

Similar to prison cells, the individual rows of rooms are cramped and interwoven like a honeycomb. The Shahr-e No ("New City") citadel has walled in Tehran's prostitutes. Two parallel roads join together, leading to an iron entry gate beyond which a maze of filthy alleyways can be seen. These alleyways branch out and expand to form the red-light district of Tehran. First-time visitors to the citadel expecting glamorous surroundings are instead greeted by an area that more resembles a waste ground or public toilet. A rotten stench flows through the streets, making it hard to breathe. It takes a while to become accustomed to these surroundings, but by the second or third look you begin to notice things you missed at first.

Shahr-e No | Tehran, 1975–77*

The social, financial, hygienic, behavioral and psychological problems that exist in everyday society are present here, and magnified. However, up until now there has been little attempt to deal with these issues.

Prostitution is not recognized as a profession under the law; it is an illegal trade. Therefore it is impossible for anyone working as a prostitute to have any hope for a normal life. The Shahr-e No inhabitants live at an almost subhuman level. The fact is that thousands of men travel to the citadel everyday to have sex with these prostitutes.

The majority of these men are rural laborers working in the city. This has led to the problem of men returning to their villages and spreading sexually transmitted diseases to their wives. The prostitutes live arduous lives under the constant threat of violence from their *sahabs* ("owners") in relationships that can be likened to slaves and masters. Mental health problems and poverty have turned many of the women to prostitution, but the additional problems they face when they begin to reside in the citadel mean that many of them stay on and work far longer than originally intended. Some of the women are prostitutes without the knowledge of their families.

Older prostitutes who no longer work look after other women's children during the working day. Many of the women who have spent their youth in the citadel continue to spend their old age there, as they have nowhere else to go.

At the center of the citadel is a small courtyard, piled high with rotting dirty tissues—remnants of the day's work. The problems here are not petty ones such as the city council's inefficiency in cleaning the streets; neither are they tearful stories of young girls losing their innocence. The real problems are syphilis, heroin addiction, violence and degradation.

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* Kaveh Golestan, "Rospigari ik padideh ghireghabele ejtenab ast" ("Prostitution is a Phenomenon Which is Inevitable"), *Ayandegan*, September 23, 1977, Report Section.