

Qadiseh Hejazi's *Barresi-ye Jara'em-e Zan Dar Iran* Dangers of Cultural Change: Gender and Female Criminality in Early Post-World War II Iran

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"Today's civilization ... is full of paradoxes."¹ With these words an Iranian women's magazine characterized Iran's state of affairs in 1928. Starting with the Constitutional Revolution (1905 and 1911), and at a faster pace during Reza Shah Pahlavi's rule (1921-41), social reforms, cultural change, and techno-scientific progress were re-forming Iran. The sun appeared to be rising again over the country, awakening it from an almost millenarian 'slumber'.

However, light was accompanied by shadows. Due to a decidedly more rapid pace, as opposed to the leisurely stroll of traditional life, the modern age was feared to exert unprecedented pressures on the individual. Modernist authors – journalists, scientific authors, and writers – waxed on the incredible velocity of cars, trains, and planes, but concluded that "the world ... need(s) tranquility, welfare, and comfort – not agitation and hardship!" All too easily, speed could become, not only metaphorically, but literally, maddening. In the late 1930s, one author identified "speed and noise" as "the particular features of today's civilization", directly causing a surge in mental disease and crime. Two decades later, a leading Iranian psychiatrist warned that "mental troubles are on the rise due to the rapid progress of the new civilization and people's lack of preparation to deal with it."² The maelstrom of modern life

engulfed all social bonds, including society's basic cell: the family.

Worries about modern life's threats are at the heart of one of the earliest lengthy texts on female criminality in Iran. Published in 1962, Qadiseh Hejazi's *Barresi-ye jara'em-e zan dar Iran* – the Iranian version of a doctoral thesis supervised by a French professor – was among the first Iranian contributions to a growing body of literature on criminology.³ The author argues that female criminality is a recent phenomenon which results from the negative impact of modern life (what we will term 'modern effects') on gender roles, marriage patterns, and family structures. Female criminal deviance is prefigured by gender deviation: what can be called the 'criminal-woman' is a failed 'mother-woman'. The two subtypes, the former deviant in a criminal sense, the latter in a bio-medical and moral sense, are intertwined and caused by the same negative effects of modernity. In view of Hejazi's admission that the number of female criminals in Iran is extremely low, she appears to be interested as much in the socio-cultural crisis (which presumably triggers female criminality), as in the criminality itself.

Hejazi advocates that women stay behind the hearth and beside the cradle.⁴ Coming from a religious family, yet

armed with a modern, higher education, she placed great emphasis on the role of religion in helping people steer clear of crime.⁵ Feminist authors did not see eye to eye with her, but more secular authors, especially men, probably under-wrote Hejazi's view that a woman's home is her castle.⁶ Moreover, although Hejazi's concerns about modern life are influenced by religion, she referred, as a matter of course, to sociology, psychology, and criminology.⁷ These scientific disciplines were central to the work of secular authors as well. Most importantly, her core argument that modern life is a threat makes it a distinct yet fundamentally harmonious voice in a choir of contemporary Iranian critics, intellectuals, and social scientists concerned with the negative consequences of 'the new civilization'.

That particular debate picked up steam in the post-war decades, against the backdrop of accelerating urbanization, mass urban culture, growing industrialization, and women's increasing public presence. However, its roots date back to the interwar years' socio-cultural reforms and concomitant social changes.⁸ On the one hand, most of these reforms were seen as benefiting women, especially modern middle class women who were more educated and who were employed in professional sectors 'suited' to their 'maternal nature', such as teaching and nursing. On the other hand, the 1931 Civil Code and the 1937 Marriage Act framed women as dependent individuals. "The new legal codes secularized patriarchal family relations by moving family law from the domain of the Shariat to the domain of the secular state."⁹ At the same time, women were seen to be particularly vulnerable to the harmful aspects of modern civilization, which were 'germinating' in the city, especially the capital city, Tehran.¹⁰

Socio-economic and cultural change continued during and following World War II. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, urban growth continued, especially in Tehran, where the urban industrial working class and the even more dejected urban proletariat [now known as *lampan* (Lumpenproletariat)] were also growing. Rural-urban migration, although not yet at the level of the land reform period (1963), was accelerating and living standards, especially of the poorer social strata, suffered from a spiraling inflation that affected housing prices in the large cities.¹¹

"[W]ith the acceleration of capitalist relations after the Second World War, and particularly with the full-fledged modernization programmes, women's position underwent some transformation. The increased participation of women in the labour force and their growing access to education created a more visible population of middle-class women."¹²

At the same time, women literati were starting to openly address their sexuality,¹³ while social critics and social scientists grew increasingly alarmed about the effects of large-

scale migration from the rural countryside to the large cities. They believed that the process was tilting the balance between young men and women in large cities, with purportedly terrifying effects on society's moral-sexual order.¹⁴ They also worried about the way in which urban mass culture was expanding. Particularly in Tehran, cinemas, brothels, cabarets, bars, and restaurants - welcomed by many, but feared for their purportedly morally corrupting effects - became more numerous than ever before; elements of American pop and mass culture were newly introduced into the fabric of urban Iranian life.¹⁵

It was in this context that Qadiseh Hejazi published *Barresi-ye jara'em-e zan dar Iran* in 1962. She identified the main threats to Iranian women as the erosion of stable marriage patterns, the disintegration of the family, and most importantly, the altering of women's biological identity as mothers. Women's place is unequivocally in the home. Religion played an important role in Hejazi's analysis. She emphasized the positive effects growing up in a family of religious scholars has had on her, and stressed the morally fortifying role of religion.¹⁶

Hejazi's religious stance distinguished her from her secular male counterparts. More importantly, however, intellectual figures such as Ahmad Kasravi and Jalal Al-e Ahmad basically shared her view that women's natural place is at home, with her children.¹⁷ The fact that she was educated in the modern state university system, where she wrote the doctoral thesis that formed the base of her book, is further evidence that her religious outlook did not place her outside the boundaries of modernist social critique.¹⁸

For Hejazi, women are first and foremost mothers. Their sexual drive is conditioned by that biologically constructed maternal instinct;¹⁹ their sexual instincts, their social role, and their biological constitution define them as mothers.²⁰ In turn, maternal feelings tend to prevent women from committing crimes. Crime is in fact contrary to women's nature.²¹ It is only with the advent of modern society, in which the bonds of marriage are loosened, that women have ceased to become mothers, and have to work outside their homes, disturbing their 'natural state'. It is, as a result of these shifts, that women are more likely to become criminals.²²

In her view, the destructive effects of this shift can be clearly seen in Western countries. In her book, the rise of female criminality in the West is evidence of her contention that there is a causal link between marriage patterns and statistics on crime: single women are much more likely to become criminal than are either married women or mothers. But even in the modern period, a mother is most likely to commit crimes for the sake of her children, as a last desperate attempt of her self-sacrificing instinct to protect and nourish them.²⁴

Hejazi thus constructs the aberrant figure of the criminal woman in contrast to the natural and normal figure of the mother-woman and maps out both a historical-cultural genealogy and a socio-criminological typology of 'the female criminal'. Her ultimate interest, in fact, lies with the criminal or the concept of the criminal-woman as arising from a pessimistic reading of 'modern effects', rather than with crime.

The contrast between the criminal-woman and the mother-woman is less clear-cut than at first sight; however, as there are various kinds of crimes and different types of criminals, simultaneously, there are qualitatively varying types of motherhood. There is an intersection, a grey zone, between the category of the careless-but-not-yet-criminal mother-woman (or a woman who cannot or does not want to become a mother) and the category of the criminal-woman. A criminal mother-woman who commits a criminal act or becomes a criminal for the sake of her children is less condemnable - in the moral rather than legal sense - than a non-criminal mother-woman who does not take care of her children or who does not want children in the first place.

Hejazi paints her picture of criminality as a 'modern effect' on a canvas of modernity's negative impact on gender roles and sexuality. Female criminal deviance predicts and is conditioned by gender deviation. Thus, the true criminal-woman is a failed mother-woman: she has ceased to be or never was a mother-woman.²⁵ The criminal-woman and the failed mother-woman share a common historical-cultural genealogy in that both are created by the distortions of 'modern effects', and although they represent different subtypes, they are logically connected: both are deviant and hence they are both discussed in *Women's Crimes in Iran*.

While Hejazi analyzes the criminal-woman in criminological terms, she describes the careless, but not yet criminal mother-woman and the failed mother-woman using a bio-medical vocabulary. This approach is not new, and has been applied in Iran from the early decades of the 20th century onwards.²⁶ In a sub-chapter entitled 'Factors that influence a woman and place her under pressure', she claims that maternal feelings "are among the [women's] most vital emotions, and therefore they cannot be fought" or repressed without negative consequences.²⁷ In other words, women who fail to develop maternal feelings are unable to develop any positive female or feminine traits. Moreover, unlike male 'instincts' that are openly sexual, women's (sexual) instincts are maternal. Their satisfaction in extra or premarital relations – which, for men, is problematic only from a moral perspective – comes at a huge cost: the loss of the woman's mental, psychological, and physical wellbeing. Women who do not become pregnant, who have to abort, or who give birth to illegitimate children, will be very likely to suffer. The failure to get pregnant has "dangerous phys-

ical and nervous costs ... which at times leads to insanity ... If [the lack of pregnancy] does not result in [the woman] dying at a young age, illnesses and discomfort [do] remain, so that she must live her [entire] life [plagued by] discomfort and disease." Moreover, this personal state of affairs "will also affect society." As for abortion, Hejazi notes that "the slightest harm and smallest danger for the woman is death. There is no need for a more detailed explanation." In light of the above stance, she most likely means that death is preferable to the variety of terrible diseases, physical as well as psychiatric, that will befall women if they, for whatever reason, do not become mothers.²⁸ The third and worst case is the birth of an illegitimate child. Social pressure to abandon the new-born scars women for the rest of their lives. In sum, women who experience any one of these three states will suffer trauma requiring medical treatment. Moreover, "the most abominable crimes are committed by (such) persons"; as a result, "the roots [of all three] will spread throughout society like cancer."²⁹

However, Hejazi concedes that unlike in the West, a very small number of children are born out of wedlock in Iran.³⁰ Likewise, in the decades between the rise in population growth in the 1930s and the inception of population control in the mid-1960s (abandoned after the revolution, but successfully resumed in the early 1990s), abortion, childlessness, and their demographic and individual psychological effects were an imagined threat rather than an actual reality.³¹ In the same vein, Hejazi grants that female criminality is extremely low in Iran.³² In fact, her book is filled with references to the disparity that exists between social reality and the cultural angst of modern effects. This discrepancy characterizes her own concern about both the psycho-medical deviation of the (childless) failed mother-women and the deviance of criminal-women.

The fact that Hejazi's book is driven more by a deep-seated anxiety about the threat of drastic culture-driven changes to social and gender identities, than by actually existing criminal reality, is conclusively reflected in her typology of female crime. The largest category is constituted by "a'mal-e mon-afi-ye 'effat" or acts against chastity, approximately 75% of which are cases of prostitution. Hejazi initially states that these acts have socio-economic causes. They are attempts by urban lower-class women to alleviate their poverty. In her view, economic distress is also a main motive for other crimes, such as drug abuse or bloody feuds.

However, in Hejazi's analysis of the categories of crime and in her final conclusions, economic factors disappear and socio-cultural dynamics come to the fore. Symptomatically, she does not frame unchaste acts as yet another criminal category; rather, they are "the mother of (all) other crimes, i.e. other crimes are [their] product."³³ In contradiction to her statement, that acts against chastity constitute the

largest category of crimes, they actually rank second in the only statistics she provides.³⁴

Hejazi's vision of chastity as the core and origin of female criminality also points to another issue. Her analysis situates female crime in a separate sphere from male crime since the latter is primarily understood from an economic perspective. Meaning, it is a threat to socio-economic stability and a danger to other to men's productive efforts. The former, on the other hand, is situated in the sphere of biology. Women's crimes are crimes against society's socio-biological, and demographic strength. Woman's original crime is a sin against her body - a body that does not truly belong to her, a body she has to look after for society's sake. Prostitution is morally condemnable, medically dangerous, and socially harmful. Therefore, a woman's

attempt to subvert her body's basic purpose - reproduction - is not only a shot into her own foot, but a stab into the back of society. It renders her insane, and places society in mortal danger.

Seen in this light, it does not come as a surprise that Hejazi frames unchastity as "the mother of all crimes". In her genealogy, modern effects subvert marriage, the family, and gender roles. Other types of crimes arise from that original source. A *'mal-e monafi-ye 'effat* thus constitute the site where the figure of the failed mother-woman blends into the criminal-woman and where moral, medical and criminal deviance intersect. This analysis conclusively reflects Hejazi's central concern: modern effects do not simply cause crime but, prior to and as a cause thereof, corrupt existing structures of family, marriage, and motherhood.

Endnotes

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1. "Ba taryak jang bayad kard!" [Opium must be fought!] *Payk-e sa'adat-e nesvan* 1:3 (1928), 66.
2. "Jonun-e sor'at" [The madness of speed] *Salnameh-ye Pars* 15 (1940/41), 184; "Ta'lil va taqil-e jara'em" [Explaining the causes and the reduction of crimes] *Nameh-ye shahr bani* 2:9 (1937/38), 15; H. Reza'i, *Bimariha-ye maghz va ravan. Jeld-e sovvom: Bimariha-ye damaghi* [Cerebral and mental diseases. Vol.3: Cerebral diseases] (Tehran: Chapkhaneh-ye daneshgah, n.d., ca. 1957), 123.
3. Qadiseh Hejazi, *Barresi-ye jara'em-e zan dar Iran* [A study of female crime in Iran] (Tehran: Enteshar, 1962). French advisor: Mahmud Shehabi, Preface to Hejazi, *Barresi*, d/h [??]. Criminology: 'A.-H. 'Aliabadi, *Hoquq-e jana'i* (Tehran, n.p., 1955); Sa'id Hekmat, *Ravanshenasi-ye jena'i* (Tehran: Daneshgah-e Melli-ye Iran, 1967); Reza Mazluman, *Jame'ehshenasi-yi keifari* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Daneshgah-e Tehran, 1974).
4. Hejazi, *Barresi*, 125.
5. Idem, 5, 102ff.
6. Haideh Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 72-104. The Shah's and the regime's official view, which allowed for a qualified public role: Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in 20th Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 148f.
7. Hejazi, *Barresi*, 7, 116, 118.
8. Reforms: Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 135-149.
9. Paidar, *Women*, 122.
10. Literature: Afshin Matin-Asgari, "Sacred City Profaned: Utopianism and Despair in Early Modernist Persian Literature", in Rudi Matthee and Beth Baron, eds., *Iran and Beyond* (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 2000), 204.
11. Socio-economics: Habib Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985). Urbanization: Jean-Pierre Digard, Bernard Hourcade and Yann Richard, *L'Iran au XXe Siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 318-327. Politics: Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921* (London:

Lomgman, 2003), 75-146.

12. Moghissi, *Populism*, 80.
13. Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words. The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse: Southern University Press, 1992), especially ch.6: 'Unveiling the Other: Forugh Farrokhzad', 127-152.
14. Dariush Rejali, *Torture and Modernity. Self, Society, and State in Modern Iran* (Boulder: Westview, 1994), 86f.
15. One of the most famous and incisive cultural critiques was Jalal Al-e Ahmad's 1961/62 *Gharbzadegi* [Westoxication]; c.f. Brad Hanson, "The 'Westoxication' of Iran: Depictions and Reactions of Behrangi, Al-e Ahmad, and Shariati" *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 15:1 (1983), 1-23.
16. Hejazi, *Barresi*, 5, 102, 104f.
17. Hejazi, *Barresi*, 125; Moghissi, *Populism*, 82-85.
18. Mahmud Shehabi, Preface to Hejazi, *Barresi*, d/h [??].
19. Hejazi, *Barresi*, 110f.
20. Idem 110ff.
21. Idem, 125, 171.
22. Idem, 125, 172ff.
23. Idem, 122, 171.
24. Idem, 122, 112.
25. Idem, 116. The use of the term *latmeh* may not be accidental: translatable as 'blemish' or 'injury', it carries both moral and physiological connotations.
26. Cyrus Schayegh. Science, medicine, and class in the formation of semi-colonial Iran, 1900s-1940s, (Ph.D. Columbia University, 2004).
27. Hejazi, *Barresi*, 116.
28. Idem, 116f.
29. Idem, 117-119, quote 118.
30. Idem, 118.
31. Link between demographics and hygiene, genetics, and eugenics, and anxiety about slow population growth into the 1930s: Schayegh, Science, ch.5.
32. Hejazi, *Barresi*, 126. She also states that in 1933 and 1934, a total of 43 respectively 170 women were accused of crimes in Tehrani courts, representing 2.1% respectively 10.4% of all accused (idem, 179).
33. Idem, 148.
34. Statistics for the years 1933 and 1934: idem, 179.