Introduction

Body Politics and Sigheh *Marriages*

Society often projects ideas of difference onto the human body by placing the body in prescribed roles that determine how it should behave socially and politically. Dichotomies based on gender, ability, aesthetic, age, and sexual identity, among others, highlight the instability of public and private borders, and subject the body to recognition or discrimination based on the body's proximity to those boundaries. Transgressing the limits of dichotomy (-ies) or identity (-ies) can deprive an individual of the right to claims of corporeal agency.

The realm of the political includes issues of personal agency associated with the body itself, including but not limited to sexual violence, contraception, reproduction, and personal aesthetic or style, and operate as markers of status and power. Within the purview of human existence, contemporary societies often organize and politicize bodies based on their sex and race, and seek to limit or to grant access to political power to those bodies based on their specific occupations, religions, and intimate relationships. A body's departure from its prearranged sexual, racial, or gender roles could subject it to physical, emotional, and sexual assault, and since the female body is disproportionately victimized by sexual violence, it is therefore marked as vulnerable and subordinate. Such a categorization associates the female body with excessive, frivolous emotion and paints it as unsuitable for the production or pursuit of sound knowledge.

Because bodies provide the foundation upon which societies are built,[1] it is necessary to study how crossing the borders of private and public boundaries subjects women to policing and stigmatization, potentially robbing them of their subjectivity and agency, and to analyze the ways in which the dismissal of the fluidity of a woman's bodily

[1] See Carol Delaney and Deborah Kaspin, *Investigating Culture: An Experiential Introduction to Anthropology* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 196.

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existence in mainstream politics compounds issues of exclusion and autonomy for women who seek to appear in the public sphere.

Hence, focusing on the intersections of gender and other societal constructs broadens the scope of what is studied in regard to body politics, formal and informal marriages, and sex work in modern Iranian literature and film, as well as the processes of nation building and modernization, among others. Under Iran's civil law, there are two recognized types of marriage: formal marriage (*nekah*) and temporary marriage (*sigheh* or *mut'a*). While formal marriage establishes a more enduring union with the intention of creating a family, temporary marriage is often of shorter duration. In many ways it is a form of concubinage, and requires a set of negotiations about the length, monetary exchange, and the nature of sexual relationships. *Sigheh* marriage has had a long history in the Arabian Peninsula and was practiced in the region even before the emergence of Islam, which positions it as a cultural practice rather than a religious tradition. In this type of marriage, there is no divorce because the union dissolves at the end of a designated term. While the primary purpose of formal marriage is the establishment of family and procreation, *sigheh* marriages are mainly for the gratification of sexual desires, often but not exclusively those of men, which is why Iran's middle-class, urban, and educated population has been viewing it as a type of sex work.[2] Therefore, despite the legality and legitimization of both marriages in Shi'i Islam (in Iran), *sigheh* marriages carry a social stigma that marks the couple, particularly the women who enter such marriages, and the institution itself, as inferior. A *sigheh* wife does enjoy certain liberties: autonomy to engage in personal, nonsexual relationships, maintain outside interests, leave the household without the husband's permission, live in a city where the husband does not reside, or even take a job. Nonetheless, because the practice is viewed as taboo in society, most *sigheh* women suffer from vulnerability and insecurity, and most men keep their *sigheh* relationship secret.

[2] While not all *sigheh* women are viewed as sex workers, several of the cultural productions under study highlight *sigheh* women who ultimately turn to sex work; therefore, I use "*sigheh*" and "sex work" with a slash to signify this parallelism in the works. I also use the term "sex worker" instead of "prostitute," signaling my participation in a larger set of feminist discourses that seek to redefine women's voices, humanity, and issues of labor with respect to sex work. For more information on using the term "sex work" instead of "prostitute," see Global Network of Sex Work Projects at www.nswp.org/.

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This book examines the representation of *sigheh* women in both the Pahlavi era and the era of the Islamic Republic. For the Pahlavi period, I am looking at three novels and two short stories: Morteza Moshfeq-e Kazemi's *Tehran-e Makhuf* (*Horrid Tehran*, 1922), Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh's *Ma'sumeh Shirazi* (*Ma'sumeh of Shiraz*, 1954), Ebrahim Golestan's "Safar-e 'Esmat" ("'Esmat's Journey," 1967), Sadeq Chubak's *Sang-e Sabur* (*The Patient Stone*, 1966), and Jalal Al-e Ahmad's "Jashn-e Farkhondeh" ("The Auspicious Celebration," 1969). For the period of the Islamic Republic, I turn to two cinematic works: Behruz Afkhami's *Showkaran* (*Hemlock*, 2000) and Mohammad Hossein Farahbakhsh's *Zendegi-ye Khosusi* (*Private Life*, 2011). These works, each of which is significant with respect to its historical context, reflect the manner in which the practice of *sigheh* impacts women by calling into question how sexuality works as a form of political analysis and power, since sexuality itself is now both a private and political matter – private in the sense that it is unique to each body and political in the sense that it is often policed under the auspices of the state. While I focus on modern Iranian cultural productions, the book attempts to move beyond the literary and cinematic realms and examines in-depth a rather controversial social institution that has been the subject of disdain for many Iranian feminists and has also captured the imagination of many Western observers.

Questioning how the body is used as a battlefield for power gives me room to analyze the fluidity of inclusion and privilege, and conversely, ostracism and marginalization. How do societies decide who is, or who is not, included in society? How should the state approach its response to the growing unanswered political demands of the bodies that cannot, or will not, remain within normative boundaries? How do physical representations of difference inform power dynamics? When bodies are policed and regulated, does that impact society? How so? In what ways do those bodies that transgress normative boundaries and state boundaries challenge power relations on the national stage? What role do moral perspectives and virtues play in society's regulation and protection of bodies?

In that sense, my analysis examines the figure of the *sigheh* woman as the abject sexual other in Iranian fiction written under the Pahlavi regime and in films produced during the Islamic Republic. Because bodies are the bedrock upon which societies stand, exploring how and why women's bodies – including those of *sigheh* women characters – engage with the state and society is critical to our understanding of what

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constitutes a transgressing body; how that body is excluded, marginalized, or threatened; how is it that social and moral norms inform political attitudes toward that body; and how does that body threaten normative narratives.

Looking at history, we can see that monogamy was the norm for the vast majority of the Iranian nation at the turn of the twentieth century. Polygamy, both formal and informal marriages, were practiced among the well to do. The head of a tribe might have two wives and a wealthy merchant might also have more than one wife. Despite various gender reforms, in poor rural and urban communities, the institution of marriage remained much the same, though the institution went through dramatic changes in urban middle-class communities. During the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi (1925–41), the state placed a great deal of emphasis on health and hygiene and in particular began to battle the spread of venereal diseases. As a result of these educational campaigns, men's inclination to visit sex workers was reduced. The health campaign of the Reza Shah period should have also targeted *sigheh* marriages, in its attempt to reduce the spread of venereal diseases. But the state chose not to do so for a variety of reasons. One major reason was that arranging *sigheh* marriages was a lucrative source of income for many clerics who acted as brokers. The clerics refused to accept any links between *sigheh* marriages and the spread of venereal diseases and the state chose not to address this issue. Under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941–79), monogamy was still the norm in rural and migrant communities and the practice of engaging in *sigheh* marriages became less common and was primarily continued around major shrines, in Qom and Mashhad for example. The Pahlavi regime adopted an attitude of benign tolerance toward *sigheh* marriages and essentially swept the issues concerning *sigheh* under the rug.

The literature and cinema of modern Iran reflect the changes and reforms to *sigheh* over the years. After the Islamic Revolution (1979), the state began to encourage *sigheh* marriages for both married and unmarried men and unmarried women. As the stigma of the Pahlavi regime against *sigheh* was reduced, married men once again more freely turned to *sigheh* marriages, which gave them easy access to sexual partners other than their wives. During and after the Iran–Iraq war (1980–8), the state pressured young war widows to contract *sigheh* marriages as a solution to the economic burdens of the war. This was the state's solution to the moral dilemma of having many young

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widows around, presumably with unbridled sexuality, and a solution for men from poor classes who could not afford a formal marriage.[3] In the 1990s, a state-sponsored media campaign promoted *sigheh* as a morally sanctioned substitute for Western dating, and the state asked sex workers to enter short-term *sigheh* marriages with the Pasdarans (Revolutionary Guards), Basijis (paramilitary volunteer militia), and other veterans. During the 2000s, *sigheh* marriages remained legal, although they still contributed to sex work and the spread of venereal diseases.

While the value of *sigheh* marriages has fluctuated throughout history, the societal stigma of *sigheh* marriages has never disappeared. A *sigheh* wife does enjoy certain liberties in modern Iran, such as autonomy to establish relationships, to maintain outside interests, to leave the household without her husband's permission, or to take a job. Notwithstanding these liberties, because the practice is culturally viewed as taboo, most *sigheh* women continue to suffer from vulnerability and insecurity, and most men continue to keep their *sigheh* relationship secret. Thus, in this book, I am concerned about issues such as the representation of *sigheh* women, their status in Iranian society, their alleged deviation from the mainstream, and their ultimate liminality and simultaneous hypervisibility within the cultural productions. Contrary to the stereotypical views of *sigheh* women as invisible and liminal figures, this book shows that in the literary and cinematic works under study, *sigheh* female characters often defy categorization. While they live on the margins of society, these female characters also occupy a significant space in the social imaginary of the dominant culture. In my analysis, this social position speaks to *sigheh* women's symbolic and sexual power.

The literary works chosen for this study provide a broad range of variations on *sigheh* thematically, stylistically, and historically. Moshfeq-e Kazemi's *Tehran-e Makhuf* and Al-e Ahmad's "Jashn-e Farkhondeh" have not been translated into English, which means that they have had a limited audience. Jamalzadeh's *Ma'sumeh Shirazi* has been translated by Franklin Lewis and made available on the website of the Association for Study of Persian Literature; however,

[3] Some of the factors contributing to these social ills include the desire for individualism, social mobility, and financial progress after a devastating revolution and a decade of war with collective spirit.

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I chose to translate the parts I used in this book myself. In the chapters addressing these three works, I have translated the quoted passages from Persian into English. While Chubak's *Sang-e Sabur* has been translated and received considerable attention, the topic of *sigheh* in the novel has not been explored as a separate project. Golestan's "Safar-e 'Esmat" has also been translated, but it has not been studied extensively either. Due to inadequate representation of *sigheh* characters and the topic in general within literary works produced under the Islamic Republic, I chose two cinematic works for this study, each one of which is foundational in its presentation of life during particular historical periods and the gender-based reforms and political changes occurring in society at those times, especially in terms of the status of *sigheh* women.[4] Hence, my analysis of these works addresses an area of thought previously understudied.

Notably, the literary and cinematic works examined in this book are written and directed by men. While women have not been utterly silent about *sigheh*, those references, to me, were inadequate for the analysis of the topic. For instance, there are references to temporary marriage in the works of Forugh Farrokhzad, Simin Behbahani, Simin Daneshvar, Shahrnush Parsipur, and several others.[5] Here, inspired by Afsaneh Najmabadi's suggestion in *Women with Moustaches and Men without Beards* that we can "use gender analytically, sources about men are also sources about women,"[6] this book is an attempt to analyze gender and sexuality in the context of *sigheh* within works created by men but relevant to both men and women. The book also promotes the idea of

[4] There are a few *sigheh* characters in post-revolutionary popular novels like in *Aram* by Simin Shirdel and *For Leila* by Ghazal Pournesaee but they are not typically classified in the same category as works of more canonical writers – they are considered romance novels. The best-seller *Hamkhuneh* also involves a *sigheh* marriage, but a nonsexual *sigheh* contract. Most of the post-revolutionary literary representations of *sigheh* introduce *sigheh* women as the villain or "the other woman" in the plotline. Thanks to Elham Naeej, who brought this to my attention.

[5] Many women writers and directors have briefly referred to or mentioned *sigheh* in their works; however, it has been either as a secondary subtheme or the representation is inadequate for my purposes here; hence, I chose to analyze those in this book (by men) because in these works, *sigheh* (and sex work) is the main subject at hand. And obviously, I do not claim this list to be comprehensive.

[6] Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Moustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 1.

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women taking hold of their own lives and writing about the impact that men and patriarchy have had on their lives, rather than the practice of men telling women's stories both to and for them.

Part of this project was conducted at the archives of the National Library in Iran during 2015–17, which revealed about twenty short stories and novels with a focus on *sigheh*.[7] In these works, *sigheh* is used in various contexts with different connotations. At times, it is used as the central theme of the plot, and on other occasions as a subtheme. Delineated here are the fifteen most prevalent foci of *sigheh* in these works: (1) the relationship between *sigheh* marriages and the clerics; (2) the author's opinion on the moral value of *sigheh*; (3) the parallels between *sigheh* and sex work; (4) clerics' exploitation of *sigheh* women as a source of income; (5) the impact of this type of marriage on children of *sigheh* women; (6) public mistreatment and abuse of *sigheh* women; (7) advantages of *sigheh* for some women; (8) men who enter *sigheh* marriages; (9) *sigheh* and pilgrimage zones; (10) the relationship between *sigheh* and Khans, masters, overlords, and property owners; (11) widowed women who enter *sigheh*; (12) divorced women who contract *sigheh*; (13) sex workers who engage in *sigheh*; (14) maids who are forced into *sigheh*; and (15) the use of *sigheh* to save face and family honor. The research in the National Library of Iran did not return any substantive literary works written and published under the

[7] Elham Malekzadeh in Iran put me in contact with a research assistant whom I hired to conduct this research at the archives of the National Library of Iran. These works include: Mohammad Mohammad Ali's "Chapar-e Quch" ("Chapar of Quch"), Hassan Hessam's "Karnameh-ye Ehya" ("Ehya's Book of Actions") and "Zan Aqa Fekr Kon" ("Stepmother Think"), Hormoz Shahdadi's *Shab-e Hol* (*The Night of Shock*), Ahmad Ali Khodadadgar's *Ruz-e Siah-e Kargar* (*The Worker's Black Times*), Nader Ebrahimi's "Rabete-ye Nevisandeh ba 'Esmat Saleki" ("The Writer's Relationship with 'Esmat Saleki"), Jalil Mohammad Qolizadeh's "Tasbih-e Khan" ("Khan's Rosary"), Gholam Hossein Sa'edi's *Tars va Larz* (*Fear and Trembling*), Asghar Abdolahi's "Dar Posht-e an Meh" ("Behind That Fog"), Mahmud Etemadzadeh's *Dokhtar-e Ra'yat* (*The Peasant Girl*), Mohammad Ali Sepanlu's "Arezuha-ye Yek Mard-e Mian Sal" ("A Middle-Aged Man's Desires"), Jalal Al-e Ahmad's "Jashn-e Farkhonde" ("The Auspicious Celebration"), "Bachcheh-ye Mardom" ("People's Child"), and *Nefrin-e Zamin* (*The Curse of the Earth*), Ebrahim Golestan's "Safar-e Esmat" ("'Esmat's Journey"), Morteza Moshfeq-e Kazemi's *Tehran-e Makhuf* (*Horrid Tehran*), Sadeq Hedayat's *Alaviyyeh Khanom* (*Mrs. Alaviyyeh*) and *Hajji Aqa* (*Mr. Hajji*), Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh's *Ma'sumeh Shirazi* (*Ma'sumeh of Shiraz*), and Sadeq Chubak's *Sang-e Sabur* (*The Patient Stone*) and "Zir-e Cheragh-e Qermez" ("Under the Red Light").

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Islamic Republic that focused primarily on the subject of *sigheh* and its impacts on women.

A quick analysis of the Pahlavi era literature shows that *sigheh* women characters frequently enter sociosexual relationships with men out of economic obligations. However, the truth is that *sigheh* relationships are formed due to a web of factors rather than simple financial dependency. Other factors, to reiterate a few, include saving the family's honor by being able to call oneself married, and believing in the heavenly reward associated with *sigheh*. These stories and novels show that within *sigheh* marriages, the female body is disciplined and policed through various sociocultural, political, and religious institutions to maintain male dominance, satisfy sexual pleasure, and preserve social status. The female body – including a *sigheh* woman's body – is the site where a multitude of sociocultural experiences and powers are inscribed and negotiated.

This book owes a tremendous amount to previous scholarship on female sexuality and *sigheh*. Here I refer to Shahla Haeri's comprehensive and groundbreaking book on *sigheh*, *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Shi'i Iran* (1989, rev. ed. 2014). Haeri's work focuses on *sigheh* largely from social science, historical, and ethnographic perspectives. Other pioneering works on female sexuality from which this book benefits include Janet Afary's *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (2009), Afsaneh Najmabadi's *Women with Moustaches and Men without Beards* (2005), and Homa Hoodfar's *The Women's Movement in Iran* (1999). These works are mainly historical accounts of female sexuality and refer to *sigheh* only briefly. Specific research on representations of the female body, female sexuality, *sigheh* marriages, and their impact on women in modern Iranian literature and cinema have been limited. Despite the wide range of meanings that the institution of *sigheh* marriage produces, surprisingly little scholarship exists on this practice, especially within the realm of cultural studies. This book fills that gap and proposes a methodology that brings feminist theories of embodiment to bear on the Iranian literary tradition in order to understand temporary marriage in Iran not just as an institution but also as a set of practices, identities, and meanings that have transformed over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Focusing on the figures of *sigheh* women, who are portrayed as sexual deviants in modern Iranian fiction and cinema pre- and post-Islamic Revolution, I address the liminality through which these authors and directors

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challenge social hegemony and stereotypes regarding Iranian women and their sexuality as well as the measures taken (or neglected) by each regime regarding *sigheh*, and whether or not those policies have helped to diminish the social stigma attached to *sigheh* and alleviated the invisibility and vulnerability that *sigheh* women endure. Seen within the context of gender inequity and segregation, temporary marriage is situated at the intersection of submission and resistance, transgression and compliance, obstacles and possibilities in this study.

Theoretical Structure and Methodology

Having this duality as my focal argument, I position myself within the female "body politics," a feminist theoretical framework on female sexuality, as exemplified in works by scholars such as Susan Bordo, Sandra Bartky, Janet Wolff, and Monique Wittig, to name a few. According to this theory, social relations between men and women are an embodiment of gendered servitude, which can translate into physical and economic obligations for women and often defines womanhood in the eyes of many. As such, the female body becomes a site for competing ideologies and policies in Iran during the two historical periods under study, and it is through the constant influences of the discursive strategies of Iranian culture that the female body becomes and is defined in the way that it is. The literature and films of modern Iran simultaneously manifest the female body as the locus for sociocultural policing; a site of social inscriptions; "docile," subordinate, and passive.[8] With sociocultural codes and power structures inscribed on the female body, cultural productions illuminate how the female body is produced through an interaction of disciplinary institutions and governments within a patriarchal system.[9] Viewing the female body as a site for sociocultural, religious, and political inscriptions translates into understanding how the female body functions as a sex object, particularly as an object of male desire that is always controlled.

[8] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

[9] For a discussion of disciplinary institutions and disciplined bodies, see Monique Wittig, "One Is Not Born a Woman," in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 309–17; Conboy, Medina, and Stanbury, *Writing on the Body*.

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The female characters in the cultural productions examined in this book, however, do not necessarily conform to the above (disciplinary) expectations. Using Janet Wolff's argument in her "Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics," I consider these female characters decorporealizing the female body such that it is viewed as not only socioculturally constructed, but simultaneously able to disrupt the existing discourses and to subvert the body–mind dualism in order to create a nonpatriarchal female embodiment.[10] The novels, short stories, and films examined in this book illustrate that there is always the possibility of resistance because identity formation, as Judith Butler also argues, is an outcome of acts of repetition, bodily gestures, and movements that create an illusion of a gendered self, which is in fact fluid and ever-changing.[11]

While this book shows that the female body is an embodiment of sociocultural, political, and historical possibilities that are part of the regulatory discourse of the larger power structure, it also highlights the fact that the female body has agency. Despite the fact that female characters are portrayed as invisible, liminal, vulnerable, and often stigmatized (especially in the case of *sigheh* women), they are simultaneously depicted as exercising a certain power by occupying a significant space in the social imaginary of the dominant Iranian culture. It is through this dual position that they disrupt the standard narratives about Iranian women and their sexuality, particularly in the context of *sigheh*. *Sigheh* women pose threats to the status quo, hold power over

[10] For a discussion of decorporealization of the female body, see Janet Wolff, "Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics," in *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 120–40. The relationship of mind to body stems from the ideas of the seventeenth-century French philosopher Rene Descartes. According to Descartes, the mind is an immaterial substance and the body is material. While ontologically different, the body and mind casually interact. For feminists, the opposition between the mind and body has been correlated with the male–female binary, with the female considered as immersed in the bodily experiences with the impossibility of an attainment of rationality. In such binary perspectives, women are regarded as more biological and corporeal than men. Feminists challenge this corporeality to confront constructions of sexed differences.

[11] See Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1988), 519–31; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); and Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993).

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men, and create anxiety over male sexuality in Iranian society even while they themselves are marginalized and subject to violence.

While I do position myself within this Western feminist discourse of the body politics, I share Judith Butler's view that to reduce women of various cultures to one universal concept, and to place them all under the same umbrella, would operate as "a kind of epistemological imperialism … The effort to include 'Other' cultures as variegated amplifications of a global phallogocentrism constitutes an appropriative act that risks a repetition of the self-aggrandizing gesture of phallogocentrism, colonizing [them] under the sign of the same those differences that might otherwise call that totalizing concept into question."[12] Instead, what I seek is the exchange and flow of ideas among various cultures and disciplines, reading Western feminist theories alongside Iranian feminist discourses and modern Iranian fiction and cinema to create a potential conversation in order to better understand female sexuality and *sigheh* marriages in Iranian culture. Therefore, it is important to read each novel, short story, or film within its historical, cultural, political, literary, and cinematic contexts, while also considering arguments by Iranian women's rights activists and feminists, and Western feminist theories, in an attempt to bridge various cultures and disciplines. With this in mind, and although the first chapter is devoted to the sexual politics of modern Iran and Iranian feminist theories concerning female sexuality and *sigheh*, it is important to dig deeper into the Western feminist theory of "body politics" and the significance of bodies first.

What Is Body Politics?

The term "body politics" came into being as a referent to the different power avenues and structures within a society that govern the human body. Introduced during the "second wave" of the feminist movement in the United States during the 1970s, the term also pertains to the struggle over autonomy and agency in the fight against heteronormative patriarchal power structures. Using the slogan "the personal is political," second-wave feminists sought to underscore a woman's right to her body by eschewing aesthetic choices that had heretofore

[12] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 13. See also Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987).

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been espoused as essential to the full expression of femininity. These choices included removing hair from the legs or underarms, and wearing cosmetics or clothing that was revealing or close fitting.

Empowering women to take control over such expressions of their identity allowed them to also take control of their sexual selves and their emotional and reproductive health, since second-wave feminism in the United States grew out of a renaissance of feminist political theory via debates over abortion and other reproductive health issues. The battlefield for those discussions was riddled with the bodies of thousands of women who had solicited illegal abortions and died during or as a result of those procedures. In 1973, the Supreme Court upheld a woman's right to have an abortion in *Roe v. Wade*. The court's decision opened the door for antiabortion, prolife activists to attempt to have more, direct political control over reproductive rights of women in the United States. Meanwhile, their prochoice adversaries continued to speak on behalf of abortion rights, pointing to the fact that legal abortions were saving the lives of the countless women whose bodies might be mutilated or otherwise destroyed if abortion was again ruled an illegal procedure. Such debates are an excellent example of the body politics and the movement's slogan, "the personal is political." They call into question who is in charge of the female body and how much power that entity wields. The debates created a firestorm among other groups of marginalized and oppressed women who believed that their bodies had fallen under the control of the state and other institutions. For instance, sex workers argued for the decriminalization of their work, and women on all sides of the debate united to fight for employment rights for pregnant women and new parents in the workplace.

The body politics of second-wave feminism also sought to remove the stigma and silence surrounding sexual abuse and violence against women and girls, in part by disavowing socially accepted gender expressions.[13] Feminists argued that it is the cultural discourse that

[13] It is important to note that third-wave feminists, those who arose at the end of the twentieth century, agreed with their predecessors about sexual violence and abuse, but were not in complete agreement with what they felt were limiting gender expressions. This latest wave of feminists supported a more extensive range of gender identities and practices including body modification techniques such as piercing, tattooing, and sexual reassignment surgeries, and acknowledging butch-fem gender roles, gender-bending, and transgender identities.

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transforms a female body into a feminine body. For example, in her book *Unbearable Weight*, Susan Bordo examines how cultural facets such as metaphors, norms, and values have been and continue to be imposed on a woman's body, shifting it from a female to a feminine body.[14] This is how regulation of the minutiae of the body's daily existence results in the normalization of the historical narratives about gender identity and personhood.[15] In a similar vein, in an article titled "The Subjectification of the Body," Alphonso Lingis argues that the body is both the subject and object of power and discourse.[16]

The idea that bodies should be regulated is an extension of Michel Foucault's analysis of power–knowledge relations in *Discipline and Punish*, an analysis that hinges upon the idea that the regulation of sociocultural institutions work, as Elizabeth Grosz states, "directly on bodies using disciplinary practices."[17] According to Foucault, power over the body is decentralized and conditioned to exercise its authority because of historical, social, and cultural programming, and can, therefore, hold dominion over a self-regulated subject from anywhere. Expanding on Foucault, Lingis notes that female bodies were understood as "substances" given to irrational and hysterical expressions of sexuality and as such had to be regulated.[18]

Critiquing Foucault, Sandra Lee Barkty notes that those self-regulated bodies are problematic in Foucault's analysis because the female body is much more docile than a male body and would have had different experiences and therefore needed different methods of discipline, methods on which Foucault does not expound. Bartky and Judith Butler both note that while we are born female or male, that does not equate to being born feminine or masculine, a point that Barkty argues "dismisses the kinds of oppression that engender the feminine body and perpetuates its continued subjugation through [the

14 See Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

15 See Rachel Alsop, Annette Fitzsimons, and Kathleen Lennon, eds., *Theorizing Gender: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Publishers, 2002).

16 Alphonso Lingis, "The Subjectification of the Body," in *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Donn Welton (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 286–305.

17 Elizabeth Grosz, "Inscriptions and Body-Maps: Representations and the Corporeal," in *Feminine, Masculine, and Representation*, ed. Terry Threadgold and Anne Cranny-Francis (Sydney and London: Allen and Unwin, 1990), 64.

18 Lingis, "The Subjectification of the Body," 296.

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aforementioned] disciplinary, cultural discourses."[19] Bartky explains that femininity is the performance of gender norms. This means that our bodies are programmed by the traditional gender norms to become feminine or masculine.

In this way, women (and to a lesser extent men) subject themselves to chemicals, procedures, and other physiological manipulations to make their bodies socially acceptable in comparison to the socially sanctioned standards associated with male privilege. These behaviors work to gender the body and to sustain the discipline activated by the initial inspecting glance of the disciplining institutions that hold certain images as the normative. For instance, men's forms of performing masculinity include bodybuilding and various exercises that ultimately make them stronger while women's performance of femininity creates more fragile bodies. Sociocultural institutions such as the state, the law, the family, and sociocultural norms often define the proper and improper forms of human sexuality. The definitions of gendered sexuality these actors provide are rooted in an overwhelmingly heterosexual and patriarchal system of norms that construct female sexuality as the subordinate in the gender hierarchy.

To contest this regulation, Luce Irigaray points out that it is essential to develop a distinctive female sexuality which is not characterized by its proximity to male sexuality, as Freud had described it. Freud's logic privileges sexuality based on visible sex organs, devaluing the vagina to the extent that its only purpose is a "lodging place" for a phallus. Irigaray explains that within Freud's phallocentric logic, the female organ, due to its invisibility "represents the horror of nothing to see" and must remain "absent, masked, sewn back up inside their 'crack,'" excluding it from representation as a viable sexual organ capable of owning or giving agency to its attached body.[20] Freud postulates that because of the female body's lack of a visible sex organ, a woman develops "penis envy" and must somehow control another body with a penis (a son) to compensate for the lack.[21] However, Irigaray's metaphor "lips speaking together" opposes Freud's characterization of female genitals constituting a lack, instead highlighting a woman's

19 Sandra Lee Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," in Conboy, Medina, and Stanbury, *Writing on the Body*, 132.
20 Luce Irigaray, "Female Desire," in *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Donn Welton (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 353–5.
21 Ibid.

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ability to please herself without engaging with a penis because, as she explains, "enacting men's fantasies for the sake of male pleasure exclusively works as a sort of masochistic prostitution that robs [a woman] of her sexual autonomy."[22] Following Irigaray's metaphor, the language of female sexual autonomy is not dependent upon men for translation or validation, and should therefore not be defined by a physical or physiological codependence on a privileged male body, as Freud had suggested. Irigaray's argument disallows the discourse from defining a woman based on a lack, or the anticipation, of fulfillment by phallic penetration. Instead, she claims that because a woman has "sex organs more or less everywhere," a female body is privy to a diverse sexuality that reaches far beyond the singularity Freud mentions and is "always at least double [...]: it is plural."[23] While the female body has been disciplined and regulated to accept the normative narratives of society, body politics encourages women to reclaim their agency and disrupt this narrative. One way to do so is through writing. Hence, as women's bodies are plural, by extension, women's language and writing are also plural, multilayered, and nonlinear.

Historical and Literary Significance

In "Modern Persian Prose and Fiction between 1900–1940," Literary scholar Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab notes that the appropriation of Western modes of art, literature, and culture was a political project, as well as a pedagogical one. The purpose of these authors was not "to create literary works, but to simplify the inaccessible baroque Persian prose style, excessively ornamented with difficult Arabic phraseology, so that their message of reform and modernization could reach people. This emphasis on social and political reform, expressed in a plain style made their works essentially pedagogic."[24] Hence, literature in the early twentieth century was closely tied to a desire for political and social reform as

[22] Luce Irigaray, "When Our Lips Speak Together," in *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, ed. Janet Prince and Margrit Shildrick (New York: Routledge, 1999), 82–90.

[23] Irigaray, "Female Desire," 356–7.

[24] Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, "Modern Persian Prose and Fiction Between 1900–1940," in *A History of Persian Literature XI: Literature of the Early Twentieth Century, From the Constitutional Period to Reza Shah*. General Ed. Ehsan Yarshater. Editor of vol. 11 Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 142.

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well as the construction of a modern Iranian nationalism, which was nevertheless presented as preserving a somewhat pure "mother Iran."

Iranian modernity is tightly interlaced with notions of a female nation, homeland, and "mother Iran," whose purity and chastity is intertwined with concepts of male honor. As Najmabadi aptly suggests, "Iranian nationalism was formed around *khak-i pak-i vatan* (the pure soil of homeland), which reconfigured *vatan* from its earlier Perso-Islamic meanings as one's birthplace to a modern territorialized homeland imagined as a female body."[25] This female body was given voice as long as it represented the "mother Iran." The problem was the female body of the never married, divorced, widowed, or *sigheh* woman presented the nation with significant challenges.

As modernity, modern fiction, and female purity were intertwined in this new nationalist discourse, the way political, sociocultural, and religious institutions defined female sexuality and Iranian womanhood were all reflected in the cultural productions of modern Iran. Therefore, since the literature and films of modern Iran in this book illuminate this issue about female sexuality and the female body, particularly in the context of *sigheh*, it is important to understand the individual historical backgrounds of the chosen novels, short stories, and films as they pertain to a time period that begins with the Constitutional Revolution (1906–11) and continues into the final years of the Pahlavi regime (1925–79) and on into the post-Islamic Revolution (1979–present).

The Constitutional Revolution remains one of the most important phenomena in the history of modern Iran. It gave birth to contemporary Iranian literature and history since it became the foundation for many historical events and fictional portrayals. As a result of greater interactions with European society, the broadening of cultural horizons, and the publication of books and newspapers during the final years of Naser al-Din Shah of Qajar's reign (1848–96), the educated intelligentsia began to demand greater social justice, including greater rights for women. But the Constitutional Revolution, which was brought to an end with Russian military intervention of 1911, could only make limited gains in this arena.[26] After years of anarchy and destruction during World War

[25] Najmabadi, *Women with Moustaches*, 97–8.
[26] ' Azam Bijani, "*Tehran-e Makhuf*, nokhostin roman-e naqd-e ejtema'i (negahi be nokhostin roman-e barjeste-ye ejtema'i-ye Iran *Tehran-e Makhuf* asar-e Morteza Moshfeq-e Kazemi)" [*Tehran-e Makhuf*: The First Novel of Social Criticism], *Rudaki* 19 (2007), 110–11.

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I, Iran was on the verge of disintegration. Its ruler, Ahmad Shah of Qajar (r. 1909–25), was young and incompetent, and his cabinet was corrupt. Ahmad Shah's reliance on foreign powers outraged the nationalist elements. If we consider Iran as the "mother nation," this was a time period when the nation remained fatherless due to the series of inexperienced and easily swayed monarchs that ruled between 1911 and 1921.[27] To end this chaos, Reza Khan, who received encouragement from British diplomats, decided to seize power and form a unified government with the help of the Cossack Brigade. In 1921, Reza Khan and Seyyed Zia eddin Tabatabai (1889–1969) staged a coup d'état and took control of the country's military forces. Soon Reza Khan became minister of war and by 1923 he was also prime minister. Fearing the growing powers of Reza Khan, Ahmad Shah left Iran for Europe. In 1925, the *Majles* (Iranian parliament) deposed the absentee monarch and elected Reza Khan as monarch of the new Pahlavi dynasty.[28]

Many constitutionalists decided to back Reza Shah as he shared some of their ideals about creating a modern Iranian society. To carry out these programs, Reza Shah signed a number of economic treaties with Germany and brought several thousand German advisors to Iran. In 1941, the Allies gave the shah an ultimatum to cut ties with Germany and when the shah and his allies chose to ignore the ultimatum, the Allies occupied Iran. Reza Shah's domestic policies were radical, and not many welcomed them. One such policy was his unveiling decree of 1936, which was favored by some women, but not all. His son, Mohammad Reza Shah (1941–79), took over and tried to adopt a more culturally moderate policy. The veil now became voluntary, though most urban women who had abandoned the veil chose not to reveil again and the face veil (*rubandeh*) was abandoned by all sectors of society.[29]

Mohammad Reza Shah's reign is remembered as a period of internal clashes, extortion, and oppression, although still a time of modernization. Upon the advice of his Western allies, the shah continuously tried to rebuild the socioeconomic structure of Iranian society, but the 1963 White Revolution rendered him unsuccessful as a significant leader,

[27] Najmabadi, *Women with Moustaches*, 128.
[28] Hassan Arfa, "Reza Shah Pahlavi," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, February 7, 2017, www.britannica.com/biography/Reza-Shah-Pahlavi (last accessed May 18, 2017).
[29] Ibid.

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with the clerics opposing his reforms. Like his father, many of Mohammad Reza Shah's reforms centered on women's rights and placing women in public spheres; however, being from various socio-cultural strata (including the more religiously oriented ones), not all women hailed his gender reforms and policies.

Cultural productions at the turn of the twentieth century, in particular, the development of Iranian literature, is closely associated with these political changes; as Seyed-Gohrab posits, "Politicians, intellectuals and poets wanted to defend their country against Western domination … while being fascinated by technological progress and Europe's sophisticated political system. Islam and the Arabs were often blamed for Persia's backwardness, and the true identity of the Persians was found in history, and often in Pre-Islamic times."[30]

Between 1924 and 1925, the first social novel written in Iran, Morteza Moshfeq-e Kazemi's *Tehran-e Makhuf*, was published. The story revolves around women's issues, the internal corruptions of society during the final years of the Qajar dynasty (1785–1925), and the early years of the Pahlavi reign. Despite its amateurish prose and structure, its sociocritical perspective had a significant impact on the genre of social novels, which highlights the social realities of people's lives. Like many other social novels, Moshfeq-e Kazemi's work explores political and government corruption, and social insecurity in the years after the Constitutional Revolution as well as the public's desperation after the Constitutional Revolution failed to achieve its intended result.[31]

Sex workers and other working-class employees are the most common character types in social novels such as *Tehran-e Makhuf*. From a sociopolitical perspective, the ignorance of the leaders of the Constitutional Revolution, combined with the inexperienced Qajar princes who were placed in leadership positions, prepared the platform for deviation from the revolution's original goals and mission. As a result, the secret relationships between sex workers and the elite replaced traditional standards of decency, and sex workers were able to manipulate the leaders under the threat of exposing the morally hypocritical behaviors of the ruling elite.[32] In the context of the earlier

[30] Seyed-Gohrab, "Modern Persian Prose and Fiction," 145–6.
[31] Bijani, "*Tehran-e Makhuf*," 112–13.
[32] Ibid., 113. This theme is also observed in *Ziba* by Mohammad Hejazi – a pre-revolutionary *pavaraghi nevis*.

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discussed modernity, nationalism, and the female body, Moshfeq-e Kazemi's work is significant in depicting the "fatherless female nation" in the hands of ineffectual monarchs and government officials. This political inefficacy is portrayed in *Tehran-e Makhuf* in its treatment of the country, but also its women, the female body, and sexuality. With Reza Shah's emergence as the ruler of the nation and his attempts to unify the nation under "mother Iran," the nation (*vatan*) and the female body came under the protection of the collective masculine monarch and state, albeit another ineffectual one in light of the fact that not all women lauded Reza Shah's attempts at modernization and gender reforms.

Like Moshfeq-e Kazemi, Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh also captured the tensions between the female body and Iranian society in his writing. In his own right, Jamalzadeh can be considered the father of modern Iranian short story genre. He was part of a generation of Iranian intelligentsia who lived outside Iran and wrote in exile. His career began with "Farsi shekar ast" ("Persian Language Is Sweet") in 1922, which was later published in the form of a collection of short stories under *Yeki bud, yeki nabud* (*Once Upon a Time*). Jamalzadeh favored simplicity in writing and chose characters from all walks of life to show the chaotic use of language by the elite and its consequences for the working-class people as well as the Persian language itself. The chaotic language Jamalzadeh referred to and critiqued in his works was a bizarre amalgam of Arabic words and phrases, incomprehensibly spoken French, and Persian. While he used easy and conversational language, he avoided using popular colloquialisms. Jamalzadeh's attempts at simplifying Persian prose made literary works, according to Seyed-Gohrab, accessible to the public. Jamalzadeh introduced realism to the genre of story writing in Iran. In his works, he focuses on social issues without using political slogans, vulgarity, or profanity, which was a trend during and after the Constitutional Revolution.

In the 1940s, Iran witnessed a growth in populist works among its intellectuals. These thinkers tried to expose the miseries experienced by the oppressed people who were being crushed under the dictatorial political system of the country. They warned their readers about the necessity of addressing the issues of the lower strata of society and the degeneration of this social class. It was during the 1940s that Iranian storytelling began disclosing various aspects of the political system that was destroying people's individuality and creating passive and indifferent

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citizens.[33] The most prominent characteristic of this stage of story writing was the broad scope of subjects that attended to the miserable and catastrophic conditions facing both individuals and society at large. These narratives were constructed through descriptions of people's lived experiences. Examples of such stories can be found in the works of Sadeq Hedayat, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, and Sadeq Chubak.[34] Chubak was the most successful among his contemporaries in portraying the miseries of this social class. Chubak digs into the depths of social corruption and superstitions and depicts the ugliness of society in an exaggerated form. His works are pregnant with social abominations, obscenity, degeneration, and the miserable lives of society's despised individuals, the portrayal of which was new in modern Iranian literature. In his works, death, fear, and corruption are the plain and ordinary realities of society.[35]

One of the most important themes in Chubak's works is the relationship between men and women and female sexual instincts. Female sexuality is a topic that most of Chubak's contemporaries avoided, and if they did address it, they attended to it in the framework of sex work or foreign or non-Iranian women in order to portray the adverse impacts of Western culture and modernization on Iranian society. Contrary to his fellow authors, and from the very beginning of his career, Chubak broke with tradition and continued to do so until his final novel, *Sang-e Sabur*.[36] Sexual repression and silence about sexual instincts due to moral, religious, cultural, or social forces is only one of the themes through which Chubak draws readers' attention to the deprivation of women in Iranian society. Poverty, the financial dependence of women on men, and superstitious and religious beliefs about women as inferior creatures that are meant to serve male exploitation are also themes that Chubak addresses through female characters, many of whom are among the poor and outcasts of society. Though these people are the by-products of a society that views them as

33 Mahmud Ebadian, *Daramadi bar adabiyat-e moa'ser-e Iran* [A Survey of Contemporary Literature of Iran] (Tehran: Gowhar Publishers, 1992), 90.

34 Asghar Babasalar, "Sadeq Chubak va naqd-e asar-e vey" [Sadeq Chubak and Criticism of His Works], *Daneshkadeh-ye Adabiyat va Olum-e Ensani-e Daneshgah-e Tehran* 177 (2006), 134.

35 Peyvand Balai, "Jelveha-ye naturalism dar asar-e Chubak" [Elements of Naturalism in Chubak's Works], *Adabiyat-e Dastani* 87 (2004), 24.

36 Mohammad Reza Ghanoonparvar, "Chand tasvir az zanan dar dastanha-ye Sadeq Chubak" [Images of Women in Sadeq Chubak's Stories], *Iran Shenasi* 18 (1993), 269.

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subhuman, Chubak humanizes them with real emotions and desires. These victims of society, as Chubak portrays them, have no say in their lives and futures, and subsist only in an instinctual existence.[37]

In addition to Chubak, Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ebrahim Golestan were among the first authors in the 1940s that attended to women's social issues. Women in their stories, particularly at this time in history, are mostly traditional Iranian housewives, naïve, with no complexities. Each author views gendered relations of power from the perspective of his experiences and environment. Al-e Ahmad examines housewives within the traditional and religious space, and pictures their fears and fantasies – things that he had probably observed in his sisters or mother. Examples of such characters are found in "Shohar-e Amrikayi" ("The American Husband"), "Jashn-e Farkhondeh" ("The Auspicious Celebration"), "Khaharm va Ankabut" ("My Sister and the Spider"), "Zan-e Ziadi" ("The Other Woman"), "Lak-e Surati" ("The Pink Nail Polish"), "Bacheh-ye Mardom" ("People's Child"), and "Gonah" ("Sin"). Women in these narratives are subject to male extortion in different ways. Their confined lives cause them to have strange desires and fantasies. Reasonably or not, because men in these stories ignore women's desires so much, the women are forced to abandon their children on the streets.[38]

In his works, Golestan typically does not attend to matters of religion, but when he does, he highlights its negative aspects. Stories such as "Be Dozdi Rafte-ha" ("Gone Stealing"), "Yadegar-e Sepordeh" ("The Entrusted Memory"), and "Safar-e 'Esmat" ("'Esmat's Journey") are about women's oppression. He emphasizes the conditions of maidservants who have been treated unkindly, women who have lost their husbands to political turmoil, or women who are only seen as sex objects and have nowhere to go or no one to turn to in a male-dominated society.[39]

As we see in this brief historical sketch, the Pahlavi era was a time when the majority of the country's intellectuals shared these inclinations toward a literary approach that scholar Mohammad Reza

[37] Ibid., 273–4.

[38] Hamid Abdolahian, "Mazamin va andisheha-ye moshtarek dar dastanha-ye Jalal Al-e Ahmad va Ebrahim Golestan" [Common Themes and Ideas in Stories of Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ebrahim Golestan], *Pajuheshha-ye Adabi* 5 (2004), 124–5.

[39] Ibid.

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Ghanoonparvar describes as "form and social commitment in content … with novelistic technique, narrative voice, and colloquial and literary language … and a continuing search for new means of poetic expression … with engagement or social commitment … and conscious or sub-conscious treatment of the shortcomings of society and of the hardships of the individual or the masses."[40] The most volatile, yet glorious moments of modernist Iranian literature can be found in the writings of the intellectuals in the 1960s. As Hamid Dabashi argues, "No other period in the history of Iranian modernity is so rich with the metaphoric tremors of emancipation. … The world was unstable, people were rootless, reality was amorphous, relations were changing, and ideals were mutable."[41] The outcomes of a nation moving toward modernity, the anxieties about the resulting freedoms, and the reforms in gender relations were only a few of the reasons for these metaphoric tremors and volatility.

These political and literary tendencies and anxieties ultimately brought about sociopolitical changes and gender reforms that resulted in the Islamic Revolution of 1979. As mentioned earlier, since my research did not return any substantive work on the topic of temporary marriage in the field of literature under the Islamic Republic, for the post-1979 period, I will focus on the film industry. The institution of marriage has always played a major role in Iranian society and cinema, particularly in creating a sense of belonging among marginalized groups, even if only briefly. In Amy Motlagh's words, "anxieties over marriage endure[d] and [were] given voice in Iran's post-revolutionary realist cinema."[42] Hence, what previously was accomplished by literature in terms of realism and realistic portrayal of Iranian culture with respect to marriage was also taken up by the post-revolution film industry.

After the Islamic Revolution, the immediate mission of the film industry was to educate the public and "purge" the country of "Western corruption." During the 1980s, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic

[40] Mohammad R. Ghanoonparvar, "Generic Experimentation and Social Content in Nader Ebrahimi's Ten Short Stories," *Iranian Studies* 15.1/4, Literature and Society in Iran (1982), 129.

[41] Hamid Dabashi, "The Making of an Iranian Filmmaker: Abbas Kiarostami," in *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present, and Future* (London and New York: Verso, 2001), 42.

[42] Amy Motlagh, *Burying the Beloved: Marriage, Realism, and Reform in Modern Iran* (Berkeley, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 134.

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Guidance (MCIG) established rules and guidelines, and approved, censored, or rejected scripts. Until the 2000s, when *Showkaran* (*Hemlock*) was produced, women were represented solely as pure mothers, daughters, or wives. Films focusing on romantic love between a woman and a man, and taboo topics such as adultery and sex work, were almost absent from Iranian cinema before the late 1990s. Women's plight with respect to reconciling the two conflicting elements of modernity and tradition became more severe after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, due to state-implemented laws that dictated how women should balance religious customs against modern ideas concerning women's rights and opportunities.

Behruz Afkhami's *Showkaran* depicts a divided society, which, under the pretext of a love triangle, attempts to portray the prevailing social relations of Iran in the 1990s. The Islamic regime witnessed various foundational transformations in 1989 after Ayatollah Khomeini's death and the end of the Iran–Iraq war (1980–8). *Showkaran* highlights a period in Iranian history known as the period of "Reconstruction." This is also a period when the then-president of Iran, Hashemi Rafsanjani, who promoted a capitalist economy, and opposed the state-based economy of the Islamist left, also promoted *sigheh* marriages as the solution to the country's social ills and economic problems. *Showkaran*'s characters find themselves living in a society stuck in the middle of a massive crisis due to the uncertainties that arise from the new economic policies and the accompanying economic corruption and inflation. Although a collective spirit was favored during the Iran–Iraq war, after the war, individualistic tendencies resurfaced. *Showkaran* is one of only a few contemporary Iranian films that portray the spirit of the times accurately and realistically in its approach to the ways that *sigheh* is tightly intertwined with politics and religion.

Mohammad Hossein Farahbakhsh's *Zendegi-ye Khosusi* (*Private Life*, 2011) is another realistic commentary on the legacy of Iran's 1979 revolution. The film breaks many taboos, while also raising many questions and problems of its own. Like *Showkaran*, it conveys its ideological messages in the context of a love story. The movie depicts the complicated 2010s Iranian political arena at a time when politics cannot be reduced to a dichotomy between reformists and conservatives. Rather, the film shows a country divided by competing ideologies and powers, in various shades of reformism and conservatism. This was a time when many former, fervent supporters of the Islamic regime, known as Islamist

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leftists, metamorphosed into reformists. The discourse about political reform and the bridging of Islamic teachings and modernity had begun in the early 2000s with the writings of scholars and *mojtahed*s such as Abdolkarim Sorush and Mohsen Kadivar. The film's timeline covers Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency, when *sigheh* made headlines once again because Ahmadinejad's interior minister encouraged the youth to enter *sigheh* unions without parental permission and knowledge. Both *Showkaran* and *Zendegi-ye Khosusi* highlight the fact that in different periods of the Islamic Revolution in modern Iran, various political, religious, and sociocultural conceptions of immorality are mapped onto the female body, in these cases a *sigheh* woman's body. Both films depict a highly politicized representation of the female body.

As this brief overview of the historical backdrop of the literary and cinematic works under study shows, each one of the chosen stories, novels, and films has an important message regarding the politicization of the female body and anxieties over female sexuality, especially in the context of *sigheh*. During Reza Shah's reign, with the growth of nationalism and anti-Arab sentiment in public policy, writers began sharply critiquing *sigheh*. In the 1920s, the intellectuals continued to criticize social conditions, the clerics, and religious sects of society. After the 1953 coup d'état, social awakening dissipated and the number of critical stories decreased. Writers often avoided the topics of politics and religion, thus the critique of *sigheh* became infrequent. However, starting in 1963, when for the first time, the clerics took hold of a movement completely independent of intellectuals, the critique of the clerics and religion, including *sigheh*, grew considerably – even though sigheh is a cultural practice, its links to the clerics have resulted in the public understanding of it as a religious practice. From 1964 to 1979, a fifteen-year period, over fourteen stories on the topic of *sigheh* were written, demonstrating the significance of *sigheh* during this time.

After 1979, we can find references to *sigheh* in only a few stories, which mainly critique the Arab sheykhs or the Pahlavi regime for the detrimental impacts of *sigheh*; that is, the stories are not set during the Islamic Republic. Thus, I opted to examine the film industry after the Islamic Revolution; however, I did not find many considerable cinematic works directed under the Islamic Republic that focused primarily on the subject of *sigheh* and its impact on women either. Most cinematic works produced under the Islamic Republic either addressed the topic of *sigheh* in a comic manner, brushing off its

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importance, or referred to it only briefly as a subtheme. Thus, I will focus only on the two films named in this study, *Showkaran* and *Zendegi-ye Khosusi*, which are the most politicized ones and deal with the topic of the female body and *sigheh* directly.

The Structure of This Book

This book is divided into three parts: general historical overview of *sigheh* marriages in Iran, literary productions of the Pahlavi era, and the cinematic productions of the Islamic Republic. In Parts II and III, each chapter is devoted to one of the literary or cinematic works mentioned at the beginning of this introduction. The rationale behind this organization, rather than a conceptual one, is to contextualize each work in its sociopolitical, historical, and literary time.

The first section includes this introduction and Chapter 1, "*Sigheh* Marriages in Modern Iran," which concerns the various definitions, meanings, and interpretations of *sigheh* marriages compared to *nekah* marriages in modern Iran. This first chapter also focuses on the socio-political and cultural background of *sigheh* marriages and female sexuality from the final years of the Qajar era to the Islamic period. I trace the sociocultural impacts of the gender-based reforms under each regime and discuss the fluctuating value of *sigheh* marriages during each period. I also explore how the disequilibrium of these reforms influences prevailing discourses on female sexuality, *sigheh* marriages, and the further stigmatization of *sigheh* women.

The second part, "Representation of *Sigheh*/Sex Work in the Literature of the Pahlavi Era," examines five novels and short stories dealing with *sigheh* unions under the Pahlavi regime. Each story takes place in a different era and so features differing views on *sigheh*. Each chapter in this part focuses on a different author's work, but the common denominator among all the works is that they each focus on a female character that has experienced a temporary marriage and/or entered sex work as a consequence. I explore the topic of *sigheh* and female sexuality in the literary, sociopolitical, religious, historical, and literary context of each work.

Chapter 2, "Gendered Violence in Moshfeq-e Kazemi's *Tehran-e Makhuf*," examines the first of these five works, Morteza Moshfeq-e Kazemi's novel, *Tehran-e Makhuf* (*Horrid Tehran*), which portrays the decadence of the social structure and political system of the country

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and the impact of such decadence on female sexuality, particularly in the context of *sigheh* and sex work, at the end of the Qajar and early Pahlavi eras. *Tehran-e Makhuf* has different sections with various themes and subthemes related to *sigheh* and sex work. In the first section, we hear the life stories of four female sex workers, among whom two, Ashraf and ‘Effat, reference their *sigheh* marriages.[43] Focusing on the female body in the context of *sigheh* and sex work, Moshfeq-e Kazemi is critical of the political and social system that supports the practice at that time. He also highlights the impact of women’s ignorance, illiteracy, unemployment, and financial needs as factors that contribute to their exploitation by men and the socio-cultural, political, and religious institutions that men dominate. In this novel, we also read about the spread of sexually transmitted diseases through *sigheh*, which is subtly associated with sex work, and the fact that men who engage in *sigheh* relations often give no thought to the possibility of contracting a disease from, or spreading a disease to, these women. By foregrounding the vulnerable socioeconomic status of women, Moshfeq-e Kazemi illustrates the ways that *sigheh* marriages are traps that force women to enter a cycle of sex work that further stigmatizes them and allows society, particularly men, to abuse them. The novel focuses on women’s suffering at the hands of a patriarchal system that considers women a property to be owned or a commodity to be used, exchanged, or sold. Fathers, husbands, and lovers all view women as objects to be desired, but not as capable of being subjects in their own right. The men in this novel dissociate the women’s bodies from their minds, dehumanize them, and see them only as bodies that exist to provide pleasure.

However, the novel also demonstrates that while these *sigheh*/sex workers are socially marginalized and stigmatized, they occupy a significant space in the social imaginary of Iran that points toward their symbolic and sexual power. Through the intermingling of politics and sexuality, Moshfeq-e Kazemi illuminates the ways that the female body has been politicized during these periods. He illustrates the way the female body can be a subject of reclaiming power and countering discourses of oppression. Through the embodiment of Mahin, ‘Effat, and ‘Effat’s fellow sex workers, Moshfeq-e Kazemi explores how the

[43] Morteza Moshfeq-e Kazemi, *Tehran-e Makhuf* [Horrid Tehran] (Tehran: Omid-e Farda Press, 2015).

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female body simultaneously fluctuates as an object of power, a site of social inscription, and a threat to the status quo with regard to women's subjectivity and autonomy. Even though these women live on the margins of society, and are vulnerable and stigmatized, the novel highlights their dominance in the social and cultural imaginary. In one way or the other, almost all the men are fascinated with these women and *rely* on them for sexual pleasure. Although these women are seen as non-thinking objects by the male characters, they subvert the status quo and resist the dominant discourses of women's "proper" place in society. Even though these women occupy a particular space that subjects them to the male gaze and social surveillance, they are the ones who control that gaze; in turn, women control the men who direct society.

The focus of Chapter 3, "The Volatile *Sigheh*/Sex Workers' Bodies in Jamalzadeh's *Ma'sumeh Shirazi*," is Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh's short novel, *Ma'sumeh Shirazi* (*Ma'sumeh from Shiraz*), in which he pits a kind but ill-reputed *sigheh* woman against an evil, high-ranking cleric. Jamalzadeh's *Ma'sumeh Shirazi* highlights the relationship between *sigheh* and the clerics, particularly in pilgrimage zones. He associates *sigheh* with sex work and illuminates the ways that the clerics exploit *sigheh* women as a source of income. The novel begins with a *sigheh* woman, who has turned into a sex worker, and her conversation with God. She relays her complaints about a high-ranking cleric to God on the Day of Resurrection.[44] Through Ma'sumeh's complaints, the reader realizes how she has been victimized by society. Ma'sumeh tells stories about the violence, marginalization, and abuse she has undergone first through *sigheh* unions, then as a sex worker. Jamalzadeh portrays how a *sigheh* woman becomes ultimately worn out after years of working by describing Ma'sumeh's illness and her gradual weight loss due to her addiction to alcohol, her many venereal diseases, and her numerous abortions. Due to these complications, Ma'sumeh loses her customers and therefore her financial autonomy. By portraying Ma'sumeh's poverty and her illnesses, Jamalzadeh shows that *sigheh* marriage not only does not grant financial security to a woman, but that the social stigma it carries allows society to brutally ostracize her. Although Ma'sumeh is

[44] Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh, *Ma'sumeh Shirazi* [Ma'sumeh of Shiraz] (Tehran: Kanun-e Ma'refat, 1954).

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marginalized and stigmatized, many men continue to desire her, which attests to her important sexual position in the social imaginary of the novel. The novel manifests how the sociocultural, political, and religious corruption of society is mapped out onto the female body. It also explores how female sexuality is politicized through the interwoven network between *sigheh*/sex work and sociocultural and political institutions.

Jamalzadeh's representation of Ma'sumeh and her life is a realistic commentary on the decadence of the social, political, and religious systems of society at the time, as well as the male objectification of young women, especially by high-ranking religious leaders and government officials. The novel sheds light on the ways that various sociopolitical and religious institutions reduce women to the biological and corporeal, instrumentalizing the female body to political and religious advantage without viewing individual women as autonomous subjects. Jamalzadeh's Ma'sumeh is an object of desire at the mercy of various misogynistic institutions. However, Ma'sumeh also occupies a particular position in the social order of the fantastical world of the novel's male characters. This is a world in which men unconsciously create an ideal image of femininity to which women must conform or face rejection. The men who initially desired Ma'sumeh go on to despise her when she becomes sick and frail – she no longer fits into the ideal femininity constructed by patriarchy. However, by the end of the novel, Jamalzadeh desubjugates Ma'sumeh by giving her a voice to defend her rights and to complain about the hypocrisy of the religious cleric to the Divine. Only within the realm of the divine court can she find justice. To have a voice, Ma'sumeh must rewrite the normative sociocultural, religious, and political scripts. Hence, she directs her complaints about the world around her and the people in it to the divine source, with no interference from men or the patriarchy. Interestingly, God responds to Ma'sumeh and condemns the hypocritical cleric, which reflects Jamalzadeh's bigger religious and social critiques.

Chapter 4, "Colonized Bodies in Al-e Ahmad's 'Jashn-e Farkhondeh,'" analyzes Jalal Al-e Ahmad's short story "Jashn-e Farkhondeh" ("The Auspicious Celebration"), set in the 1930s. The story, narrated by the son of a cleric, concerns the relationship between *sigheh* women and the clerics. Al-e Ahmad begins his tale with the arrival of a letter inviting the cleric, the narrator's father, to participate in Reza Shah's organized event

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for the Emancipation of Women. The story explicitly draws on the 1936 police-enforced unveiling decree of Reza Shah. Since public veiling has been banned, the cleric must attend the celebration with his wife unveiled publicly. To avoid what he considers an abomination, the narrator's father decides to contract a *sigheh* for two hours with a friend's more modernized daughter.[45] In this way, he can attend the celebration with his temporary wife without violating the royal command, but at the same time, he is able to disobey the state's unveiling decree by not attending it with his formal wife. Al-e Ahmad shows how female sexuality is regulated and the female body is exploited under a religious façade to the benefit of the sociocultural, religious, and political institutions during the early years of the Pahlavi regime. The story also illustrates the interlaced network of relations between female sexuality and sociopolitical and religious institutions during this time period.

Since the female body – viewed as different from the male body by default – functions as "the other," it is expected to become an obedient and passive object of male desire and male exploitation. Through this designation as passive, it is devalued, repressed, regulated, objectified, and treated as a cause of women's oppression, or a means of resistance for men. It is against this backdrop that "Jashn-e Farkhondeh" explores how the *sigheh* woman's body, as a site of both repression and possession by men, becomes the locus where politics and religion intersect. Al-e Ahmad addresses the issue of modernization, how it intersects with anxieties over losing or sacrificing the indigenous culture, and the role of women within this new nation-state, which is heading toward a Western-style model of modernization. In so doing, "Jashn-e Farkhondeh" depicts how modern Iranian womanhood came to be defined through the struggle between religion and politics, as well as the interaction between modernity and tradition, among other factors. While such intersections and reconciliations might have been beneficial for advancing Iranian women's rights to a certain extent, at the same time, it is always women who bear the brunt of these male-controlled transactions. In this story, even though this nonsexual example of *sigheh* does not have the same consequences as the sexual type of *sigheh*, it still hints at the instrumentalization of women and their bodies to the benefit of the patriarchal system. Simultaneously, the

[45] Jalal Al-e Ahmad, "Jashn-e Farkhondeh" [The Auspicious Celebration], in *Panj Dastan* [Five Stories]. 2nd ed. (Tehran: Ravaq Press, 1976), 25–44.

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story bears witness to the important role of female sexuality in bringing order to society through reconciling politics with religion.

Chapter 5, "The Grotesque *Sigheh*/Sex Worker's Body in Golestan's 'Safar-e 'Esmat,'" looks at Ebrahim Golestan's 1967 short story "Safar-e 'Esmat" ("'Esmat's Journey"). Similar to his contemporaries, Golestan examines the relationship between *sigheh* and the clerics, connects *sigheh* to sex work, and illustrates how clerics exploit *sigheh* women as a source of income in pilgrimage zones. "Safar-e 'Esmat" begins with 'Esmat's journey to Imam Reza's shrine in Mashhad to repent from sex work. As she is walking toward the shrine, 'Esmat remembers a night when she had many customers and was feeling tired and sick and not up to much sexual activity. This night, 'Esmat recalls, ended in a violent fight. Golestan situates 'Esmat in the midst of drunkenness, the smell of sweat, fights, headaches, and physical abuse to illustrate the violence 'Esmat endures. When she arrives at the shrine, 'Esmat is approached by a cleric who invites her to stay at the shrine and work for him as a *sigheh* for the pilgrims.[46] Golestan illustrates the impact of religious and sociocultural decadence of the country on *sigheh* women and the female body in his portrayal of the cleric. He draws a realistic picture of the degeneration of the social system and the perversion of the clerics who exploit the female body and sexuality to their own financial benefit during the Pahlavi regime. Golestan also highlights 'Esmat's ignorance about her rights, emphasizes her illiteracy, and brings to the fore her poverty and financial need. However, while 'Esmat's socioeconomic conditions place her on the margins of society, the fact that the cleric approaches her immediately after seeing her in the shrine hints at 'Esmat's symbolic sexual-social power.

It is within the paradoxical context of reality and fantasy that I approach Golestan's "Safar-e 'Esmat." As a *sigheh*/sex worker, 'Esmat can bring men's sexual fantasies close to reality. This can provide her with a degree of power in setting the terms of the transaction. According to the norms of male-dominated society, her sexuality should be confined within the framework of *sigheh* in order to maintain

[46] Ebrahim Golestan, "Esmat's Journey," in *Stories from Iran: A Chicago Anthology, 1921–1991*, ed. Heshmat Moayyed (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 1991), 147–8; Ebrahim Golestan, "Safar-e 'Esmat," in *Juy va Divar va Teshneh* [The Stream, the Wall, and the Thirsty One] (Tehran: Golestan Studio, 1967).

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religious legitimacy and control over it. It is important to acknowledge 'Esmat's socioeconomic and lower-class status in order to be able to discuss the experiences and forms of power that various patriarchal institutions within society have inscribed on her body. The discrepancy between men's and women's earning power and access to resources and employment are additional reasons to consider in 'Esmat's submission to the Seyyed. 'Esmat's transformation from a sex worker to a *sigheh* woman under the influence of a clergy problematizes the question of female agency. Did sex work provide 'Esmat with agency? Will *sigheh* empower 'Esmat? If 'Esmat engaged in sex work and entered *sigheh* due to lack of alternative means of income, does this mean that she is still empowered, or is this another form of exploitation? In addition to analyzing the detrimental consequences of sex work/*sigheh* for 'Esmat, it is important to examine the question of "choice" versus "force" in "'Esmat's Journey." The fact that 'Esmat had freedom in choosing her clients as a sex worker, while as a *sigheh* woman, the Seyyed will choose her clients for her also foregrounds the dichotomy of "victim" versus "oppressor." Hence, the question remains: Who holds the power? "'Esmat's Journey" draws attention to the discord between female empowerment and male power in the context of *sigheh*/sex work.

Chapter 6, "Bodily Inscriptions in Chubak's *Sang-e Sabur*," explores Sadeq Chubak's novel *Sang-e Sabur* (*The Patient Stone*), which reflects on the chaotic social conditions of the 1930s and includes a criticism of the institution of *sigheh*. *Sang-e Sabur*, too, explores the relationship between *sigheh* and the clerics, as the author regards *sigheh* as another form of sex work, and shows how clerics exploit *sigheh* women as a source of income while also bearing witness to the poor treatment of *sigheh* women. *Sang-e Sabur* explores the lives of five characters. Gowhar, who is never given a voice of her own for the entirety of the novel, is a young *sigheh*/sex worker who is physically absent from the very beginning of the novel. Although not physically present, her presence can be felt through the impact of her disappearance on the lives of the other characters. This symbolic presence in the face of her physical absence implies Gowhar's significant position in society and the role she plays in the social imaginary of the novel's world. In addition to Gowhar, there is Belqeys, another female character who is sexually frustrated because of her old, opium-addicted, and impotent husband. With respect to Belqeys's sexless marriage, Chubak seems to view

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sigheh as advantageous, while in Gowhar's case *sigheh* is associated with sex work.[47] Chubak depicts the decadence of the social and religious systems of the country by hinting at the abundance of women contracting *sigheh* in pilgrimage zones to alleviate the conditions of their poverty. Chubak criticizes the way sex work is disguised under the façade of religion and marriage. His mouthpiece, Ahmad Aqa, could be Chubak himself or any of the other intellectuals of the day who were active opponents of the objectification of women. By exposing Gowhar to social violence and her subsequent murder at the hands of a psychopath who has decided to purge society of sex workers, Chubak also indicts the social stigmatization and ostracization of *sigheh* women in Iranian society. To emphasize the invisibility of *sigheh* women, Chubak even goes so far as to avoid giving a voice to Gowhar throughout the entire novel. This exposure to violence indicates that the patriarchal world in which Gowhar lives is hesitant to grant working-class women, especially *sigheh* women, the right to control their own sexuality and thus their subjectivity. Hence, Gowhar's murder is much more than an act of gendered and/or class-based discrimination.

Although violence against women, particularly sexual abuse, has been historically defined mostly as rape, incest, and battering, there is also a range of male behaviors such as emotional and psychological abuse that are often dismissed as minor nuisances. In *Sang-e Sabur*, in addition to Gowhar's murder, the novel captures a range of verbal, emotional, and psychological assaults. These are attacks directed not only at Gowhar, but at other women in the novel, too, and not by one man but by almost all the men and even by other women. Therefore, since *sigheh* is a socioculturally and religiously sanctioned practice of subjugation important for maintaining collective male power, the objectification of Gowhar and the violence directed toward her may be regarded as political rather than simply personal. Once again, it is the cultural, political, economic, and religious conditions of society that bring about Gowhar's plight; however, her dominance of the story, even without a voice of her own, shows her power even in light of these oppressive social forces.

[47] Sadeq Chubak, *Sang-e Sabur* [The Patient Stone] (Tehran: Javidan-e 'Elmi Press, 1967). See also Sadeq Chubak, *Sang-e Sabur* (Tehran: Javidan Publishers, 1973); and Sadeq Chubak, *The Patient Stone*, trans. Mohammad Reza Ghanoonparvar (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1989).

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In Part III, "The Islamic Republic and *Sigheh* in the Film Industry," I turn to two post-1979 revolution films that treat the topic of *sigheh*. These are Behruz Afkhami's *Showkaran* (*Hemlock*, 2000), and Mohammad Hossein Farahbakhsh's *Zendegi-ye Khosusi* (*Private Life*, 2011). Both films focus on the Iranian government's endorsement of the practice of *sigheh* after the Islamic Revolution. *Showkaran* is set during the Reconstruction period right after the 1980–8 Iran–Iraq war, and *Zendegi-ye Khosusi* focuses on the political factionalism of the 2010s. During both of these historic timelines, *sigheh* was a topic of state discussion.

In Chapter 7, "Whose Body Matters in Afkhami's *Showkaran*," I examine Afkhami's *Showkaran* (*Hemlock*, 2000), which is set in 1995. *Showkaran* depicts Mahmud, a seemingly happily married man who finds himself stuck at the junction of religiosity and modernity. Mahmud, who is religious minded, becomes attracted to Sima, a widowed head nurse, and suggests to her that they contract a *sigheh* union. Mahmud keeps his *sigheh* marriage a secret, and soon decides to end it, but Sima has become pregnant. Sima threatens to ruin Mahmud's life but ultimately realizes that she cannot bring herself to do it. In *Showkaran*, Afkhami exposes some key social problems, including *sigheh* marriages, and how religious regulations are used as a façade to justify social injustice. He sheds light on the double standards that dominate *sigheh* marriages and dramatizes how the political becomes personal as individuals strive for morality. Through the character of Sima, Afkhami's *Showkaran* reflects on how the social and moral corruption of the time is mapped onto a woman's body, and how, in order to eradicate social and moral corruption, a woman's body must ultimately be eliminated. Sima, who was desired and lusted after at the beginning, suddenly becomes despised and stigmatized. Afkhami's Sima is an educated, independent woman who enters a consensual legal relationship (not an affair) and becomes pregnant. She wants to keep the child and needs Mahmud to get the child a birth certificate, but Mahmud will not accept it. Instead, he ruins her life. This shows that in this society, an independent woman who is pregnant out of a "legitimate" union does not have the right to keep the child and, even worse, she must be eliminated so she does not pose a threat to the man's *nekah* marriage and social status.

By highlighting the role of *sigheh* marriages in maintaining the precarious balance of religiosity and modernity, the manipulation of

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religion, the societal and religious double standards imposed on women, marriage as an institution versus an intimate relationship, and politicization of the personal, Afkhami displays the complex aspects of *sigheh* marriages and the detrimental effects the practice has on the personal lives of women, as well as on society as a whole. Sima is simultaneously portrayed as both desired and despised, at the margins and at the center. Sima who is "socially peripheral" becomes "symbolically central," for she poses a grave threat to Mahmud's *nekah* marriage, and therein lies her power. The title of the movie, *Showkaran* or Hemlock, is a reference to a poisonous plant, exposure to which can cause insanity – much like the insanity that the "poisonous" practice of *sigheh* causes for Sima in this film. While it might be poisonous for Mahmud too, he can get away with it without the social stigma that Sima has to endure. Afkhami portrays a realistic treatment of love, sexuality, and women through Sima's character, which becomes the catalyst for a symbolic struggle between the cultural, social, religious, political, and sexual forces of the time.

In Chapter 8, "Politics, Power, and Embodiment in Farahbakhsh's *Zendegi-ye Khosusi*," Farahbakhsh's *Zendegi-ye Khosusi* (*Private Life*, 2011) also draws on ways that the political becomes personal. Farahbakhsh not only focuses on the political environment of Iran in the 2010s, but also highlights the inherent double standards found within the government's endorsement of *sigheh*. Ebrahim, who is married and also was an Islamist radical during the early years of the revolution, undergoes a dramatic transformation in 2011. He becomes attracted to Parisa, a Western-educated woman, and suggests that they contract a *sigheh* union. He keeps his *sigheh* marriage secret, and soon decides to end it, but Parisa is pregnant. Parisa, who is at the center of Ebrahim's attention during his wife's absence, is pushed into the periphery when Ebrahim's wife returns and Ebrahim's *nekah* marriage is in peril. Yet even in her most vulnerable position, Parisa exerts her power by threatening to ruin Ebrahim's life, punishing him for his rejection of her by setting his car on fire and making friends with his wife.

Highlighting the importance of *sigheh* marriages, and the unsettling balance of the political and the personal, the manipulation of religion, double standards, and gendered inequality, *Zendegi-ye Khosusi* demonstrates the inimical power of patriarchy to protect and maintain male dominance. The film calls attention to women

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like Parisa, who are initially desired and lusted after, but as they pose threats and demand equal rights, they are eliminated. To complete her eradication from his life and keep his moral corruption a secret, Ebrahim, who initially lusted after Parisa, now objectifies, victimizes, and ultimately murders Parisa. Similar to Afkhami, Farahbakhsh depicts the politicization of the female body and sexuality in the context of *sigheh* under the Islamic regime. Like Sima, Parisa is an educated, independent woman who gets pregnant out of a legal union (not an affair) but does not have a right to the child because Ebrahim will not acknowledge his paternity so Parisa cannot get a birth certificate for the child. Farahbakhsh uses the figure of Parisa to lay bare the religious and political hypocrisy and gender-related double standards inherent in the practice of *sigheh*.

Finally, in "Epilogue: Reclaiming the Female Body via Writing," I discuss whether or not the policies of each regime impacted the various authors' and directors' interpretations of *sigheh*. I posit that the female body and sexuality, in the context of *sigheh*, has been politicized under both regimes. In response to the fact that men have produced almost all literary and cinematic works about *sigheh* women, I question whether male-dominated writing or directing promotes a realistic characterization of female protagonists. Instead, I point to the need for women to discuss the ways in which "body politics" is related to *écriture féminine*.

As my research illustrates, not many women have written about or directed films on *sigheh* and representations of *sigheh* women; this is particularly true after the Islamic Revolution, as there is a very limited representation of *sigheh* women in literature. Here, I explore the ways in which women have written about their lived experiences and how they have been impacted by men and patriarchy, in contrast to the ways in which men had narrated women's stories for them. Through their own writings, women can challenge male-dominated society, culture, literature, and language. They can also adopt a new language for the expression of their lived bodily experiences and reject the phallogocentrism of the dominant discourse.[48] Iranian society awaits the day

[48] See Hélène Cixous, Keith Cohen, and Paula Cohen, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* 1.4 (1976), 875–93; and Ann Rosalind Jones, "Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of l'écriture feminine," in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. E. Showalter (London: Virago, 1985).

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when more and more women disrupt the dominant male-centered language and in the process reclaim and assert their sexuality.

It is noteworthy to mention that in the 1980s, after the Islamic Revolution, Iranian women did begin writing their lived experiences, their bodies, their thoughts, and their lives; however, with a few exceptions, works on the representation of *sigheh* women are lacking. This inadequate representation might be because *sigheh* has become a government-endorsed practice, which means that even if women (or men for that matter) write about *sigheh* and its detrimental impact on women, the work will be banned or subject to strict censorship.[49]

All in all throughout this book, I show that the different strategies adopted by the Pahlavi and Islamic regimes have not diminished the stigma associated with *sigheh*. Rather, they have perpetuated the victimization of women, most often under the façade of religious regulation. All of the works under analysis illustrate how at first *sigheh* women are desired and lusted after, but then despised and discarded when they pose a threat to the formal marriages of the men. However, it also becomes apparent that living invisibly on the margins of society also heightens the visibility of *sigheh* women. *Sigheh* women are simultaneously at the margins and at the center. This hypervisibility hints at the *sigheh* women's symbolic social-sexual power. By focusing on *sigheh*, I demonstrate how the female body has become the catalyst for a symbolic struggle between the social, cultural, religious, and sexual forces that define modern Iranian womanhood. All the while, this book is not an attempt to condemn the practice of *sigheh*, as, in some variations which I will explain, the practice has had some benefits to women. What I attempt to do is to present a close reading of the ways this practice is reflected in the cultural productions of modern Iran.

[49] According to "Writer's Block" by *Small Media*, censorship applies more strictly to women's writing.

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