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Race, Slavery and Domesticity in Late Qajar Chronicles

This article examines cultural attitudes on race and African slavery in late Qajar chronicles prior to abolition in 1929. In contrast to previous scholarship, Qajar textual sources reveal that elite cultural attitudes were relevant in structuring the social conditions of enslavement in Iran. Visual depictions and narratives about African eunuchs and concubines naturalized the violent acquisition and use of the Other. Slave narratives also bear witness to how such views of African corporeality determined the social worth of eunuchs and concubines in the domestic sphere.

Keywords: Iran; Slavery; Qajar; Eunuchs; Concubinage

> My child, along with myself and other black people were in Muhammad Ahmad Yūhī's house. In the two months that I was there he abused me. I heard he wanted to sell me and my child, so today I escaped from his house. I have brought my child with me along with other black people and I am requesting freedom.
> —Nasībeh[1]

During the late Qajar period, at a moment when the Caucasian slave trade halted, vast numbers of East Africans were taken from their villages in Zanzibar, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and elsewhere and brought mainly as domestic slaves to Iran. Though the expansion of the East African slave trade globally is largely attributed to European demand, it is estimated that between one and two million Africans were exported to Iranian ports throughout the nineteenth century, and two-thirds were women intended for sexual slavery.[2] The treatment of this history has been

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[1]This testimonial, taken by a British lawyer in Iran, stated the following: "Nasībeh, daughter of Mabrūk; age approximately 30 years; name of master, Muhammad Ahmad Yūhī; resident of Lengeh; place of birth, the island of Hendorābī (looks like a Zanzibarian), May 26, 1927." Alipur, *Asnād-e bardeh forūshī*, 278–9.

[2]Lee, "Recovering Biographies of Enslaved Africans," 1. See also by this author "Enslaved African Women in Nineteenth-Century Iran."

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characterized as a victimization vs. agency paradigm, whereby scholars have debated the extent to which slaves could make independent choices.[3] According to Madeline Zilfi, historians wanting to stress agency have falsely concluded that "the system might be seen as not too vicious after all."[4] The fact that some slaves skillfully navigated their roles in "humane niches of slavery," Zilfi maintained, should not come at the expense of exposing slavery for its systemic brutalities. Going further, Zilfi argued that this paradigm tends to ignore the intricate lives of slaves.

It is possible to recover agency without minimizing slavery's institutionalized violence, particularly in the way historians have recovered the humanity of African slaves through their surviving testimonies. Of course this approach relies on critical methods and some imagination given the small number of surviving sources. Furthermore, in reading sources about slaves, such as personal memoirs and chronicles written by Qajar grandees, we can understand how writers determined the social value of African slaves based on their labor function. The study of nineteenth-century slavery requires a familiarity with these important yet equally vexing elite narratives, for they provide otherwise obscured glimpses into and vignettes of slaves' lives while also highly distorting them through a patriarchal lens. While it is nearly impossible to recover their voices in history fully or adequately, reading narratives about slaves—alongside testimonials of the enslaved themselves—allows us to get closer to their lived experiences.

This discussion of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century archival sources, therefore, focuses on how race and gender intersect in Qajar texts in ways that constituted eunuchism and concubinage as socially natural, desirable, and appropriate forms of human bondage. I consider how such writings justified the violent acquisition, imprisonment, and sexual exploitation of the African body within the framework of domesticity.

Background

The study of slavery in Iran has received critical attention as late; however, there is still a dire need for more engagement with race and gender theory.[5] As the most comprehensive study of Iranian slavery to date, Behnaz Mirzai's book *A History of Slavery and Emancipation in Iran 1800–1929* is deserving of significant comment. In her research,

[3]For example, Anthony Lee has addressed the erasure of the African presence in Baha'i histories, and through identifying false assumptions about the inability of slaves to assume a new religious identity, he shows how slave converts to the Baha'i faith—Haji Mobārak and Fezzeh Khānūm—were silenced in religious discourse. Lee, "Half the Household Was African," 29.

[4]Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 96.

[5]Pioneering work by Afsaneh Najmabadi and Janet Afary has been particularly important for understanding women and children in nineteenth-century discourses on sex trafficking. Afsaneh Najmabadi also has demonstrated the centrality of women and gender in Iranian constitutionalist debates by analyzing various accounts of the "Daughters of Quchan incident" in her book *The Story of the Daughters of Quchan*. Janet Afary has also written about the social and juridical dimensions of concubinage using a broad array of sources. See Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*.

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Mirzai argued that slavery in Iran was mild and that racial ideology was less relevant in understanding patterns of enslavement than Iran's proximity to Persian Gulf trade. Her overall position in *A History of Slavery*, it seems, denied both the presence of racial ideology in Qajar Iran as well as the stigma of slavery through what promises to be a closer inspection of indigenous circumstances and external factors, namely the policies of the British Empire. In her literature review, Mirzai briefly alluded to the mutual imbrication of blackness and slavery: "*Siyah* ('black') was the most commonly used term by which enslaved Africans were designated in nineteenth-century manuscripts."[6] The terminology section of her introduction featured a short list of Perso-Arabic terms connoting "slave," "eunuch," or "black." However, as I note throughout this article, her assertion that the words for male slave, *kaka* and *dadeh*, were "respectful" contradicts the common use of epithets during this period (noted below). Nor should the words *gholām* (male slave) and *kanīz* (female slave) be understood as a kind of "domestic servitude," without acknowledging the gender and racial inequalities encoded in such terms.[7]

Slave nomenclatures, in fact, were invoked in the context of ownership. The historical presence of slaves was recorded in purchase agreements, marriage contracts or inheritance (*mehr*) documents. Each slave was assigned a price, and they were often moved from household to household based on the fortunes or misfortunes of others. Slave-owners conceived of African bodies primarily as moveable wealth. Moreover, Mirzai's more general denial about the presence of racism in Iran, as in the claim that "Persian documents generally do not contain reference to racial provenance,"[8] contrast nineteenth-century writers' regular use of ethnic typologies. Documents frequently classified East Africans as "Bombassees," "Habeshees," or "Nubees."[9] These categories led to raiding villages in regions throughout East Africa to supply the slave market, where individual slaves were given roles according to their collective identity, i.e. if their ethnic group was perceived as intelligent, beautiful, or strong.

The contemporary belief that Iran is a race-blind society is based on the logic that, were racial categories significant in Iran, African slaves would not have risen to high positions: "The fluidity of these terms not only indicates that the identity of enslaved people could be transformed, but that they were not confined to a static position within the system and could, in fact, elevate their statuses."[10] This assertion relies on a belief in slaves' "social mobility": i.e. that because some slaves could acquire new roles and degrees of limited access meant that all could do so. Zilfi, on the other hand, refuted this notion: "Slavery may have been of benefit to fortunate indi-

[6] Mirzai, *A History of Slavery*, 24.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 3.

[9] See Floor, "Barda and Barda-dāri."

[10] Mirzai, *A History of Slavery*, 25. In the Ottoman context, Ehud Toledano also urged us not to think of slavery in binary or static ways; however, his point centered on the need to differentiate Ottoman "officeholders" (*kuls*)—whose condition at the time of the *tanzimat* varied considerably—from what he referred to as "real slavery" and more devastating circumstances experienced by other slaves. See Toledano, "Late Ottoman Concepts of Slavery," 483.

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viduals … but the notion of systemic neutrality, much less advantage, is insupportable."[11]

The study of slavery, in addition, lacks a more critical reading of gender. It requires an approach that both confronts the Orientalist tradition of presenting Eastern women as objects needing to be saved by Western modernity, and one that identifies the internal dynamics of power identified by slaves themselves. In the first instance, Mirzai is sensitive to the power imbalance in European representations of slave women when she stated that "the idea that [harem] women were voiceless victims in a misogynist world is utterly a creation of European Orientalists."[12] Similarly, Ehud Toledano reminds us that concubinage "should be put in the context of the generally very sorry state of women in almost all premodern societies."[13] Keeping in mind the broader comparative context, first-hand reports by female slaves themselves cannot be dismissed. It therefore becomes questionable for Mirzai to replace terms like *kanīz* with the euphemism "domestic servitude," or refer to "'*sayfeh*' and '*jariyah*'" as "fluid" terms indicating "the relationship of an enslaved female to her master."[14] If we take Islamic legal discourse only as a starting point, the term "relationship" fails to capture how the master had unrestricted access to her body, since nonconsensual sex or rape was not considered forbidden (*zena*).[15] While we can agree that the tendency in western discourse to reduce women to "voiceless victims" is problematic, slave narratives also remind us how concubinage was a particularly dehumanizing form of "social death" where female slaves had no right to sexual refusal or the choice to have children.[16] However complex or empowering we may find their choices, the abuse slavery engendered formally and informally closes the possibility of "a positive side" even while we valorize individual stories.[17]

[11]Zilfi, *Women and Slavery*, 97.

[12]Mirzai, *History of Slavery*, 114. Partha Chatterjee summarized this problem as a particular manifestation of the civilizing mission, that is, targeting a form of native practice (in this case, concubinage, or in India, *sati*) as a way of "spreading enlightened Western knowledge": "What we must note is that the so-called women's question in the agenda of Indian social reform in the early 19th century was not so much about the specific condition of women within a determinate set of social relations as it was about the political encounter between a colonial state and the supposed "tradition" of a conquered people-a tradition that, as Lata Mani (1986, 1987) has recently shown in her study of the abolition of satidaha [widow burning], was itself produced by colonialist discourse." Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women," 623.

[13]Toledano, *As if Silent and Absent*, 84–5.

[14]Mirzai, *A History of Slavery*, 25.

[15]See, for instance, Ali, "Concubinage and Consent."

[16]For a more thorough discussion within the context of comparative slavery studies, see Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*.

[17]Mirzai, *A History of Slavery*, 114, 210. Refer to Janet Afary's research on the abuse of female slaves in *Sexual Politics*, chapter 2 "Slave concubinage, temporary marriage, and harem wives". I would also like to draw the reader's attention to a highly empathetic treatment of slave biography by Haleh Afshar entitled "Age, Gender and Slavery in and out of the Persian Harem: A Different Story," which does a remarkable job of resisting universalizing terminologies and demonstrating the breadth of human experience through the life of Sonbol Baji, yet still tends to downplay or silence the history of sexual slavery and its impact on other women. I think the main issue here again is the tendency to conflate the experience of a few pri-

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Furthermore, Mirzai's denial of racism throughout her book seems to emanate from presentism, namely the assertion that Iran is a multiethnic nation: "Iranian society was not preoccupied with racial divisions: the experiences of both black and white—enslaved people and free—testifies as much to the vulnerability of as well as opportunities available to all races."[18] She further argued that "blackness" in an Atlantic context "cannot be fit into a Middle East context," and unlike Atlantic slavery, Iranian slavery was more subtle.[19] In no way am I arguing that we should ignore regional divergences or impose universal categories on local histories; however, I object to the way this comparison is used to both advance the claim of Iranian slavery's "mildness" and exonerate the nation-state from its slaving past. The myth of slavery's subtlety has been frequently cited by other historians who almost invariably rely on the authority and casual reflections of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century foreign accounts (Sykes, Polak, and Wills, to name a few), less so Qajar sources or the accounts of slaves themselves. Moreover, rarely do we find such assertions grounded in rigorous comparative work. Mirzai's contention that Iranian slavery was categorically different or milder also rests on the nationalist assertion that racial divisions were imposed by foreigners. In one section, she stated that Arab chiefs alone were responsible "for perpetuating the centuries-long slave trade."[20] This emphasis on the "supply-side" of the slave economy emphasizes slavery's foreign origins by displacing blame onto Arabs.[21] Minoo Moallem and Roshanak Kheshti similarly have shown how a "racialization strategy" in modern Iranian discourse "functioned as a handmaiden to Iran's modernist project through a historically revisionist insistence upon Iranian origins in the Aryan race."[22]

As I argue below, Qajar attitudes about the African Other had social consequences.[23] Cultural attitudes produced the demand for male African eunuchs

vileged women (i.e. in the Qajar court) with the majority of women who were repeatedly bought and sold among Qajar households, some of whom were as young as twelve at the time of sexual servitude.

[18]Mirzai, *A History of Slavery*, 210.

[19]Ibid., 9.

[20]Ibid., 59.

[21]Ibid., 92. She asserts this point again in her discussion of slavery's ancient origins, where slavery was imposed on an ancient Iranian Zoroastrian "nation" by Arab conquerors: "Iran was occupied by invading Arabs, who replaced the official Zoroastrian religion with Islam and relegated the indigenous Persians to second-class citizens … a central feature of the expanding Islamic Arab Empire of the Abbasids was the policy of enslavement."

[22]See Roshanak Kheshti's discussion of Minoo Moallem's work in "Review: Can the Memoirist Speak?," 58. For a thorough discussion of the legacies of Aryanism in Iran see Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *Self-Orientalization and Dislocation*.

[23]Alessandro Stanziani noted it is important to point out the difference between domestic bondage and slavery, which keeping in mind "multiple criteria for comparing labor conditions and legal status in different historical contexts" stated that they could not be seen in the same light since domestic bondage "involved reciprocal obligations, voluntary submission, temporary bondage, and still other kindred phenomena that would seem to exclude them from being defined as slavery in a strict sense." Stanziani, "Slavery and Bondage in Central Asia and Russia," 65. This is also a way of differentiating the unique social status of African slaves in Iran versus other minority groups in terms of their "war captive" status.

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or nannies and were rooted in categories of difference based on race, gender and sex.[24] Even though Mirzai advanced that "race and color were by no means the only factors influencing slave trading and owning patterns for the simple fact that there were non-black enslaved people in Iran too," this statement is used *ipso facto* as a way of dismissing anti-black bias.[25] While it is beyond the scope of this study to deal with this issue thoroughly here, we can acknowledge that the mere presence of non-African slaves did not preclude different or worse treatment for Africans within the social hierarchy, whether or not that difference was ascribed to skin color, perceived place of origin or religious status. For example, in Zilfi's work there are quite a few primary sources that describe the particularly low status of sub-Saharan Africans within Middle Eastern slavery who were relegated to more menial work, and how being perceived as "darker-skinned" translated into fewer advantages and difficulties especially for black female slaves.[26]

To begin this analysis, revisionist historians in the past decade have turned their attention to enduring racial myths and attitudes in modernist writings.[27] Reza Zia-Ebrahimi has shown that writers such as Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā, Mīrzā Fathʿalī Ākhūndzādeh, and Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī by the late 1890s theorized an "Iranian nation pitted against its Semitic other," which he called a "racist endeavor to identify an absentee scapegoat to be reviled."[28] Zia-Ebrahimi maintained that reformers invented the modern notion of a pre-Islamic Aryan nation by vilifying Arabs, Turks, and Mongols. However, there is little if any mention of how cultural stereotypes toward people of African descent in Iran—ubiquitous in cultural figures like *Hāji Fīrūz* featured in an indigenous black minstrel tradition—factors into the rise of nationalism before slavery was banned.[29] Moreover, one historian insisted that "popular and comical characters" like Kākā Siyāh prove that slavery was tolerable since Africans have had some "marginal influence on Iranian culture," a view that does not take into account the fact that such figures were objects of ridicule and mockery on account of their simplicity or ignorance.[30] The author also

[24]The Quranic injunction against bodily mutilation for Muslims partly justified (but did not necessarily cause) the practice of seeking castrated labor from exogenous sources for domestic work, primarily Africa.

[25]Mirzai, *A History of Slavery*, 21–2.

[26]Zilfi, *Women and Slavery*, 106, 118–19, 128.

[27]In a similar vein, among Ottoman reformers, some resisted European "cultural interference" because of abolition, and others acknowledged the "painful tragedy" of slavery. Toledano, "Late Ottoman Concepts of Slavery," 493.

[28]For a detailed discussion of Ākhūndzādeh and Kermānī's writings, and his devastating critique of contemporary scholars' apology for anti-Arab racism, see Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism*. He has also argued, like Moallem and Kheshti, that the reason for the salience of nationalist frameworks in contemporary academic discourse is partly due to "strategies designed to manage the trauma of the encounter with Europe."

[29]Inroads have been made in the study of *siyāhbāzī* by a new generation of Iranian scholars, including Parisa Vaziri, who presented a paper entitled "Screening Siah Bazi: Performative Legacies of Indian Ocean World Slavery" at the University of California, Irvine (spring 2018).

[30]Floor, "Barda and Barda-dāri."

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suggested that because "[African slaves] often forgot their own languages and adopted Islam" this was an example of successful "assimilation."[31]

In the following discussion I consider how late Qajar writings framed Africanness and blackness through the lens of domesticity. In Qajar sources we can track the emergence of a public discourse on the African body even before Aryan nationalism was solidified during the Pahlavi period (1925–79). I suggest below that Qajar perceptions of racial otherness structured the labor economy. Not only was the upper-class need for domestic labor a precondition for enslavement, it was incumbent on elites to justify *whose bodies* were suited for slavery.

In texts written mainly by slave-owners and government officials we can glean elite cultural attitudes pertaining to race and slavery. Qajar writers promoted a general position on the suitability of black bodies to protect and maintain the elite household, which perpetuated the dangerous and lethal practice of castration.[32] My analysis employs H. Alexander Welcome's insights on slavery, namely how white society's "identity-thinking" led to the alienation, oppression and appropriation of the African body.[33] Transcending a white–black binary, Welcome's theory captures how dominant groups produced discourses on racialized bodies. From the vantage point of slavemasters, African slaves were valued according to the usefulness of their bodies to perform work, and in terms of their collective identity.[34] Not only was African labor available for domestic import, Qajar elites continued the longstanding practice of African eunuchism and concubinage until the twentieth century based on the belief that they were a necessary part of the domestic household.

Narratives of African Corporeality

Various stories and anecdotes highlight how racialized thinking led to the restriction of and control over black bodies. In a report written in 1912, Mahdī Qolī Hedāyat[35] recalled the following story about two rebellious slaves:

> In Sievert's time,[36] two black *kākās* caused their master a lot of trouble and left his house. They had joined the service of the state police [*zhāndārmerī-i dowlatī*]; one

[31]He stated that "They spoke Persian (although with an accent) and forgot their own languages and adopted Islam, thereby completing the assimilation process." Ibid.

[32]In what appears to be an exceptional story for the time, a young boy slave from East Africa was spared the fate of so many others of his kin. According to a nineteenth-century French travel account recorded in Qajar chronicles, just as the boy was about to be castrated and sent off to Persia, the man holding the sword sneezed. The swordsman interpreted the sneeze as a bad omen, grew scared, and the boy was spared and admitted into the Qajar army. Afzal al-Molk, *Afzal al-Tavārīkh*, 352.

[33] Welcome, "Our Bodies for Ourselves." There are other scholars in addition to Welcome who consider Adorno's work in light of feminist theory. See, for instance, Leeb, "Toward a Theoretical Outline of the Subject."

[34]Welcome, "Our Bodies for Ourselves," 91.

[35]MahdīQolī Hedāyat was a German-trained provincial governor of Shiraz.

[36]Sievert was an officer during the period of the Swedish-trained government gendarmerie, 1910–21.

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> of them had attacked Sievert, and was sent to Isfahan, the other killed a *sayyed* in broad daylight and was arrested by the police. Two other murders had been committed by the state police and the people were frightened. They gathered at the government building and sought punishment until I was forced to close the gates. I consulted with the courts and the ruling for punishment was issued.[37]

The author makes it clear that in leaving the master's house and joining the army, two former slaves fell into a path of violence and destruction. Hedāyat also demonstrates his ambivalence about the social status of slaves once they lose connection to the domestic sphere, the family, and the master.

Other reports drew similar conclusions about so-called "rebellious" slaves. In one example, Nāser al-Dīn Shāh's chief court eunuch, Hājī Mobārak, committed murder during an encampment en route to Tehran:

> Hājī Mobārak, the chief eunuch who was a maker of ministers, and little got by without his intervention, also went to Amīn Al-Molk's tent with the others. In order to pass the time they began to play backgammon and cards. Yahyā Khān, the son of Mīrzā Nabī Khān, who was a court insider, began playing with Hājī Mobārak. Kākā [Hājī Mobārak] had drunk a bit too much, and over the matter of points and turns, unfairly wanted to impose his way. Yahyā Khān, who had not drunk as much as Hājī Mobārak, and did not trust his closeness to the king as much as Hājī Mobārak did, and who was weaker but wiser than him, gently expressed his different point of view to the Āghā bāshī. Kākā exploded from his audacity. He went from aggressive speech to outright cursing.[38]

According to the king's travelogue *Safar'hā-ye Nāser al-Dīn Shāh beh Qom*, Hājī Mobārak grew progressively angrier and fatally stabbed Yahyā Khān in the forehead, and threatened anyone who went for a doctor or medicine that they would meet the same fate. Pāshā Khān reportedly had no other choice than to call upon the king resting in his tent in order to stop the violence of someone he cursed as "this black Zanzibarian."[39] It should be noted that the Deh Khodā lexicographical dictionary defined *barzangī* as a pejorative term referring to Africans—"Zanzibarian: of very tall stature, long-mustache, ill-mannered, ignorant, and inclined towards lowly desires [lust]." Nāser al-Dīn Shāh ordered Hājī Mobārak to be executed. Despite having achieved such a high position as a slave at the royal court, he was not spared.

Ḥājī Mobārak's story epitomized larger concerns over the stability of male slaves, even if the king's scribe invoked this anecdote to illustrate the shah's ability to deliver justice. Often when eunuchs are mentioned outside of the domestic context they are typically described as perpetrators, fugitives, or victims of violence. In an

[37] Hedāyat, *Khāterāt va khatarāt*, 268. Later, after his execution, a member of the army returned and went to great lengths to reclaim his body from the justice department.

[38] Nāser al-Dīn Shāh, *Safar'hā-ye Nāser al-Dīn Shāh beh Qom*, 27.

[39] Ibid.

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account involving an allegedly drunk and violent black slave written in 1889, the author claimed that a slave waiting in an alleyway attacked the chief physician of a local notable and stabbed him in the chest. The author provided no reason for the murder.[40] One Qajar writer also described a harrowing account of a fifteen-year-old black slave who was accused of sodomizing a four-year-old boy. Relatives of the boy petitioned the chamberlain to punish him, and so he decided that the authorities should beat him, cut off his ear, tie him up and parade his mutilated body throughout the bazaar. This story of a black slave transgressing sexual norms seems to have been included for its shock value rather than its commonness.[41]

Qajar grandees also recounted stories of slave women, breaking norms by escaping captivity. According to ʿAyn al-Salṭaneh, it was too common for blacks to escape, and he stated that they had "no shame."[42] He recounted how the black female slave of Golīn Khānūm fled her home during the month of Ramadan. After days of investigation they discovered that she had found refuge at the dwelling of a local mujtahid, Sayyed ʿAbd Allāh, who refused to return the slave and her four-year-old son, Bashīr. Since homes of the ʿulamā were legal sanctuaries, he refused to answer their repeated demands. When the family threatened to petition the shah he eventually complied and returned her to the authorities, though he gave up her son reluctantly after the boy was discovered.[43] In addition, other stories of people fleeing slavery show how the ʿulamā provided cover for fugitives. In 1901 a eunuch who was highly coveted by a local notable due to his work ethic fled his attempted abduction, and together with the master and family, sought sanctuary at a local religious shrine.[44]

These stories suggest how Qajar narratives tend to present runaway slaves as shirking their "rightful" place, and fleeing slavery as a breach of the rule of law or custom. Within the framework of domesticity, eunuchs were tender caregivers and loyal servants, but when they fled, they were criticized for being troublesome and angry men who disrupted a legitimate system. In addition, seemingly benign physical descriptions of slaves underscored their potential threat. Slaves were presented in foreboding, masculine terms; writers used adjectives such as "thick-necked," "brutish," "oafish," and "ferocious-looking" (*mahīb*) to describe black slaves.[45] In terms of dress, slaves were described wearing "masculine clothes" (*lebās-i mardāneh*). Sometimes descriptions of dress had a neutral connotation, however, the particular

[40] Sīrjānī, *Vaqāyeʿ-e Ettefāqīyeh*, 329.

[41] I'm not certain if this was an unusual punishment for *liwāt*, as it appears he received a heavy punishment. In another reference, the sister of a slave complained to the local governor that her family never received money (blood price) for the death of her slain brother, who had tried to protect his master from a violent and drunk son, suggesting that laws were applied unevenly.

[42] "All black people be damned. They never fail to escape. They have no shame." Sīrjānī, *Vaqāyeʿ-e Ettefāqīyeh*, 329.

[43] Qahramān Mīrzā Salur, *Rūznāmeh-ye Khāterāt-i ʿAyn al-Saltaneh*, 917.

[44] Sīrjānī, *Vaqāyeʿ-e Ettifāqīyeh*, 647.

[45] Nāser al-Dīn Shāh, *Ruznāmeh-ye Khāterāt-e Nāser al-Din Shāh Dar Safar-e Dovvom-e Farangestān*, 99.

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language reflected a normative way of describing slave corporeality where black bodies were essentialized (i.e. the figure of the "Zanzibarian").

Qajar-era writers often assigned masculine attributes to slaves, in contrast to European sources that invariably feminized eunuchs. Furthermore, in the context of entertainment, elite views of black performers were more gender-fluid. In one account, a famous black female entertainer named Hājī Qadam Shād was celebrated for wearing "unconventionally" masculine attire (*kot va shalvār-e mardāneh*) under a chador. She was said to brilliantly imitate regional accents[46] and don a wide variety of ethnic attire—Kurdish, Arab, Shirazi, Afghani, Kabuli and the like. Not only were gender and ethnic identities open in the context of theater and performance, black slaves were said to have mingled socially with greater ease. In one recollection, a man travelling in Russian Samarqand reported seeing a black slave and a white woman dancing: "this black and white couple were very beautiful and danced well."[47]

Though the realm of entertainment featured multiple gender performativities, outside of this realm there were concerns over racial transgression. One report discussed how a woman sitting on a bench at a pharmacy warned a dapper young man—a dandy dressed head to toe in white—not to sit next to her to avoid being arrested by police. She chides him saying, "Look, I am black. This is not Europe. A stylish man shouldn't be sitting next to a black woman."[48] When a man consorted with a black woman freely in public it stirred anxieties, especially since "the enslaved Black female body was a location of both chaos and desire."[49]As this story suggests, though patterns of enslavement differed from an apartheid or Jim Crow notion of a "color line," the freedom of movement of black women was curtailed due to what may be interpreted as their sexual power.

In sum, whereas racial constructions in Atlantic slavery differed from a geographical/religious designation of difference, Qajar slavery held similar conceptions of "blackness" as "otherness" that functioned to preserve and maintain social hierarchies. Qajar writers were regularly compelled to identify African slaves according to their blackness: as "black" (*siyāh*), "black-skinned," or explicitly as *black* slaves (*kākā siyāh*), which points to how racial identification was an important marker of social position. Moreover, racial epithets signifying a slave's Africanness—i.e. as a "Zanzibarian" or *barzangi*—perpetuated the belief about their exogenous origins and lower social status of slaves.

Qajar reports and memoirs frequently employed prejudicial language as minor and major justifications for African enslavement, pointing to a cultural milieu where African slaves were regarded as outsiders brought to Iran. Perhaps an interesting exception lies in a religious text written by ʿAbd Allāh Mostowfī. In a memoir entitled *Sharh-e Zendagānī-ye Man* Mostowfī recounted a story he read about man who

[46]One accent was referred to as a "kākā siyāh" accent.
[47]Qahramān Mīrzā Sālur, *Rūznāmeh-ye Khāṭerāt-i ʿAyn al-Saltaneh*, 1717.
[48]Ibid., 7146.
[49]Scheiwiller, *Liminalities of Gender and Sexuality*, 179.

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questioned his wife's faithfulness based on the skin color and hair "tangled like wool" of their newborn child:

> I think I read in the *Kāfi*[50] that once upon a time a man and his wife came to see the Prophet. The man put on the ground in front of the Prophet the child that his wife had given birth to, whose skin was black and whose hair was tangled like wool. He said, "What am I supposed to do with this woman who has given a child like this?" The Prophet said, "Have you observed any infractions in your wife up till now?" The man replied, "No. She was always at home even before her pregnancy, where there is no chance for betrayal. But what can I do with such clear and present evidence?" The Prophet asked, "Have you considered the possibility that one of your forefathers had taken an Abyssinian wife?" The man said, "There are no Abyssinians among my ancestors as far back as I can ascertain." The Prophet asked again, "What about in the depths of your parentage and pedigree? Can you be absolutely sure that none of your ancestors were Abyssinians?" The man said, "How can I make such a claim?" The Prophet concluded, "Then take heed from God, and do not doubt your wife in whom you have observed no infractions and cannot conceive any possibility of betrayal by her." So the wife and the husband left the Great Prophet joyfully.[51]

This religious text credits the Prophet Muhammad with acknowledging African ancestry, where a husband was persuaded to give his wife the benefit of the doubt. In lieu of the analysis I have provided, this story is remarkable for the way it encouraged the reader to subvert racial categories.

As a whole, African slavery was justified based on material and religious rationales. A text written in 1901 by the Iranian foreign minister, in response to a British letter, suggested that African slavery was a civilizing project:

> Most [slaves] are servants and receive pay. Certainly this life is better for them than survival in the state of savagery [*vahshiyyat*]. Also, those Muslims who bring these kinds of people transport them from the world of savagery to civilization. If it is a man, they give him a wife, if it's a woman, they give her to a husband. They give them a house and a life. Their training is not at all comparable to those African captives who are bought and sold and are forced to work by the whip.[52]

Government officials also justified slavery on the grounds that it was beneficial for slaves to convert to Islam. In a letter sent by the Iranian embassy in Istanbul to the Iranian foreign ministry on 22 April 1882, an official had accused the British of trying to stop the spread of Islam through abolition.[53]

[50]This refers to the earliest text of the Shiite Hadith canon by Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb Kulaynī (d. c. 941).

[51]'Abd Allah Mostowfi, *Sharh-e Zendagānī-ye Man*, 320, n. 40.

[52]"Dar bāb-e kharīd va forūsh-e kanīz va gholām," in Alipur, *Asnād-e bardeh forūshī*, 174.

[53]"Sefārat-e Eslāmbol dar bāb-e sūrat-e mo'āhedeh-e gholām va kanīz-e dowlat-e Osmānī va Engilīs," in Alipur, *Asnād-e bardeh forūshī*, 57–8.

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Labor and Slave Identity

The narrow framing of slave identity undercuts claims about slaves' free "mobility." In premodern Central Asia and Iran, however, a number of exceptional slaves achieved prominent positions in the military, in the royal court of Mamluk Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, or Safavid Iran. According to one scholar, premodern slavery fell into two broad categories: military slavery (such as in the case of the Ottoman janissaries) and non-military slavery (domestic servants, merchants and artisans, plantation slaves), a testament to the wide-ranging definition of slavery in the premodern world.[54]

Variability in the types of work urban slaves performed before the mid-nineteenth century was a feature of the pre-industrial economy. Textual sources attest to the number of trades slaves contributed to as entertainers and dancers, chefs, food preparers and servers, police and army officers, carriage drivers, coppersmiths, tailors, butchers, and hunters. Some slaves were well-versed in Persian and even tutored elite women in all-female *taʿziyeh* performances.[55] Unlike the antebellum South, in theory it was possible for black slaves to occupy most professions though by and large it appears that the majority were low in rank or social prestige, and certainly in financial compensation. They shared these professions with slaves from different points of origin, primarily Turkic slaves, not to mention domestic servants. By the mid-nineteenth century loss of Qajar territories in the north led to a greater dependence on African labor. There are also reports of people trafficked from Iran to other places by Afghan traders, and eunuchs brought to Iran from India, as well as many Kurdish slaves at the court of Nāser al-Dīn Shāh.[56] British officers warned their officials not to think of slavery in Persia in terms of skin color, since it included "negroes, enslaved Mekranis [Baluchis], indigenous persons."[57]

[54] Marmon, "Domestic Slavery in the Mamluk Empire." Baki Tezcan has written two interesting pieces on the premodern period in this regard. The first article, written in 2007, traces the roots of anti-blackness in seventeenth-century Ottoman texts relating to one very influential eunuch's rise to power. His racial origins were called into question on account of his patronage connections to other black eunuchs and access to power outside of the ʿulama nobility. In another article, Tezcan noted that variations on the "Curse of Ham," which justified black enslavement retrospectively, were often politically motivated to discredit the role of black eunuchs in Ottoman politics. See Tezcan, "Dispelling the Darkness: The Politics of 'Race'." Also refer to his most recent work on this topic "Dispelling the Darkness of the *Halberdier's Treatise*."

[55] See Mottahedeh, "Karbala Drag Kings and Queens," 80. Mottahedeh elaborated that "Literate castrates would go to Muin al-Baka's home and learn the various lines by heart. They would also learn the musical scores for each part. The eunuchs would search the andaruns (lit. interiors, or females-only spaces in homes) and harems and collect a variety of female mullahs and then teach them their designated lines for the all-female performances. The eunuchs themselves would perform the music onstage and at certain times a blind kamancheh player, known by the title 'Nadman-i koor,' would also get onstage to play the traditional 19th-century Persian string instrument."

[56] See Alipur, *Asnād-e bardeh forūshī*, 270–1.

[57] "Expenses Incurred as a Result of Slaves Taking Refuge in Consulates and Agencies," 215.

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Even though male slaves held different professions, their intrinsic worth was presented in terms of their labor. In ʿAyn al-Saltaneh's memoirs, he wrote affectionately about the black female slave Tāzeh Gol (Rosebud) who attended school with him as a young child. According to his memoir, among her praiseworthy attributes was her command of Persian, willingness to take the brunt of punishment in his place for *his* poor behavior, and cooking well in spite of having very little experience. Incidentally, he noted that she took offense to anyone calling her a slave ("kanīz"). In direct contrast, Tāzeh Gol is compared with her husband, Changīz Khān, whom 'Ayn al-Salṭanah referred to as a "dirty, lazy drunk"[58] and a "six rib."[59] ʿAli Akbar Dehkhodā, in his lexicography of Persian (*Loghatnāmeh-ye Dehkhodā*), defined "six rib" as an epithet meaning "stubborn" and applied exclusively to people of African descent.

In addition to memoirs, Qajar photography presented slave identity in terms of race and labor. Black slaves were prominent in photographs depicting affluent family life. In the British Library's archive, "Faces and Places in Iran: Iranian Photography at the Turn of the 19th Century," late Qajar-era portraits of African slaves show them posing with young boys, infants, or children, in front of homes, manicured gardens, or studio backdrops. In one collection of photographs from Arāk, a sitting black servant holds a small infant boy dressed stiffly in a suit and fez in his lap, with another servant sitting to his right and an older white servant boy to his left. The photograph contained the inscription "ʿAbbās Mīrzā ʿAzod in the arms of his own *laleh*."[60] The scene shows the *laleh* as a child's benevolent protector, and per the inscription, "his own *laleh*" denotes belonging and ownership.

The common trope of the dutiful black servant, discussed in Pedram Khosronejad's collection entitled *Qajar African Nannies*, referenced a devoted slave figure similar to the Uncle Tom of the antebellum South.[61] Slaves were bound to a dominant visual discourse that "[reified] multiple types of bodies in particular types of bodies," in this case, bodies that were supposed to nurture and protect the elite household.[62] In "The Body and the Archive," Allan Sekula theorized that photography introduced an "entire social terrain" where "every portrait implicitly took its place within a social and moral hierarchy."[63] The staging of black *kākā*s in Qajar photography thus determined their place as caregivers or providers within the social hierarchy. At the same time, Staci Gem Scheiwiller reminds us how Naseri slave portraiture also revealed agency since "the sitter also exhibited some control … outside the photograph."[64]

[58]Qahraman Mirza Salur, *Rūznāmeh-ye Khāterāt-eʿAyn al-Salṭanah*, 1752.

[59]Other members of his family are described in terms of their professions as coppersmiths and tailors.

[60]"*Laleh*" refers to a male nanny.

[61] Khosronejad, *Qajar African Nannies*. In comparison, long after slavery officially ended in the US female domestic servants faced abuse by their employers and were forced into a punitive system of economic and sexual exploitation, along with social segregation. The conflation of domestic work with sexual slavery, the home, and public space as a man's sexual rights over black female bodies, completely uprooted the asexual or sexually undesirable "mammy" myth.

[62]Zackodnik, "The Green-Backs of Civilization," 122.

[63]Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," 10.

[64]Scheiwiller, *Liminalities of Gender and Sexuality*, 184, 188–9.

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Concubinage and the Myth of "Mobility"

Textual and visual sources demonstrate how the desire for black slave labor was cultivated among the aristocratic classes. For African female slaves, even if their status could, in principle, change, it did not mean that higher status was easily attainable or permanent. According to Janet Afary, in written law permanent wives (*ʿaqdī* wives) had better status because they could inherit money, and receive *mehr* and other financial allowances, while a female *kanīz* was barely provided a living. Concubines were not entitled to the same rights of sexual refusal, sexual satisfaction, or children as held by other women under Islamic law.[65] Their role within the family could change; she might become a temporary wife for a specific period of time and be given some financial compensation along with her children if the master acknowledged paternity. Some women who became temporary wives reverted to household servants. There are also rare cases where female slaves married their masters and became permanent legal wives, or married other slaves. Legal jurists intended to establish paternity, and thus the children of slavemasters were free and in theory could inherit property.[66] This released the child as property of the father.[67]

Since women could own property under Islamic law, wealthy women also owned slaves and complicated static notions of family and slavery. Slaves could be part of a woman's *mahr* or debt that the groom owed to his wife even in the event of divorce. In an 1891 marriage contract between Gowhar Malek Khānūm and Mīrzā Bāqer Khān, the total amount of her wedding package was stipulated at 1,000 tomans—200 earmarked for the bride, and 100 for the gift of a Qurʿan and a male and female slave. The remaining 700 was a promissory debt to the bride.[68] Incidentally, in other Qajar marriage contracts, the price of a female slave ranged from 40 to 70 toman.[69] It should be noted that unlike slave documents in the American colo-

[65]See Afary, *Sexual Politics*, 58.

[66]Zilfi (*Women and Slavery*) maintains that in practice this was extremely difficult.

[67]Shaun Marmon has shown that in the reasoning of one Islamic legal scholar, both marriage and slavery implied ownership over the body, and that marriage was "ownership of the [wife's] sexual organ." On the other hand, divorce relinquished the husband's rights over the wife's womb and his contingent legal responsibilities to her children. Similarly, manumission was the release of ownership over the slave's physical body. Marmon, "Domestic Slavery in the Mamluk Empire," 18.

[68]See *Marriage Contract between Gowhar Malek Khānūm and Mīrzā Bāqer Khān, 1891*.

[69]The following data was taken from a number of slave contracts available in the Harvard digital archive "Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran":

1794—a female slave was worth 6 tomans
1825—a female slave was valued at 21 tomans
1854—a male (*gholām*) and female (*jāriyeh*) slave was appraised at 50 tomans each
1862—"two Abyssinian slaves" amounted to the combined price of 25 tomans
1867, 1859—in two different contracts, a single female slave was 40 tomans
1870—a slave and a male servant were worth 80 tomans
1879—a "female Ethiopian slave" was 40 tomans
1909—a contract listed a female slave at 70 tomans.

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nies, which only listed slaves by their age and gender, Qajar slave documents sometimes included slaves' given names.

Slave women, and in some cases young boys, were tied to a sexual labor system. According to one male slave-owner, African slave women were preferable because of their perceived unspoiled "innocence" compared with slaves of other backgrounds.[70] Female slaves assumed nearly all household responsibilities as well as many of the duties of childrearing. In the memoirs of Tāj al-Saltaneh, daughter of Nāser al-Dīn Shāh, she describes the many jobs performed by female slaves, such as "the cradle-rocker," "room attendant," "purse attendant," and "clothes washer."[71] As head of household management, Qajar women with considerable means regarded their slaves and servants not only signs of their wealth, social standing, or leisure, but also considered them part of an extended family they could rely on for companionship and protection. Conversely, Tāj al-Saltaneh wrote about the poor treatment of slaves by their mistresses:

> In cold or rainy weather I would see the servants toiling and slaving away in their scanty clothing, rewarded only by adverse comments from their mistresses and rebuked by them for no good reason. This grieved me tremendously and left me heartsick, and I would ask myself: "What difference is there between them and the ladies, except that the latter wear satin dresses and God has chosen to favor them with worldly blessings? … So where is the distinction? Where is the superiority? Why all this harshness and force? I don't understand.[72]

Tāj al-Saltaneh's account captures early modernist reflections on the daily abuse that defined domestic slavery. Behnaz Mirzai acknowledged that female concubines "were subject to the vagaries of their masters";[73] however, she insisted on the overall good treatment of female slaves by citing a book published in 1891 by C.J. Wills. Wills had once written that "the slaves in Persia have what Americans call a good time; well fed, well clothed, treated as spoiled children, given the lightest work, and often given in marriage to a favorite son, or taken as a 'segah,' or concubine, by her master himself."[74] Wills implied that a concubine, described in his own words as an object passed from father to son, was part of some elite selection process rather that what we now identify as sexual violence.[75] Without questioning this account,

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[70]In a text written by Mīrzā Ahmad Khān Kārgozār on 20 January 1872 to the Iranian foreign ministry in Bushehr, he stated that African women were better *kanīz*es for their perceived innocence: "Since one cannot get a *kanīz* who is trainable and faultless in Tehran, attaining that is easy at the ports in Bushehr and Bandar Abbas. Therefore please purchase two or three young *kanīz* that are trainable but are not household born or native and send them." Alipur, *Asnād-e bardeh forūshī*, 159.

[71]Tāj al-Saltaneh, *Khāterāt-e Tāj al-Saltaneh*, 8.

[72]Amanat, *Crowning Anguish*, 160.

[73]Mirzai, *A History of Slavery*, 19.

[74]Ibid,, 97–8.

[75]This very same 1891 testimonial by Wills is also quoted in *Encyclopedia Iranica* as proof of the good treatment of slaves: "[Eunuchs and *kanīz*es] were the most trusted members of the household, and they were treated well … Wills 326–327." Mahdavi, "Qajar Dynasty xii: The Qajar-Period Household."

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Mirzai uses it as evidence for how "some [slaves] enjoyed high status"; "enslaved females could even enjoy freedom in public"; "masters were required to treat their enslaved people humanely."[76] Her position relies heavily on Wills' nineteenth-century account, and the assumption that because Islamic legal texts provided limited rights to slaves, this translated into legal and social freedoms.

The "construction of the native" in accounts like Wills' are overwhelming written by privileged white men who regarded the lives of enslaved women as a "good time." Colonial accounts are notorious for describing the deviant sexual lives of Persians, which invariably included casual observations about concubinage. Contemporary scholars, moreover, have also unwittingly reproduced such ideas. B.D. Hopkins, while carefully discussing concepts of slavery in Central Asia and Afghanistan and attempting to recover agency for female slaves, still fell into this trap in minimizing the impact of sexual assault: "Yet the status of enslaved women varied widely, ranging from domestic servants occasionally raped by their masters to pampered concubines."[77] Hopkins created a distorted picture of sexual slavery where he suggested a life of luxury was an easily attainable reality. He restated this position in his later analysis:

> While one need be careful not to uncritically digest pro-bondage arguments about benefits to the slaves themselves, it must be recognized that for many concubines, their enslaved position signified a step up in the world. Only the richest households could afford to support concubines (as opposed to domestic servants), who often heralded from poverty-stricken areas where their families sold daughters into slavery out of economic necessity … Slavery thus presented families a viable economic and social strategy of survival, and sometimes even improvement.[78]

In this section, Hopkins explains the dire social realities that led to forced enslavement. His conclusion, however, rests on a generalization about how concubinage for African women represented a "step up in the world."[79] Part of the problem lies with his reliance on English sources (and few Persian sources in translation). In addition, Hopkins' occlusion of African slavery in Iran, in which slaves were acquired by raiding and forced abduction, and his misjudgment about the physical and psychological toll incurred by sexual slavery, makes it doubtful whether or not women and boys would have preferred this life to hunger. Quite the contrary, testimonials by runaway female slaves speak to the brutalities of the system and why they risked escape. They yield insight into the unbelievable ways that women resisted their abuse and imprison-

[76]Mirzai, *A History of Slavery*, 19, 98.

[77]Hopkins, "Race, Sex and Slavery," 644. Hopkins also asserted elsewhere that slavery in Iran was "less physically abusive" without providing adequate evidence, and merely contrasts this position with the known "harsh plantation-style slavery" of the Atlantic; in other parts of his article, particularly his methodology section, he emphasizes the comparability of different slave societies and the "commonalities of those experiences." Ibid., 638.

[78]Ibid., 660–1.

[79]Ibid., 660.

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ment. Janet Afary has written about an African slave girl sold in Mecca who suffered years of rape and abuse at the hands of an Iranian merchant.[80] Matt Hopper has also written a moving portrait of the slave girl "Salama," who fled and was rescued on a boat en route to Zanzibar where she was about to be sold to slave traders in the Persian Gulf.[81]

In addition, a series of exchanges involving a woman named Saʿīdeh, a slave-owner, Abol Qāsem, a government official in Shiraz, the Iranian foreign minister, and the British consul general, provides a rare glimpse into the journey of one woman to claim her freedom. After Saʿīdeh fled her captivity in 1904, Abol Qāsem wrote to the Iranian foreign ministry in Tehran and demanded that they return her. He claimed that she had fled to the British consul after he punished her. He provided testimonials from witnesses verifying that she was his legal "wife" and "Nūbī."[82] The merchant reported that he had gone to the imam and the secretary of the British consul, who had investigated his claim, told him that the *kanīz* was not his wife. The British consul then petitioned the Iranian foreign minister, Moshīr al-Dowleh, to issue manumission papers for Saʿīdeh and another escaped slave named Jamīleh.[83] The merchant cited injury to his personal honor in a subsequent letter: "All the people of the region, namely great men, the nobility, and the great ʿulamā, are aware of this matter, and so this is the cause of my embarassment."[84] In another letter, he asked the government to issue a ruling so that "the British Consul might return the *kanīz* to me so that my honor may not be further destroyed."[85] Advocating on the merchant's behalf, a government agent in Shiraz asked the foreign office in Tehran to issue a ruling so that most "*kanīz* and *khājehsarā gholāms* will not get to a state in which they would take the property of their owners and [seek refuge] at the consulate. The majority consider the *kanīzes* to be their wives, and according to the law of the sacred *sharīʿat*, they are *molk-e yamīn* and count as wives."[86] In a later document, this official warned the British consul general: "They might [the kanīzes] take refuge with the ʿulamā."[87]

Saʿīdeh's story reveals how the British challenged the legality of slave marriage on the grounds that since slavery was illegal, the merchant broke the law for keeping slaves and should therefore be punished. The Iranian foreign ministry requested after 26 September 1904 provisions for a *fatvā* (Islamic decree) that would

[80]Ibid., 661. Afary also appears to support this claim when she noted how foreign accounts confirmed "the benign treatment of Iran's urban slaves," though she balanced this perspective by offering contrary evidence later in her analysis. See Afary, *Sexual Politics of Modern Iran*, 53–4.

[81]Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, vii.

[82]Document no. 3, "Testimony [Esteshhād]," in Alipur, *Asnād-e bardeh forūshī*, 237.

[83]The foreign minister later wrote to the British embassy saying that they would reject Jamilah's manumission request because if she was pregnant she was not a slave and could not be manumitted. Document no. 37, "Letter of Foreign Ministry to the British Embassy Regarding Manumission Papers," in Alipur, *Asnād-e bardeh forūshī*, 264.

[84]Document no. 10, "Petition to the Foreign Minister (Moshir al-Dawla)," in ibid., 245.

[85]Document no. 6, "Petition to Moshīr al-Dowleh (Foreign Minister)," in ibid., 242.

[86]Document no. 9, "Memorandum," in ibid., 244.

[87]"Memorandum," in ibid., 244.

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negate a marriage if a slave was purchased before this date. It stipulated that if the owner of a female slave wanted to marry her, he had to free her first. Moshīr al-Dowleh told the Shirazi official that if Abol Qāsem has followed the law, and performed the marriage in this manner, then he should inform them so that they could negotiate on his behalf with the British embassy. Otherwise, in accordance with the abolition of slavery, he wrote that a manumission document must be issued. In a later document, Moshīr al-Dowleh wrote that he thought Saʿīdeh had the legal right to freedom.

The British consul general included Saʿīdeh's own claim that she was not Abol Qāsem's wife. As Anthony Lee has argued, such inclusions are a precious reminder of slaves' humanity.[88] The British officer went on to say that the merchant probably slept with her and called that marriage, but how could a slave legally choose a husband for herself when she was not free? In response the merchant claimed that temporary marriage rites were performed by Saʿīdeh's former owner.[89] And as a way of staking his legal rights further, Abol Qāsem compared his treatment under British laws to the status of Jews under Islam:

> Your Highness [Moshīr al-Dowleh] should consider that even though it has been 1,300 years that the following Quranic verse has been revealed regarding the Jews "*A humiliation and wretchedness were stamped upon them*," and even though they do not have their own sovereignty in Islamic kingdoms, still they have not been subjected to such humiliating oppression. How is it then that a person who is the subject of the powerful and just king of Islam, be subjected to such a shameful tyranny by the agents of a foreign government?[90]

While Saʿīdeh's story is truncated by British and Iranian legal discourses, we also have other testimonials of slaves and their appeals for emancipation. In a sworn affidavit dated 26 May 1927 and signed by J. W. Woodley, attorney of the British consulate, Nasībeh, the daughter of Mabrūk, listed as approximately thirty years old, recorded her request for manumission:

[88]See Lee, "Recovering Biographies," 4. In another Qajar document entitled "Connected to the paper of the British embassy to the Iranian foreign ministry" written by Hajji Mirza Ahmad, the Iranian government secretary, in 1862, he stated that a British foreign embassy official visited him and offended him by not returning his *gholām* and a *kanīz* in exchange for his support on a housing project. The British official said that the captain of an Iranian ship brought forged papers that the elder *kanīz* was claimed as his wife (*ʿaqd-i nekāh*) and other people had claimed that the reminder of the slaves belonged to them. Hājī Mīrzā Ahmad claimed they were all lying and that the captain's papers were unfounded. Document no. 51, "Connected to the paper of the British embassy to the Iranian foreign ministry," in Alipur, *Asnād-e bardeh forūshī*, 147–8.

[89]"Nekāh" here refers to *nikāh al-mutʿa* (Ar.) or *sīgheh* (Pers.), defined as temporary or "pleasure" marriage for a specific duration of time.

[90]Document no. 10, "Petition to the Foreign Minister (Moshir al-Dowleh)," in Alipur, *Asnād-e bardeh forūshī*, 245. The Quranic verse is footnoted by the editor as 2:61.

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> I was born on the island of Hendorābī, in the house of my master, Mohammad Ebn Jāsim, resident of Hendorābī. I served there until three years ago. Afterwards, Sheikh Ahmad Ebn Muhammad ʿAbīdlī, governor of Chīrū, seized me and my child, Mubarak. This child is from my husband, Balāl, who is currently the slave of Muhammad Ahmad Yūhī. My child and I and other black people were in Muhammad Ahmad Yūhī's house. In the two months that I have been there he abused me. I heard he wanted to sell me and my child, so today I have escaped from his house. I have brought my child with me along with other black people and I am requesting freedom.[91]

In a coeval affidavit, an escaped slave of Muhammad Ahmad Yūhī named "Fīrūz, son of Almās" stated "We were serving [Muhammad Ahmad Yūhī] in Kangh, but because he was abusing us, last night we escaped his house in order to enter this consulate and gain our freedom."[92] At forty-five years of age, Fīrūz'es story is a microhistory of enslavement, manumission, and re-enslavement following the master's death:

> I was born in Zanzibar. When I was a child bedouins [captured me in a raid] and took me to Sūr and sold me in Batina. A person called Hājī Mūsā bought me and after a year sold me to ʿAbd Allāh ebn Jayrān, resident of Kish. I served ʿAbd Allāh ebn Jayrān until he died. After his death, his wife arranged with me that each year I give her half of my earnings and keep the other half. This agreement existed between us for four years. After that, I was serving [as a free person] for myself. I, along with my wife, Saʿīdeh, were then given away by Sheikh Ahmad ʿAbīdlī to his creditors. They gave me, my wife, and my son to Muhammad Ahmad Yūhī. He brought us to Lengeh two months ago and took us to his house in Kangh. We were serving him in Kangh, but because he was abusing us, last night we escaped his house in order to enter this consulate and gain our freedom. Because the night was dark we were separated from one another and lost each other. The people of Rūdbād captured us and took me to the government office. I was there until the secretary of the [British] consulate came to the government office and brought me to the consulate. My son was frightened and escaped back to Kangh. Now I request that you issue a freedom paper for me.[93]

Among the party seeking asylum, Zīvar, son of Mabrūk, who was recorded as approximately twenty years old, included a vital discovery. He stated that though his present master, Ebrāhīm ebn Yūsef, "was not abusing me … since I see that my father is free, I want to be free too. Therefore I have come here."[94] This statement reveals the strength of family ties, as some of the petitions included former slaves' demands that their children and spouses be returned and issued manumission papers. More importantly,

[91]Document no. 57, "Nasībeh, daughter of Mabrūk," in ibid., 278–9.
[92]Document no. 61, in ibid., 284.
[93]Document no. 61, in ibid., 284.
[94]Document no. 59, in ibid., 280–1.

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slaves invoked their right to freedom, which is no small proof of their aspirations beyond the confines of slavery, even if the wider world provided little help or betterment.

Though the British did not consistently document the testimonies of escaped slaves, colonial administrators through the India Office recorded the number of slaves seeking manumission throughout the Persian Gulf region. Some reports simply described "A boy and a girl rescued in Bushire," or in the following manner:

> Female, inhabitant of Makhlef near Sowhar, and the offspring of a freeman … had been conveyed to Mogoo, a port on the Persian coast … She was rescued from bondage by native Agent at Lingah, and Resident directed her removal to Muscat "for the purpose of being restored to her family and home."[95]

These brief accounts raise more questions than answers. As is often the case, we may never know the ultimate fate of this "female inhabitant of Makhlif." What we can glean from the colonial archives typically relates to other issues, for example, many officials frequently mention the difficulty in securing the passage to freedom for runaway slaves from the Persian Coast because of "the reluctance of the Persians to agree to the surrender of slaves that have once reached *terra firma* in Persian territory."[96]

With the increasing pressure to end formal slavery in the Indian Ocean, there were also individual moral incentives to free slaves. In one testimonial, for example, it was reported that every ʻ*eid* a grandee by the name of Amīr ʿAlam Khān Heshmat al-Molk would go to Kerman and buy either two concubines or two "black slaves" and free them. This story featured in *Safarnāmeh-ye Khānlarkhān Eʿtesām al-Molk* shows how manumitting slaves on special occasions reflected well on the reputation of grandees, but by no means was it considered part of an organized effort to end slavery.[97]

Female slaves were the primary agents of negotiating degrees of freedom. Anthony Lee writes that "the distinction between slave and 'free' was more permeable for a female slave than for a male slave, since she might hope to be accepted as a valuable worker within a household, become her master's concubine, give birth to some of his heirs, and in unusual cases become the wife of a powerful and wealthy patriarch."[98] While not disagreeing with Lee's important observation, we must acknowledge that young slave girls, unlike most of their male counterparts, held the additional burden of being routinely violated and often from a very young age. It is impossible, therefore, to speak of freedom or reward without sexual consent or bodily autonomy. As H. Alexander Welcome has argued, while negotiating one's status was a slave's prerogative, female slaves risked their lives to escape because the master–slave relationship was defined by physical violence. Violence was a "foremost mode of engagement":

[95]Saldanha, *Precis on Slave Trade,* 101.
[96]Ibid., 101.
[97]*Safarnāmeh-ye Khānlarkhān Eʿtesām al-Molk*, 319.
[98]Lee, "Recovering Biographies of Enslaved Africans," 4.

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> [Slave] bodies must be understood as sites of physical conflict, with violence being the first and foremost mode of engagement. Along with rapes … other physical constraints must be included under the subheading: where people are allowed to and forced to live, who people are supposed to have sex with, and the nature of marriage.[99]

From another vantage point, women may have found pathways of survival within the domestic household not because it was tolerable, rather, according to Hideaki Suzuki, because it was harder for them to escape. In the region of Baluchistan with a large population of slaves, Suzuki argued that escaped male slaves had more access to British officials because their professions allowed them greater mobility to go on errands or travel and this gave them more opportunities for escape.[100] In contrast to the case of Saʿīdeh, many female slaves who escaped were returned to their masters who claimed them as legal wives.[101] British "Manumission Procedures" tilted in favor of slavemasters, since it required a slave to provide proof of abuse and included the provision to return a slave upon the master's promise of satisfactory treatment. Moreover, in places like Kuwait the British failed to implement manumission procedures and allowed smaller-scale slave trading.[102] Slaves fleeing to Kuwait were sent to the sheikh, and the female slaves to the wife of the sheikh. To be considered for emancipation meant that you also had to prove you were enslaved after the March 1882 Slave Trade Agreement. In addition, a slave had to be from a territory where the British were able to grant this request, and there were disincentives in taking on the burden of housing and feeding former slaves. Even under so-called British protection, unfree persons faced a labyrinth of red tape and perilous uncertainty.[103] Though someone may be granted manumission, in their new status as "British protected persons" they were exploited as laborers on plantations in other British colonies

[99]Welcome, "Our Bodies for Ourselves," 92.

[100] Suzuki, "Baluchi Experiences Under Slavery," 213.

[101]Behnaz A. Mirzai, "Emancipation and its Legacy." Mirzai provided the following explanation for continuity: "Emphasis therefore was placed not on individual autonomy but rather in directing the entire nation toward social and economic security. While this 'freedom' may have appeared limited to western eyes, the government's strategy allowed social control to be maintained while the grip of former owners over slaves was loosened." Ibid., 2.

[102]"Slavery in the Persian Gulf," 1.

[103]Persian slaves were caught between fleeing danger and the colonial administration's apathy. A rare slave testimony by Mabrook bin Salim was recorded on 9 February 1929: "When I obtained my British manumission certificate from you after two days the Farrāsh of the Governor met me in the Bazar and told me that I was wanted by the Governor. I did not go that day till next day Mīrzā Hosein the Monshī of the Governor saw me and told me to go to the Governorate so next day I went there. Mirza Hussein asked me to as/to where was my Persian Manumission letter I told them that I gave it to the Consulate and obtained another one. They told me to bring it so some days I came to this office and informed you that the Governor wanted my paper and you told me to show it to him and inform you the result so I took the paper to the Governorate and handed the paper over to Mīrzā Hosein the Monshī. It is about 7 or 8 days that I am going to the Governorate and ask them for the paper they tell me that they have not yet taken a copy of it. Up till now they have not returned my paper to me I there came to this office to report the matter." "Expenses Incurred as a Result of Slaves Taking Refuge in Consulates and Agencies," 189.

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and territories. In one Qajar chronicle, the writer claimed that a British treaty was merely a cheaper and easier form of "new slavery."[104] After ending the formal slave trade, the British government continued to exploit African labor by keeping ex-slaves in quasi-slave status on agricultural plantations throughout the colonies. In some cases they completely ignored the practice of slavery in order to curry favor with local elites.[105] Even in places where the British supported abolition, the slave trade continued in independent states like Baluchistan.[106] While the restriction of movement and mobility convinced many slaves to flee, they faced new challenges under so-called British "protection."

Conclusion

To debate the "mobility" of a female slave in a system that did not recognize her bodily autonomy seems impossible, and yet, as Judith Butler urged, we must think about how "such constraints not only produce the domain of intelligible bodies, but produce as well a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies."[107] The first-hand accounts of Saʿīdah, Fīrūz, "the black female slave of Golīn Khānūm," Tāzeh Gol, Salama, "the African slave girl sold in Mecca," Jamīleh, Nasībeh, Zīvar, or "a boy and a girl rescued in Bushire," bear witness to the human suffering experienced under slavery in Iran. Bearing witness does not make their lives and testimonies any less remarkable or miraculous. If any general observation can be made from a still nascent field of research, it is that their testimonials call into question any "mild" nature of slavery in the late Qajar period. Even if we acknowledge specific historical contingencies, variability of labor roles, laws, and social mediation, any discussion of agency is limited by the presence of systemic violence, especially when we consider the lives of female slaves. The desire for African slaves, furthermore, was informed by normative views about their bodies: the desirability of devoted *gholām*s and innocent *kanīz*es, by a mindset however inconsistent or contradictory. Premodern Qajar writers, including high-ranking chroniclers and members of the royal family, regularly employed racialized and gendered descriptions in their writings; they perceived eunuchs to have a natural fealty and affection toward women and children, and were forced into domestic roles. African women were regarded for their beauty, their industrious-

[104]ʿAbd Allāh Mostowfī, *Sharh-e Zendagi-ye Man*, 81. Historian Mark Hobbs also provides this statement on the British use of African slave labor: "Many manumitted or runaway slaves ended up being sent by British Government officials to Bombay. Here, many were recruited into the ranks of the Indian Navy, and it is suggested that more than half of the reported two thousand Africans in Bombay in 1864 were employed in maritime work. Others were sent to agricultural plantations in places such as Zanzibar and the Seychelles, where their condition was not much better than the slavery they had escaped from." See Mark Hobbs, "Between Freedom and Slavery: The Employment of Runaway Slaves in the Indian Navy," Qatar Digital Library.

[105]Hopkins noted this was the case for the British in Northern Nigeria. See Hopkins, "Race, Sex and Slavery," 660.

[106]Suzuki, "Baluchi Experiences Under Slavery," 210.

[107]Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xi.

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ness, or a combination of both. Once a slave left domestic spaces, Qajar writers tended to present them as socially unstable. For the slaves themselves, they were haunted by the contradictions in the terms "home" and "family" and made their objections known.

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