious texts and enforced through institutional mechanisms like the morality police, the hijab mandate represents a means of exerting state control over women's bodies and sexuality. Despite lacking explicit Quranic or Hadith justification, the hijab mandate has been upheld as a religious obligation by the government, serving as a tool for social and political control reinforcing the regime's War on Sex. Furthermore, the symbolism of hair as a symbol of feminine identity and resistance underscores the broader struggle for individual autonomy and freedom in Iranian society. Beyond mere sartorial expression, the resistance against compulsory hijab encapsulates a larger quest for *Azadi*—a demand for freedom from oppressive state control and the right to self-expression. In framing the discourse surrounding the hijab mandate, it is essential to move beyond simplistic Orientalist narratives and recognize the multifaceted nature of Iranian women's struggles for autonomy, agency, and equality within a complex socio-political context.

The killing of Mahsa Zhina Amini over not wearing her compulsory hijab correctly in September 2022 sparked an *Azadi* movement titled with the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom" being chanted all over Iran and in the diaspora. **Chapter 7**, "Queer, Trans, *Azadi*: Breaking free from the Inner-Panopticon" focuses on queer visibility in Iran and within the movement. Despite the government's discrimination against the community and maintenance of efforts to uphold a national Muslim-heteronormative identity, Iranian queers have always found ways to bypass regime surveillance and exist. The Woman, Life, Freedom uprising also sparked the visibility of LGBTQ+ Iranians. This movement marks a significant shift in Iranian history, as the LGBTQ+ community stands united with women in their shared struggle against oppressive laws and the regime's War on Sex, together breaking free from their inner-panopticon. This newfound empathy has led to increased visibility and activism, both within Iran and across the global diaspora, with the chants of "Woman. Life. Freedom. Queer. Trans. Liberation." the Iranian people are rising up. From Tehran to Berlin, breaking free from the inner-panopticon, protestors are demanding *Azadi*, the end of this oppressive system and an end to the exploitation of their sexuality for the purposes of political objectives.

Glossary

aberoo (*ah-beh-ROO*) — Literally translated to "the water of the face" in Farsi, *aberoo* refers to a concept of honor or dignity in Iranian culture. It encompasses various social norms, values, and expectations related to personal and familial reputation, integrity, and respectability. Maintaining *aberoo* is often associated with upholding traditional gender roles, modesty, and moral behavior within the societal framework. Violations of *aberoo*, whether perceived or actual, can lead to social stigma, ostracization, or even retribution within the community.

Azadi (*ah-zah-DEE*) — Often translated to "freedom" in English, *Azadi* does not mean to Iranians what freedom means to Westerners. It is not freedom to or freedom for; it is utter, complete, and whole human emancipation.

cleric/mullah — An Iranian Mullah cleric is a religious leader within the Shia Islamic tradition who has typically undergone extensive religious education and training in Islamic jurisprudence and theology. They often serve as religious scholars, interpreters of Islamic law (sharia), and spiritual guides within their communities. Mullahs play various roles, including leading congregational prayers, delivering sermons, providing religious education, and offering guidance on religious and social matters. In Iran, Mullahs also hold positions of influence in the country's religious and political hierarchy, often serving as representatives of the clerical establishment and playing a significant role in shaping religious and social policy.

fatwa (*FAT-wah*) — A fatwa is a ruling or legal opinion given by an Islamic scholar on a specific issue or question.

inner-panopticon — The inner-panopticon refers to a psychological state in which individuals, under the influence of disciplinary mechanisms imposed by societal institutions, internalize surveillance and adopt a self-regulatory mindset. In this conceptual framework, individuals perceive themselves as constantly monitored, with their thoughts and actions subject to scrutiny. This internalization of surveillance is particularly pronounced in contexts of authoritarian governance, such as the Islamic Republic, where pervasive monitoring has become normalized over time. As a result, individuals develop an "inner-panopticon" within their minds, wherein they regulate their behavior based on the perceived expectations and norms of the external surveillance apparatus. This internalized form of surveillance influences individuals' thoughts, actions, and decisions, shaping their behavior in accordance with societal standards and authorities. See Chapter 1.

IRI — the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Pahlavi (*pah-lah-VEE*) — The Pahlavi dynasty refers to the ruling monarchy of Iran from 1925 to 1979, established by Reza Shah Pahlavi and succeeded by his son, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. During their reign, the Pahlavi dynasty implemented significant modernization and secularization reforms in Iran, aiming to modernize the country and strengthen its position on the world stage.

panopticon — a circular prison with cells arranged around a central well, from which prisoners could at all times be observed.

tamkin (*tam-KEEN*) — sexual submission in accordance with sharia law.

War on Sex — The "War on Sex" refers to a systematic campaign orchestrated by the Islamic Republic of Iran to establish and enforce a cis-heteronormative sexual identity within Iranian society. This effort permeates various aspects of life, including law, culture, discourse, and individual consciousness. It involves the manipulation of sexual norms and practices as instruments of state power to control and regulate societal behavior, particularly targeting non-conforming individuals such as women and queer communities. See Chapter 2.

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