

THE COLOR BLACK

ENSLAVEMENT
AND ERASURE
IN IRAN

BEETA BAGHOOLIZADEH

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BUY

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DUKE

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**DEDICATED TO THE ONES WHO
LIGHT UP
MY HEART AND MY SKY**

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Throughout the text, I have used a transliteration system most commonly used in English by lay Persian speakers, with specific emphasis on the standardized Tehrani dialect. For example, I have opted for *Golestan* or *Haji Naneh* instead of *Gulistān* or *Hājī Nanih*, for the ease of the reader. Although it is uncommon to capitalize regional ethnic and racial labels in their transliteration into English, such as *Habashi* or *Siyah*, I have opted to do so to recognize these labels and identities.

For citations in the notes and bibliography, I have followed a simplified version of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES) system for the transliteration of Persian-language book titles and articles in citations. Diacritical markers for consonants have been omitted, with the exception of ' for *hamza* and ' for *'ayn*. I have kept this for the sake of researchers and scholars who use this system regularly.

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NOTE ON PHOTOGRAPHY

This book argues that enslavement and abolition were defined by processes of forced visibility and forced invisibility in Iran. Forced visibility involved, in part, the photography of enslaved people against their consent, which I discuss at length throughout the book. I have reprinted some of these photographs to demonstrate the mechanisms and dynamics involved in the forced visibility.

With a few exceptions, I have prioritized publishing photographs that have already been in circulation, to redescribe their context and content. This is especially pertinent, as some of these photographs have contributed to the erasure of this history and its violence. Because they do not conform to some individuals' preconceived ideas of what enslavement looks like, these photographs have, in some instances, been used to promote an idea of a generous form of enslavement or to explain enslavement away altogether.

In an effort to be deliberate about the circulation and reproduction of these photographs, I considered making the editorial choice to blur the photographs, share tracings, or elide them altogether and offer detailed descriptions instead. But because Black and Afro-Iranians regularly face the denial of their histories and existence, both within Iran and in the Iranian diaspora, I have decided against the censoring or removal of these photographs to prevent contributing to these large-scale erasures. Instead, I have included some of these photographs to combat the voyeurism, correct the narrative, and reject the erasure of this history. I thank the Collective for Black Iranians for sharing their insight as I navigated making this decision.

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This book would probably still be tucked away in a drafts folder were it not for Elizabeth Ault's infectious encouragement of my research, and I could not have asked for a better editor to work with. Along with Elizabeth, Benjamin Kossak, Jes Malitoris, Chad Miller, James Moore, Chris Robinson, Laura Sell, Liz Smith, Christi Stanforth, and others at Duke took a document saved on my computer and turned it into a real book—thank you all so much.

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INTRODUCTION

There were many Yaquts. I am not referring to the precious gem, though *yaqut* is the Persian and Arabic word for “ruby.” I am referring to the enslaved Black men who were forcibly brought to Iran and renamed Yaqut throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹ The ones whose names only appear briefly in single-page documents among thousands about the slave trade along the Persian Gulf coast.² Some were enslaved alongside other men named Almas, or “Diamond.”³ The gemstones reflected the nature of enslavement in the region: while some enslaved people were forced to serve as manual or agricultural laborers along the gulf coastline, many were bought and sold as status symbols in the homes of affluent merchants, royalty, and those with access to power, wealth, and resources.⁴ Some of these Yaquts make appearances in this book. Others do not. Some of them were enslaved alongside Black women, many with floral names, such as Golchehreh, Sonbol, and Narges.⁵ Some of these women also appear in this book. Others do not. And some of their names are lost to us altogether.

Names are hard to trace, and this book does not try to trace them all. Sometimes names are misleading, contrived, or not even names at all.

This book began as a study of nineteenth-century enslavement in Iran, but as Christina Sharpe writes, “Those of us who teach, write, and think about slavery and its afterlives encounter myriad silences and ruptures in time, space, history, ethics, and research as we do our work.”⁶ I encountered these silences and ruptures at every stage of writing this book: in the sources, in the archives, and in people who preferred to look away.⁷ These erasures stretched the focus of my work and pushed me to think about them as extensions of enslavement, which led me to examine enslavement and erasure together.

Despite claims otherwise, the history of enslavement in Iran is a long one, with references to enslaved people as imperial tribute dating as far back as the Achaemenid Empire.⁸ For centuries, Iranians enslaved many from around their domains, including the Caucasus, Central Asia, South Asia, and East Africa.⁹ During the nineteenth century, elite and wealthy Iranians enslaved people in their domestic spaces as nannies, wet nurses, eunuchs, cooks, and other jobs critical to the maintenance of a healthy household that are often socially undervalued.¹⁰ While some scholars have described their work as “menial” and therefore unimportant, no such word in Persian describes their work as insignificant, except in the tone of these later histories.¹¹ Instead, these individuals were seen as critical for the preservation of the family and the royal court. They were generally symbols of power and status, not economic slaves, despite some examples of chattel slavery in the South.¹² This book focuses on those held in bondage by royal and wealthy families and argues that their presence and gradual disappearance shaped the discourse of race and racism on a national scale in the modern period.

Just as enslavement was not new during the Qajar period, neither was the term *Siyah*, or “Black.” For centuries, *Siyah* had been used to describe various ethnic groups, and the term morphed to accommodate whatever groups were represented in Iran at the time. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for example, the term *Siyah* typically described enslaved South Asians at the Safavid court.¹³ Similarly, in poetry, *Siyah* might have been paired with another term to describe a person—*Zangi-ye Siyah* (the Black Zanzibari) or *Hindu-ye Siyah* (the Black Indian)—regardless of their free or enslaved status.¹⁴ As a term, *Siyah*, or “Black,” was malleable. Not only had it referred to different groups across two continents; it had also always been used as an adjective. Not until the mid-nineteenth century did government documents refer to *Siyah*, or the plural *Siyah-ha*, as nouns and identities unto themselves: *Black* and *Blacks*.¹⁵

Even though Iranians viewed many as categorically enslavable, by the late nineteenth century, a particular language of enslavement arose that racialized East Africans as exclusively Black, and *Black* as equivalent to *enslaved*. This was largely due to geopolitical transformations that changed who was being enslaved in Iran. Once Russians increased their power in the North, and the British colonized South Asia, East Africans were left as the dominant group of enslaved people in Iran. Starting in 1848, the Qajars signed several treaties with the British, each promising to stop the Persian Gulf slave trade. There were several iterations of these treaties, and with

each new version, the British pressed for more control over ships in the Persian Gulf, a key waterway. Perhaps some people expected that these treaties would make enslaved people harder to come by in Iran and the institution would then disappear on its own. It didn't exactly happen that way; Iran's Parliament abolished slavery in Iran in 1929.

After 1929, the process of abolition involved an active process of erasure on a national scale, such that a collective amnesia surrounding enslavement persists today. This collective amnesia is multifaceted: just as *enslaved* had come to refer exclusively to Black people, the erasure of enslavement arrived largely with the erasure of Black presence, life, and history in Iran. Together these erasures have allowed for Iranians to purport that they are not racist and that racism has never existed in Iran, resulting in a kind of “white innocence” outlined by Gloria Wekker in her eponymous book on racial politics in the Netherlands.¹⁶ Rather than a humanitarian effort, the abolition of legal enslavement was a project to present Iran as modern and save the nation from embarrassment on the global stage. By the twentieth century, enslavement and Blackness had become so blurred that the erasure of slavery resulted in the erasure of Black freedpeople as well, a forced invisibility in a country where they were now citizens. Black Iranians, who once would have been seen regularly in major cities, became a peripheral population, concentrated in the Persian Gulf coast. In their place, blackface caricatures in theater and comic formats gained popularity in urban centers, further normalizing the erasure of Black people in Iran. Anti-Black caricatures were sanitized and couched in folk traditional rhetoric that hid the legacies of these institutions. The erasure of Iran's history of enslavement even reconfigured simple terms. For example, the term *bardeh*, which referred to an enslaved person, was used in the Manumission Law of 1929. *Bardeh*, however, now refers primarily to enslaved people on US plantations. The tacit shift in connotation allows for the abundance of statements such as “We never had *bardeh*!” The lack of language to discuss this history is a recent problem. Nineteenth-century records show us that not only was there a language for discussing race and enslavement but also that it involved a precise vocabulary that responded to social realities and changes, from the populations being enslaved, to the global efforts toward abolition, even to the debates over who belonged in the family unit. In recent decades, this forced invisibility has fostered the emergence of various documentary projects that claim, tacitly or otherwise, the discovery of Afro-Iranians, many of whom are descendants of freedpeople.¹⁷

Detractors of the study of enslavement will argue that because “few” people were enslaved in Iran, it is an insignificant topic of research. Unfortunately, the exact number of individuals enslaved in Iran is lost to us. Aside from a handful of records, there is no hard data about the number of people enslaved in Iran, African or otherwise.¹⁸ But contrary to what these detractors might expect, the presence of enslaved East Africans in the homes of wealthy and powerful Iranians had an outsized effect on conceptions of race and shaped Iranian life during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from the structure and responsibilities of family members, to the architecture of their homes, to life in the bazaar, and even appropriate forms of entertainment. Because of their positions of power, these enslaving families were tastemakers for Iranian society, and Iranians from other social classes would have attempted to copy them. As it became less common and ultimately illegal to enslave people in one’s home, Iranian life changed dramatically to one that prioritized nuclear families in smaller family homes and justified blackface theater with alternate, revisionist descriptions. The presence of enslaved people—and their disappearance—touched every aspect of Iranian urban life: their presence was significant in Iran.

This book is concerned with the tension between forced visibility and forced invisibility: a recent history of enslavement, one that was wielded for visual displays of power and status, was made to disappear so dramatically that even the most obvious of footprints are explained away. In the first half of the book, “Enslavement,” I argue that enslavement in Iran was a process of forced visibility, where enslaved people were ranked by their appearances and used as representatives of the enslaving family in public and visual settings. Enslaved people lacked mobility afforded to other members of the servant class: that is, they were either forcibly migrated to Iran and sold into the homes they worked in, or they were born in those homes and forced to stay. While other servants might have worked in return for room and board, their ability to leave and find other homes or families to work for on their own volition distinguished them from those who were enslaved. And by the late nineteenth century, the Blackness of the individual—their visibility—would have marked them as someone forcibly brought into Iran, and therefore as an enslaved person, despite the presence of free Africans in Iran.

Abolition, which I define here as an erasure of slavery, triggered a forced invisibility of enslavement, formerly enslaved people, and their histories. This collective erasure created a vacuum where blackface cari-

captures, racial ideologies, and even personal histories received revisionist explanations for their existence to allow for the public erasures to remain. The second half of this book, “Erasure,” demonstrates the extent to which the government, society, archives, and the descendants of enslaving families sought to hide, cover, and deny a history of enslavement in Iran in which they were implicated. No erasure, however, is ever complete, and nothing and no one can ever be made fully invisible.

To be clear, this is not a comprehensive study on the history of Black or Afro-Iranians. The history of Black or Afro-Iranians is much more layered, much richer, and spans millennia of exchange, migration, and belonging. This is a modern history of Iran and Iranians, whether they were part of the elite classes who enslaved people or part of the wider public that aspired to be like them, whether they intentionally denied this history or unknowingly perpetuated these erasures.

SHOWING–HIDING

Have you seen this little girl in the photograph (fig. I.1)? She stands tall, looking boldly at the camera. There are others, too, a whole group of children both younger and older than her, and a few adults, smiling patiently or blankly staring while the photographer painstakingly takes their photograph. The photograph was taken some time in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, when the process took a little longer than what we are used to today. Everyone had to be very still, including this little girl, who stood all the way over to the far left, her bangs curled as they poked out from under her scarf and chador. This little girl is visibly Black; the rest of the household is not.

She was enslaved, likely born into enslavement in the same household she was photographed in. None of the other children in the photograph were enslaved; rather, they were her enslavers, along with their mother sitting in the middle. The individuals in the back were likely servants. The information on the photograph is scant, and nothing tells us directly that she was enslaved.

But if we were to follow Tina Campt’s lead to listen to the photo and think through its layers and textures, we can glean more details that show how this photo came to be in the first place.¹⁹ The photo was taken outside: in the upper left corner, a brick wall peeks out from behind a white sheet, undoubtedly hung to give the impression of an indoor photo while still



I.1 A little Black girl and the family that enslaved her. She is remembered in records published by the Majles Library in Tehran and Harvard's *Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran* as either Juju or Suski, neither of which is a name. ("Children of Yamin al-Saltana," *Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran* digital archive, record no. 31e141, <http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/31e141.html>; also in *Asnad-i Banuwan dar durih-yi Mashrutiiyyat*, published by the Majles Library. Text from *Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran*.)

taking advantage of the natural light. The sun was so bright that two of the individuals have their hands up to shield their eyes from it. Someone had decided to hang an oil painting in a gilded European-style frame on the wall, but it seems to be a bit crooked, another indication that this was not its permanent spot. Instead, they had hauled it outside to give the viewer the impression of wealth. Some photography studios would have offered backdrops with European-style scenes on them, but the inclusion of a stand-alone painting indicated the family's status: they had their own oil painting and did not need a fake backdrop to cue their cosmopolitanism. In addition to the painting, a single chair had been brought for the matriarch at the center of the photograph. The style of clothing—most of the girls in starched white scarves pinned under their chins, the matriarch distinguished in a gauzy black scarf, the other women in floral

chador, and the inclusion of a few double-breasted coats, one worn by a young boy in the front and another by an older man in the back—all indicate that this photo was taken in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Not many households could afford photographs at this time, much less highly stylized ones with their oil painting hanging askew in the back. The sort of households who could afford these portraits were usually elite or very wealthy families, the kind that had a live-in staff. The kind that would enslave people in their homes.

While these photographs are unusual across the general populace, they are fairly common and even expected when thinking about these households. These photographs all similarly scaffolded the individuals pictured—the matriarch required a seat. In the presence of a seated matriarch, most of the children would stand close by her to show respect. Servants and enslaved people would be relegated to the margins, visually signaling their deference to the matriarch and her family. The little girl, with her stylized bangs and tightly gripped chador, stood next to the children of the enslaving family—she was too short to be sent to the back. Instead, she would stand to the side, her chador pulled over her head, not wrapped around her waist like the chadors of the other girls.

The members of the enslaving family are all well documented, their relations painstakingly noted in the two places where the photograph is published: the *Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran* digital archive based at Harvard University and an edited volume titled *Sources on Women during the Constitutional Period*, published by the Majles Library in Tehran, reflecting the different yet similar curations of a family-oriented institutional archive and a state archive.²⁰ The little girl is even left forgotten in the archival label of the photograph: the *Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran* archive calls the photo “Children of Yamin al-Saltanah,” while the edited volume from the Majles Library leaves it untitled. Certainly, she was not the daughter of anyone in the photograph or the patriarch named in the archival title; rather, she was enslaved by them.

The captions provide us with further details. These are names ostensibly provided by the contributor, as no image of the verso or scribbled marginalia is provided.²¹ As you might expect, their names (and whether we can identify their names at all) reflect their status. The names of the enslaving household all have titles attached to them, either *khanum* or *saltaneh* or *soltan*, honorifics that remind us that they are genteel individuals and connected to the royal family. The names of the servants in the back have been marked as forgotten, partly because they likely worked for

the family for a shorter period, as servants cycled through jobs and employers like any other occupation. In chapter 2, I discuss another photo from the same household taken a few years earlier, where these servants are not present but the little Black girl shows up again. But who is this little Black girl? Where were her parents? Were her parents enslaved in the same family but left out of the photograph? Who pulled her to the side of the frame? Or did she already know to pull herself to the margin?

The preservation of her name—or the lack thereof—speaks to the difficulty of studying enslavement and abolition, and how these processes informed constructions of Blackness within the Iranian context. Each published version of the photograph remembers her name differently: in *Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran*, the little girl is listed as Suski. In the Majles Library's edited volume, she is listed as Juju. The two "names" are starkly different. Suski is a diminutive for *susk*, or "cockroach," a racial epithet shrouded in childlike language, a reference to her being very young and Black. By contrast, Juju means "chick," a childish pronunciation of a sweet term of endearment. Neither of these is a name. What was her name? Such a simple fact, lost in two of the most significant physical and digital spaces for the study and preservation of modern Iranian history. Her name cannot be studied or preserved here because her name has been erased, forgotten, removed. Denied.

The shrouding and removal of this history does not begin and end with her name. As with many other historical and archival records, the issue of cushioning language emerges. We researchers not only have to grapple with contradictory names like Suski and Juju; we also grapple with archives that are hesitant to release sensitive documents at all or, instead, move forward and relabel texts to prevent any associations with enslavement.²² The aversion to identifying individuals as enslaved can be observed in both Persian and English-language archival descriptions, due to an idea that *slavery*, *slave*, *enslavement*, or *enslaved* are unhelpful terms for describing the Iranian phenomenon. Scholars, archivists, and others have suggested that these terms might be misleading for a public unfamiliar with Iran, as they conjure images of US plantation or chattel slavery that do not apply to the Iranian context. The US-centric connotations surrounding the term *slavery*, or even its closest Persian equivalent, *bardeh-dari*, have seeped into Persian as well. Enslaved people are recast as *servants* or *household members*, as if changing the term will lighten its indictment of history. Often archivists or scholars will hide behind the

slipperiness of the vocabulary of servitude, picking terms that do not explicitly determine whether or not an individual was paid.

Terms such as *khadameh* or *mostakhdameh* only tell us that the person worked in a domestic capacity; these terms shroud whether they were paid or enslaved. But when we read the photograph with all its layers—a little Black girl, who appears standing to the side of more than one photograph of the same wealthy family, with no clear name but several “nicknames”—we can see that this little girl was born into enslavement, raised in part by the same family who enslaved her.

These negotiations in captions between institutions and within archival records is evident in other documents and texts as well. Texts digitized by the *Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran* are particularly compelling because the archive not only curated materials held by private families, such as figure I.1, but also documents and other paraphernalia held by archival institutions in Iran. For example, a document held at the Yazd branch of the National Archives was embellished by the National Archives with a modern brown border with faux inscriptions all around it, with a label at the bottom that reads, “An Example of a Wedding Contract” (fig. I.2). The decorative border is odd, as it is clearly fake, but more to the point, this is not a wedding contract at all. It lacks any of the necessary elements of a marriage contract. It does not even involve two people who are to be married. The same document, fake border and all, has since been digitized for the *Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran* archive, which has listed it as a “Sale document of a black slave, 1891.”²³ But it is not a sale document either.

The document is a testimony of a reconciliation between two individuals regarding the sale of an enslaved Black man named Salman that had already taken place. In it, an individual who claimed he had not received proper compensation for selling Salman delineated the various steps that were taken to rectify the situation, ultimately resulting in a settlement that involved a lump sum of money exchanged to end his complaints. One can see how the researchers at the *Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran* archive might have skimmed quickly and decided to classify it as a sale document.

But the archivists at the National Archives seemed to have only read the last line of the document, where it refers to *sigheh-ye masaleh*, or “a vow of reconciliation.” The term *sigheh* is often used in reference to marriage vows, but it is used more expansively here to refer to an agreement or resolution. Whoever decided to add this border seems to have read that word and deemed it enough to justify labeling the entire document a

مجمع ۴ ص ۱۰۰ شماره ۱۳۹
۱۳۹۰ هجری قمری
۱۳۹۰ هجری قمری
مجلسه حاجت سینه نعلات لاجعده ایق ولدر صوم لاجعده ایق
کجه لاجعده ایق لاجعده ایق
بجه لاجعده ایق لاجعده ایق
مجلسه حاجت سینه نعلات لاجعده ایق ولدر صوم لاجعده ایق
کجه لاجعده ایق لاجعده ایق
بجه لاجعده ایق لاجعده ایق
مجلسه حاجت سینه نعلات لاجعده ایق ولدر صوم لاجعده ایق
کجه لاجعده ایق لاجعده ایق
بجه لاجعده ایق لاجعده ایق

نمونه ای از سند ازدواج
کابل آرشیو: ۱۳۰۳-۱۳۰۲-۵۰
کراچ ۱۳۰۶ هجری قمری (۱۲۷۰ هجری شمسی)

I.2 Not an example of a wedding contract. ("Sale document of a black slave," 1891, Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran digital archive, record no. 13122A31, <http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/13122A31.html>.)



marriage contract—a somewhat incompetent and lazy interpretation. A more cynical read, however, may be that the archive intentionally mislabeled it to avoid having to identify it as a remnant of Iran's enslaving past.

I pursued some of my research at the Majles Library in Tehran, where the directors had approved my research topic after an interview.²⁴ But the archivist at the reference desk responded to my request for documents on enslavement with, “You must be from overseas, where they had *bardeh*. We never had *bardeh*. Cyrus the Great freed them all. You've been poisoned by the racism of wherever you're from to think that we are like that, too.”²⁵ After some back-and-forth, he shrugged his shoulders and allowed me to submit document requests. I ultimately found the materials I was looking for. In most Iranian archives, however, I could only move forward with my research when I described it using less-charged terms, such as *kaniz* or *gholam*, each of which primarily refer to enslaved women and men but could also take on the connotation of any young or subservient woman or man, regardless of free or unfree status.²⁶

Similarly, questions of race and racism and whether these concepts exist at all in Persian have been denied and avoided time and time again because of the lack of clear equivalents in Persian. *Race* is usually translated as *nezhad*, although the term can often refer to lineage or ethnicity as well. *Racism* is typically translated as *nezhad-parasti*—the worship of one's race—although in recent years terms such as *nezhad-setizi* or *nezhad-zadeh*—“race discrimination” or “raced,” respectively—have entered Persian and gained traction as well. Although terms like *race*, *racism*, and *racialization* can be useful for a critical analysis, their presence or absence in a language does not preclude whether certain actions, dynamics, vocabularies, and structures are raced, racist, and racializing. Hiding behind the lack of clear equivalents, many scholars and Iranians have made claims along the lines of “Because there is no clear term for ‘race’ or ‘racism’ in Persian, it obviously never existed.” A notable example of this is found in Behnaz Mirzai's *A History of Slavery and Emancipation in Iran*. Despite having written the first full-length monograph on Iran's history of enslavement, Mirzai argues that conceptions of race were irrelevant in enslavement; she even defines racial slurs as terms of endearment.²⁷ Mirzai's rejection of a racial framework in her analysis is based on works in general Middle East Studies, including that of Madeline Zilfi. Zilfi's research on the Ottoman harem came with a small caveat: that because the Ottomans enslaved people of different backgrounds and ethnicities, race cannot be considered a factor in their enslavement, as it was an

“Atlantic-derived” category.²⁸ Ironically, these scholars use enslavement in the Atlantic world as the standard for identifying whether or not certain practices count as slavery instead of acknowledging the horrors of enslavement plainly present in the Iranian and other Middle Eastern cases. In many ways, Zilfi was responding to Bernard Lewis’s *Race and Slavery in the Middle East*, which she described as an “ahistorical compilation.” In it, Lewis suggested that the constructions of race in the region have been largely unchanging, sanctioned by Islamic law, and wholly racist.²⁹ His book and its one-dimensional sweeping claims have haunted the field and created a generation of defensive scholars eager to entirely reject race as a salient category in the Middle East. Several scholars, however, have rejected both approaches and asserted the importance of taking race seriously as a dynamic category in the broader Middle East and Indian Ocean world.³⁰ *The Color Black* joins them in asserting that constructions of race, like any other category of analysis, were shaped by and responsive to social, political, economic, and other changes.³¹

The general reticence to discuss race in Iranian Studies has shifted in recent years. Amy Motlagh’s work on the subject has consistently critiqued the general consensus in Iranian Studies, pointing toward how enslavers aggrandized themselves and how celebrated intellectuals such as Simin Daneshvar and Mirza Fath ‘Ali Akhundzadeh had a more complicated relationship with race, specifically Blackness, than has been readily acknowledged.³² The study of whiteness in the Iranian context, however, has received much attention in Iranian Studies, as demonstrated by Reza Zia Ebrahimi in his study of intellectual thought and Aryanism in Iran during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and Neda Maghbouleh’s study of race and racial identifiers used in the Iranian diaspora in the United States.³³

The Color Black traces the opposing process: as Iranians viewed Africans as more and more Black, they in turn viewed themselves as more and more white. Iranians had once viewed themselves as in between “white” Caucasians and “Black” Africans, but the diminished presence of Caucasians led to the creation of a clear category of *Black* as *enslaved* that was framed by an Iranian whiteness.³⁴ Ultimately, the emphasis on an Iranian whiteness was used to erase Black Iranians: the same people whose presence rendered others as white would be eclipsed by the racial category altogether.

The change from a racial spectrum to a clear-cut binary was one that developed throughout the nineteenth century. Few other studies of Qajar Iran (r. 1794 to 1925) have incorporated race into their analysis. Those that

do examine race, however, have done so based on an assumed Black/white binary, accepting anti-Blackness and the whiteness of Iranians as a foregone conclusion during the Qajar period. This is especially the case with scholarship that deals with visual analyses of photography, namely Pedram Khosronejad's *Qajar African Nannies* and Staci Gem Schweiller's *Liminalities of Gender and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century Iranian Photography*. Khosronejad, whose published album focuses entirely on enslaved African eunuchs and women, makes no mention of enslaved non-Black individuals and goes so far as to crop the enslaved Caucasians out of his selection of photographs or simply ignore them. Schweiller, whose book focuses on the gendering and sexualization of photographs during the late Qajar period, overlooked enslaved Caucasians, who were sought after explicitly for their sexual appeal. Instead, she focuses entirely on photographs of enslaved Africans, equating whiteness with Iranians. This analysis unintentionally replicates the free/nonfree binary exacerbated by the black-and-white nature of the photographs; it imposes later racial realities back onto the late nineteenth century. And while *The Color Black* focuses on the forced visibility and invisibility of Black people in Iran during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was the distinction between enslaved Caucasians and Africans that so clearly *othered* Black people as equivalent to enslaved in Iran. Caucasians were allowed to assimilate, lean on alternate histories unrelated to enslavement, and ultimately claim a nativized Iranian identity in the multiethnic fabric of the country.³⁵ A close analysis of photography reveals more such nuances.

The photographs, like the archives that housed them, were always for the benefit of the enslavers. To my knowledge, none of these photographs were ever contributed to an archive by an enslaved person or their families. The archival record of these photographs is one that rests entirely on the memory of the enslaving families' descendants, who differ even among themselves in their accounts of the lives of the enslaved. Perhaps that is why this little girl's name has been recorded as both Suski and Juju: maybe two different individuals, each with a different memory or understanding of the girl's name, gave the photograph to different archives.

Other examples of the unreliability of enslaving narratives abound. Consider, for example, the life of Sonbol Baji, nanny to siblings Haleh and Kamran Afshar. In an article Haleh Afshar wrote about the life of Sonbol Baji, she asserts that Sonbol Baji arrived at the Qajar palace at the age of two and that she was "taken in" by her grandfather, Khabirsaltaneh, sometime between 1918 and 1922 as a "harem trained young lady."³⁶ Haleh

Afshar implies that Sonbol Baji was freed in her grandfather's home, although she still played the role of a domestic servant. But in Pedram Khosronejad's collection of Qajar-era household portraits, *Qajar African Nannies*, he published a photograph of the Afshar children with Sonbol Baji, courtesy of Kamran Afshar. The description diverges from Haleh's narrative: here Sonbol Baji is said to have been born in the king's harem and "freed in childhood."³⁷ And while Haleh insists on Sonbol Baji's infinite happiness with her enslavement in the harem, Motlagh has highlighted the photograph as an unintended critique, revealing a somber and even melancholy image of her life.³⁸

The revelatory ability of nontextual sources to refute and reject the dominant narrative drew me to include them in this book: I incorporate visual and architectural sources alongside textual ones to subvert the erasures that have permeated Iranian society. While I read testimonies, manumission documents, sale contracts, marriage contracts, letters, memoirs, newspapers, travelogues, dictionaries, poetry, and literature, I made sure to also examine photography, portraiture, art exhibits, films, television programs, circus acts, residential structures, religious architecture, archaeological objects, caricatures, archival catalogs, and illustrations produced in multiple languages and locales. Ultimately, however, many if not all of the sources in this book are filtered through the lens of the enslaving families or other institutional powers. Even testimonies that claim to be written from the perspective of the enslaved are often recorded or translated by government officials. Archives and other repositories assume their audience to be non-Black Iranians who view themselves as inheritors of an elite past, regardless of their own familial affiliation.

When I was researching in Tehran, I asked one of the Majles archivists involved in the volume's publication why the little Black girl's name was listed as Juju and not an actual name. He said that that was the name the person donating the photograph had offered and that the recipients had accepted it. "Better than having no name at all," he suggested.³⁹ The question arises, Who are these records for? Who benefits from such a name?

DELETED—OBSCURED—CLAIMED—AND WHISPERED

For a shah who desperately wanted to modernize Iran, Reza Shah viewed the ongoing legality of enslavement in the twentieth century as an embarrassment to him and the country. These concerns were not humanitarian

in nature but, rather, an effort to catch up and curry favor with the West. Reza Shah wanted everyone to forget anyone was ever enslaved in Iran. He wanted to build and shape the institutions that would forge a modern future for Iran.⁴⁰ He destroyed the Golestan Palace harem in the early 1930s and built the Ministry of Finance building in its place.⁴¹ He also established the National Library and Archives of Iran, a space for Iranian history to be preserved.⁴²

The modernization project, however, could not escape the ghosts of those once enslaved and even rested on what they had left behind. Reza Shah established the National Archives and Library using the inheritance of an enslaved person.⁴³ ‘Aziz Khan, a royal Caucasian eunuch who had been enslaved in the late nineteenth century, bequeathed his personal library to a charitable endowment in the name of the ruling shah. These were the books that made up the core collection of the National Library when it was first established in the 1930s.

‘Aziz Khan’s contribution, which was foundational for the National Archives and Library, was included on the institution’s website just a few years ago, and I had saved it when I was writing my dissertation. A more recently updated page on the history of the National Archives on that website, however, no longer mentions ‘Aziz Khan or his charitable endowment. We can make guesses as to why it was erased and rewritten, since the newer version also has no reference to Reza Shah. Due to ongoing domestic politics, the current administration remains uninterested in Reza Shah’s legacy and removed references to his role in establishing the National Archives and Library. But Reza Shah’s contribution to the library was not solely his legacy; it was also that of ‘Aziz Khan. ‘Aziz Khan has been erased, his foundational donation left unmarked for the public. Notably, ‘Aziz Khan’s story was not unique. Other eunuchs like him also left their inheritances, big and small, to charitable endowments, as they often had no other choice.⁴⁴ How many other institutions benefited from inheritance of those denied inheritors, the property of those considered property?⁴⁵

The organization of the archives themselves deepen these erasures. As Rosie Bsheer has described the selective narratives promoted by archives in Saudi Arabia, “Erasure is not simply a countermeasure to the making of history; it is History.”⁴⁶ Most archival institutions in Iran do not have a systematic way of organizing files on enslavement or abolition. Or, more pointedly speaking, they choose not to. Instead, these files are interspersed in their collections, either as individual papers or under other groupings.⁴⁷ Often, because of the domestic nature of their work, many of

the files on enslaved people—regardless of their gender or sex—are filed under the “Women” binders, as is the case in the Golestan Palace Photo Archive. The religious usage of *kaniz* and *gholam* in reference to the Prophet, his daughter Fatima, and the Shi’i imams—Kaniz-e Fatimeh, Gholam ‘Ali, and so on, which operate both as names and markers of religious devotion—made it difficult for me to find relevant sources at the Astan-e Qods Archive in the Imam Reza Shrine Complex in Mashhad, Iran. Even more confounding, *bardeh*, the catchall term for “slave,” is written the same as *bordeh*, the past participle for “taken” in Persian; their identical spelling makes scanning services less than helpful. Finding sources on enslavement requires the researcher to engage in a meandering process of finding files. The general lack of organization around this topic has led some scholars to assume that there are no sources and that it might be impossible to research, an assumption that exists beyond Iranian Studies as well. Zavier Wingham, who works on Afro-Turks and Ottoman legacies of enslavement, opened the inaugural Middle East Librarians Association Social Justice series in 2020 by saying, “I was told I wouldn’t find anything, but I did find something.”⁴⁸ In the same respect, the recent push toward digitization has made certain files hypervisible, while others are totally obscured, depending on the keywords and tags given to each entry.

The Iranian archives operate in stark contrast to their British counterparts, where there are boxes and boxes of files labeled *Slavery and Anti-slavery*, many of which focus on the Persian Gulf slave trade. The British Empire prided itself on championing abolition worldwide and routinely used the language of abolition to cloak their imperial efforts.⁴⁹ Anyone who has sifted through these files can see that the British regularly prioritized strategic political choices that went against the freeing of enslaved individuals or their well-being. This was chiefly the case in the Persian Gulf as well.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, the archival holdings on antislavery are still very much centered within the British archives, whereas in Iran the public erasure of slavery has prevented most of the documents from being organized in a centralized manner.

But documents do exist in Iran, both within the archives and beyond them, as do many photographs. Enslaved people were more likely to be photographed than the “average” Iranian, because enslaved people were often enslaved by wealthy and powerful Iranians who had access to cameras and photography in ways that other Iranians did not. The circulation of images through archives—like that of the little Black girl denied a proper

name and her enslavers—is a reminder of how widely photographs have moved around the world.⁵¹

Archives and museum projects not only obfuscate their collections pertaining to enslavement; in addition, the very structures out of which they operate can contribute to that project of forced visibility and invisibility. The circulation of photographs in and out of archives is not new, nor is it a neutral practice. Temi Odumosu and Jarrett Martin Drake have examined the circulation and holding of photographs of Black individuals in white institutions. Odumosu's "The Crying Child: On Colonial Archives, Digitization, and Ethics of Care in the Cultural Commons" examines reproductions of a photograph of a young Afro-Caribbean child and argues that the labeling practices around these reproductions were another form of taming the other through "the cutting, pasting, and inscription of album production."⁵² Drake's article on Tamara Lanier's court case regarding the custody of Delia and Renty's daguerreotypes held at the Harvard Museum is also instructional for understanding this kind of forced visibility.⁵³ The daguerreotypes show the father and daughter as naked from waist up, taken as proof for Louis Agassiz's theory of polygenesis.⁵⁴ Lanier, who has provided evidence of being the direct descendant of Delia and Renty, has asked for custody of the photographs. Harvard has rejected these claims and continues to hold the dehumanizing photographs in their collections, along with that of five others also taken by Louis Agassiz. As Drake has shown, if Harvard were remorseful for their role in the history of enslavement, they could simply return the photographs to Lanier as Delia and Renty's rightful heir and descendant. But to do so would require a shift in archival praxis and would undermine the archival institution as a whole.

Instead, the photographs remain in Harvard's possession and reflect, quite literally, the afterlife of enslavement. Drake highlighted the "blood at the root" of the archive—much like a lynching, the violence of it involved not only the gruesome murder but also that the family and friends of the victim were forced to see the body long after their death. In the same way, the violence of these photographs is not limited to the actual taking of the photograph; it also includes the fact that they are forced to remain in Harvard's museum. Lanier's fight for Delia and Renty's photos has resulted in petitions, protests, and even student demands that the photographs be returned to her. In response to the students, Harvard's president has said that the photographs "belong to history."⁵⁵ Because they are relegated to

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this timeless state of belonging to “history,” Delia and Renty are forced to continue performing their forced visibility in their afterlives.

If Simone Browne’s *Dark Matters* taught us to rethink the structure of a slave ship as a panopticon structured to surveil those kidnapped and enslaved through the Middle Passage, this book argues that the very structures of urban life and living lent themselves to a similar surveillance of enslaved individuals in Iran. The tight alleys, the labyrinthine bazaar layouts, even the separated public and private spaces of homes meant that enslaving families would have been able to control—and socially benefit from—the visibility of those they had enslaved. Enslaved people, especially those from East Africa, would have been made readily visible at every opportunity possible.⁵⁶ Photography, then, operated as the most obvious and lasting extension of this forced visibility. But the circulation of these photographs raises the same issues facing the photographs of Delia and Renty—they are being made accessible without their (or their descendants’) consent, extending the life of enslavement into the present day. By contrast, some of these photographs have been wielded toward a forced invisibility, where they have been used to downplay the horrors and violences of enslavement, especially after abolition. The changing nature of these technologies and their contrasting implications in forced visibility/invisibility is unsurprising, as Ruha Benjamin has argued that technologies can both make Blackness hypervisible and ignore it altogether.⁵⁷

The history of enslavement and its aftermath is one that has not been studied fully because of boundaries within the discipline of history. Although the tide is now changing, historians tend to cling to written and textual sources, rendering visual sources secondary or supplemental to their key archival findings. But in this context—where the history of race and racism in Iran rested on a visual language of difference—visual sources are just as important, if not more so, in a serious examination of the racial legacies that undergirded nineteenth-century patterns of enslavement. Photographs reveal a great deal about the visual language of race and enslavement that was only sometimes supplemented with a clear vocabulary. The visuality of this language, and the insistence of those in the academy and the Iranian diaspora that such racial hierarchies do not exist, urged me to look at photographs more closely. Much like how Saidiya Hartman scoured spaces to find traces of a little girl in a photograph, I found myself staring at photographs, trying to figure out more about those still individuals staring back at me.⁵⁸ It is in these photographs and

other sources that we see the full weight of the forced visibility and invisibility of enslavement and abolition in Iran.

Forced visibility involved, in part, the photography of enslaved people against their consent, which I discuss at length throughout this book. The inclusion of these photographs may be viewed as an extension of this forced visibility. At the same time, eliding the photographs altogether can also contribute to collective erasures, which have prevented scholars and others from addressing this history head-on and have prevented many from knowing their own family histories. It is not uncommon in the Iranian or Iranian diaspora context to see certain photographs or portraits circulate without any acknowledgment of the enslaved Black person in the frame, or, if addressed, presented as though they benefited from a benevolent form of servitude. Even more common are claims made by non-Black Iranians that they “never knew” Black Iranians existed. It is for this reason that I have chosen to include the visuals: to provide a corrective context and mitigate these continued erasures.⁵⁹

The dearth of scholarship on the histories of racism and enslavement in Iran is rooted in both the general erasure of this history at large and scholars themselves. While some scholars have told me that they had never realized Iran had a history of enslavement, the reasons for which I detail in the latter half of the book, many of the scholars who were aware of the history of enslavement in Iran came from enslaving families themselves. These scholars have often shared stories of their grandfathers’ or grandmothers’ “servants” in passing with me after conference presentations and other spaces, calmly recounting their family history, *Oh, you study slavery, yes, that’s interesting. My grandfather had one of those from his trips to Mecca.* These are individuals who have written books and articles themselves in which any references to enslaved people are relegated to footnotes (if ever mentioned at all), avoiding any discussion of the racial dynamics their families benefited from.

The scholarly erasure of this history makes efforts to read it from a Black perspective all the more important, even if they do not yet exist in forms that typically receive a stamp of approval in the ivory tower. Victoria Princewill’s historical novel *In the Palace of Flowers* imagines life in Golestan Palace from the point of view of an enslaved Abyssinian woman and eunuch, Jamila and Abimelech, whose lives are shaped not only by their enslavement but also their own searches for freedom.⁶⁰ Even more pressing, the work of the Collective for Black Iranians—a transnational organization founded and organized by Black and Afro-Iranians in the

United States, Canada, France, Germany, and Iran—has focused on amplifying and centering Black Iranian voices in stories about the past and present. This organization's work on social media and other platforms has pushed forward the conversation on race and racism from a Black Iranian perspective and rejected the historical erasures that have remained the norm for nearly a century.⁶¹ The collective, which wields creative storytelling in Persian and English, has supported Black and Afro-Iranians in reclaiming their personal histories.⁶² As the collective has shifted the conversation and created opportunities to discuss the entangled histories of Blackness and enslavement in Iran, I am sure more family histories will be recovered, and perhaps another historian will be able to write about the transition from enslaved to citizen in the future. As a historian who has worked closely with the collective, I find myself continuously confronted by the need for historical narratives written from a Black Iranian perspective to counter the default positionality of non-Black Iranians, myself included.⁶³

ENSLAVEMENT AND ERASURE

The book is split into two parts: “Enslavement” and “Erasure.” Part I, “Enslavement” (chapters 1–3), examines the forced visibility of enslaved Black people in Iran. Part II, “Erasure” (chapters 4–6), investigates some of the consequences of the forced invisibility of enslavement and Black people after abolition in 1929.

Part I, “Enslavement,” begins with chapter 1, “Geographies of Blackness and Enslavement,” which maps out the terrains of enslavability within and around Iran's environs throughout the nineteenth century. This chapter examines the imagined racial geographies that informed architectural structures and urban spaces in the nineteenth century. Opening with the story of Khyzran, a Zanzibari woman who was kidnapped and trafficked into Iran, this chapter examines the different mechanisms that endangered her life, justified her enslavement, and jeopardized her freedom. After enslaved East Africans survived Middle Passages via land and sea, their arrival in Iran was marked by a forced visibility vis-à-vis their enslavement. The dwindling of the Caucasian, Central Asian, and South Asian slave trades left East Africans as the dominant enslaved group. The racialization of East Africans as exclusively *Siyah*, or “Black,” as opposed to more nuanced geographic labels, such as *Bombasi*, *Somali*,

or *Zangi*, relied on a specific salience of racial visibility. This chapter also calls into question British and Qajar abolitionist efforts of the nineteenth century and how they were deployed for political means. It examines the undulating contours of enslavement and abolition and describes how increased abolition movements came to ultimately converge with the racialization of *Black as enslaved*.

Chapter 2, “Limits in Family and Photography,” argues that the term *khanevadeh*, or “family,” did not carry connotations of intimacy and instead would be better translated as “household.” Piecing together single moments from the lives of both free and enslaved Black people in Iran during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this chapter argues that enslavement remained the dominant social association of visibly Black people in urban centers. Enslaved African domestics served as the face of enslaving families in public spaces. In turn, enslaving households wielded photographs and portraits to further intertwine their images. This chapter is organized around the stories of Yaqut Gholam, Narges, and the little girl whose name has been replaced with Juju/Suski, a mix of free and unfree Black individuals for whom the “family” served as a complicated locus of entrapment, manipulation, loss, and survival. Their lives shed light on the different spaces afforded to Black people in Iran, and the kinds of intimacies they were allowed or banned from enjoying. This chapter highlights the limited notion of the “family” and shows how enslaved people instead sought intimacy and safety in their own found families.

Chapter 3, “Portraits of Eunuchs and Their Afterlives,” showcases a case study that links the lives of dying eunuchs at the royal court to the rise of minstrelsy performances within a generation. Naser ed-Din Shah (r. 1848–96) began to memorialize eunuchs at his court through photography and other commissioned memoirs. Most eunuchs were of African ancestry and were among the last ones in Iran, due to ongoing abolition efforts. The royal enslaved eunuchs, I argue, were not simply a status symbol; rather, their very presence was a visual metaphor for the Iranian Crown. Foreign dignitaries, ambassadors, and royal guests, for example, would first meet with the chief eunuch before any member of the royal family. Photographing these eunuchs at such a critical period captured a different face of Iran, as the aging eunuchs were frail and delicate. These photographs served as a complicated site for preserving the memory and agency of eunuchs, as some eunuchs were trained as photographers as well. At the court of Mozaffar ed-Din Shah (r. 1896–1906), the photographs became fodder for court jesters, and blackface minstrelsy took on a very

specific form. This chapter highlights the direct connection between enslavement and its legacy of blackface in Iran by examining photographs from the Qajar court, many of them preserved at the Golestan Palace Photo Archive, in tandem with published memoirs and travelogues written by viziers and other court personalities.

Part II, “Erasure,” begins with chapter 4, “Histories of a Country That Never Enslaved,” and supplies an in-depth analysis of abolition as a process of erasure after the Manumission Law of 1929. Under Reza Shah (r. 1925–41) and his son Mohammad Reza Shah (r. 1941–79), erasure was the guiding principle of abolition, to the extent that entire palace wings were demolished, dictionary definitions of the word *slavery* were carefully rewritten, and ancient Iranian history was reframed entirely. Within decades of the abolition law, Iranians began to adopt an exclusively US-centric understanding of enslavement and its legacies, as well as embracing a nationalist Aryan myth, eliding any reference to Iranian enslavement or Black Iranians on a broad scale in urban centers. This chapter examines how the Manumission Law and the efforts surrounding it were intended not to rectify the harms of enslavement but, rather, to restructure society as if no one had ever been enslaved. While Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah crafted modern images of Iran on the world stage, freedpeople quietly built new lives as Iranian citizens.

Chapter 5, “Origins of Blackface in the Absence of Black People,” examines the development of the blackface character, from the court minstrel shows to street performances to print magazines. While entertainment had served as a lifeline for some freed Africans in Iran in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, non-Black Iranian actors in blackface, now called *siyah*, or “the black,” replaced them after 1929. The development of these minstrel shows into a type of folk theater required their sanitization, and while the framework of the plays replicated all existing references to the enslavement of the *siyah*, alternate rationales and narratives emerged to distance the theatrical genre from the tainted past. As minstrel plays grew more popular, the inclusion of a blackface caricature would catapult satirical magazines, such as *Towfiq* and later *Yaqut*, to a heightened popularity during the 1960s and onward. This chapter charts the canonization of blackface caricatures in public spaces and how their imagery came to displace the presence of Black Iranians.

The sixth chapter, “Memories and a Genre of Distortion,” identifies the writings of enslaving families and their descendants as its own specific narrative genre that blurs experiences of enslavement with ideals of

benevolence divorced from racist attitudes. Drawing on Trouillot's four phases of history-making, this chapter defines the genre of distortion as one that emphasizes a shared love between enslaver and enslaved, denies the full extent of one's enslavement, and asserts an intimacy that outsiders cannot be expected to understand. This chapter argues that the descendants of the enslavers frame their ancestors as having been infallible and incapable of wronging their enslaved.

The book concludes with the epilogue, "Black Life in the Aftermath of a Forced Invisibility," which moves away from the discussion of enslavement and erasure and looks at Black history, presence, and perspective as a genre of restoration.

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NOTES

INTRODUCTION

- 1 There were other Yaquts as well, enslaved in other parts of the Indian Ocean world and beyond, their lives not bound by these centuries. See Nicolini, “Western Indian Ocean as Cultural Corridor,” for a discussion of Yaqut bin ‘Ambar al-Habashi, a eunuch and the appointed governor of Zanzibar under Omani rule. In earlier centuries, it appears that enslaved people were also named Yaqut, most notably Yaqut al-Musta‘simi, the well-known calligrapher of the last Abbasid caliph in the thirteenth century.
- 2 File 280-1-5, Sazman-i Asnad, Tehran; “File 5/190 V Manumission of Slaves at Muscat: Individual Cases,” British Library, India Office Records (hereafter IOR) and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/1/219, in *Qatar Digital Library*, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000193.0x0000c0 (accessed September 10, 2019).
- 3 Zdanowski, *Speaking with Their Own Voices*, 147, 155, 158, 159.
- 4 For a discussion of pearl diving and enslavement in the Gulf region, see Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*.
- 5 Naming practices across the Middle East seemed to have favored flowery names for enslaved women and gem-oriented names for enslaved men, as well as other names describing positive attributes. See Toledano, *As If Silent and Absent*, for more on similar naming practices in the Ottoman Empire.
- 6 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 12.
- 7 See Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.
- 8 I use *Iran* and *Iranians* here to refer to the inhabitants of the Iranian plateau, roughly along the borders of the modern nation-state. I recognize the problems of using *Iran* or *Iranian* as a modern identifier as delineated by Mana Kia, as it risks essentialization, especially as I refer to practices in the Achaemenid Empire in a book about modern Iran in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Unfortunately, as Kia has noted, modern nationalism has created a mirage of continuity that is ahistorical and incorrect. Kia, *Persianate Selves*, 5–8. In addition to the inelegance of alternatives to

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Iran and Iranians, I consistently come up against rebuttals to my research that are rooted in this ahistorical and incorrect mirage of the past that reify Iran as a singular space never tainted with the stain of slavery, and thus, find myself forced to address these claims. For example, contrary to the common nationalist refrain “But Cyrus the Great freed all the slaves!,” which I discuss further in chapter 4, enslavement has existed in a multitude of forms in the Iranian plateau. Similarly, modern claims that the practice of enslavement was only “imported” later to Iran by way of the Arab invasion or Portuguese imperialism are also untrue. Dandamayev, section 1, “Achaemenid Period,” in “Barda and Barda-Dari.”

- 9 The patterns and types of enslavement practiced throughout Iran and the broader region varied broadly per time period. Examples of military enslavement have been most readily studied, but other forms of domestic or labor-intensive forms of enslavement also existed. For a broad overview, see Dandamayev, “Barda and Barda-Dari,” which is divided into the following sections: the Achaemenid period, the Sassanian period, the Islamic period up to the Mongol invasion, the period from the Mongols to the abolition of slavery, and military slavery in Islamic Iran. Throughout this time and into the twentieth century, Iranians were enslavable in the surrounding region as well. See Eden, *Slavery and Empire in Central Asia*; Najmabadi, *Story of Daughters of Quchan*.
- 10 The term *elite* here is not meant to conjure positive or notable imagery. I use it to refer to people who are either royalty or connected to the court. In discussions about the dynamics of enslavement, the vocabulary around certain terms and labels tends to favor the oppressors (for example, *master* instead of *enslaver*). I have tried to avoid as much of this language as possible, but I could not find an adequate alternative for *elite*, as it is a bit more expansive than the typical terms that are used in relation to enslavement.
- 11 Mirzai cited a British official in their use of the term *menial*. Mirzai, *History of Slavery*, 18, 93, 117.
- 12 See Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*; Sabban, “Encountering Domestic Slavery”; Mathew, *Margins of the Market*.
- 13 Most eunuchs described as “Black” at the Safavid court (1501–1736) were South Asian, as opposed to Caucasian eunuchs who were “white.” Babaie et al., *Slaves of the Shah*, 158. See also Babayan, “Eunuchs, iv. The Safavid Period.”
- 14 For centuries, major Persian poets such as Ferdowsi, Hafez, Rumi, and Nezami associated the adjective *Black* with different groups, including the *Hindu* (South Asian), *Habashi* (Abyssinian), and *Zangi* (Zanzibari). For some examples, see Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Abu'l Qasem Ferdowsi*, 2:15, l. 196; Dastgirdi, *Kitab-i Khusraw va Shirin*, 355–56; Foruzanfar, *Kulliyat-i Shams-i Tabrizi*, 5:230, poem 2499, l. 26444.
- 15 It is important to note that Iranians did not typically use the continental adjective or noun—that is, *African*—to refer to these individuals. It is for

- this reason that I typically use the term *Black* throughout the manuscript and opt to use *African* or *East African* only when necessary for clarification.
- 16 Gloria Wekker describes white innocence as “an important and apparently satisfying way of being in the world. It encapsulates a dominant way in which the Dutch think of themselves, as being a small, but just, ethical nation; color-blind, and thus free of racism.” Wekker, *White Innocence*, 2.
 - 17 Apart from a few examples from prerevolutionary Iran (Naser Taqvayī’s *Bad-i Jinn* and *Arba’in*, among others), the 2000s have seen a rapid spike in the production of these documentaries, beginning with Behnaz Mirzai’s *Afro-Iranian Lives* (2007) and *The African-Baluchi Trance Dance* (2012), Kamran Heidari’s *Dingomaro* (2013), Farhad Varahram’s *Siyahan-i Junub-i Iran* (2014), and Mahdi Ehsaei’s photo series *Afro-Iran: The Unknown Minority* (2016).
 - 18 Mirzai has attempted to reconstruct this data as much as possible throughout her book. See Mirzai, *History of Slavery*.
 - 19 Here I am drawing on Camp’s pivotal works for understanding Black photography, drawing our attention to the haptic and sonic textures of photographs and their various layers that create meaning. Camp, *Listening to Images*; Camp, *Image Matters*.
 - 20 “Children of Yamin al-Saltanah,” Bahman Bayani Collection, *Women’s Worlds in Qajar Iran*, <http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/31e137.html> (accessed January 10, 2015); Turkchi and Tatari, *Asnad-i banuvan dar durih-yi Mashrutiiyyat*, 311.
 - 21 In an accompanying photograph, which I discuss in chapter 2, each of the individuals is numbered directly on the photograph, although no image of the verso is provided there either. “Amir Heshmat Family,” Bahman Bayani Collection, *Women’s World in Qajar Iran*, <http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/31e137.html>.
 - 22 In *Dispossessed Lives*, Marisa Fuentes describes analyzing archival fragments on the lives of enslaved women and the importance of mining the archives for what they include and do not include. That same methodology is imperative in the Iranian context as well.
 - 23 “Sale document of a black slave, 1891,” Yazd Document Center and Library, *Women’s Worlds in Qajar Iran*, <http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/13122A31.html>.
 - 24 “The Library, Museum, and Archives Center of the Islamic Parliament” (“Kitabkhunih, Muzih, va Markaz-i Asnad-i Majlis-i Shura-yi Islami”), hereafter referred to as Kitabkhunih-yi Majlis or Majles Library.
 - 25 Conversation with an archivist, Kitabkhunih-yi Majlis, Tehran, 2015.
 - 26 When looking back on this, I am often struck by how similar it was to Maria Elena Martínez’s experience of researching *limpieza de sangre* in Spain, and the reactions of archivists to her research. Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 7.
 - 27 Mirzai, *History of Slavery*, 24, 109. I discuss the term *kaka Siyah* and its racist vestiges more in depth in chapters 1 and 5. See also Wendy DeSouza’s

critique of Mirzai's approach, which she identifies as one that "exonerates a nation-state from its slaving past." DeSouza, "Race, Slavery, and Domesticity in Late Qajar Chronicles."

- 28 Zilfi, *Women and Slavery*, xii.
- 29 Zilfi, *Women and Slavery*, 139; Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East*. For a succinct description of the problems with Lewis's argument as well as the revisionist histories that followed in the broader Muslim world, see Ware, *Walking Qur'an*, 23–24. This mode of thinking about race in the Middle East as either irrelevant or ahistorical still persists. See Alex Lubin's interview with Ussama Makdisi: Makdisi, "Coexistence, Sectarianism, and Racism."
- 30 See Cakmak, "Citizens of a Silenced History"; El Hamel, *Black Morocco*; Moore, "Superstitious Women"; Tolan-Szkilnik, *Maghreb Noir*; Troutt Powell, *Tell This in My Memory*; Walz and Cuno, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East*; Wingham, "Arap Bacı'nın Ara Muhaveresi"; and Willoughby, "Opposing a Spectacle of Blackness," among others. The reticence around discussing race extends into African Studies as well. Young and Weitzberg have traced the broader hesitancy around discussing race, racialization, and racism (while also noting the scholarly exceptions) in African Studies and have called for a more rigorous analysis in this area. Young and Weitzberg, "Globalizing Racism and De-Provincializing Muslim Africa." For works on premodern race in adjacent Islamic societies, see Arvas, "Early Modern Eunuchs"; and Schine, "Race and Blackness in Premodern Arabic Literature," among others. For a study of Middle East imperialism in Africa, see Mostafa Minawi, *Ottoman Scramble for Africa*.
- 31 Natalia Molina advances the idea that race is relational in its social constructions, which I argue is also true in the Iranian and broader Middle Eastern context. Molina, *How Race Is Made in America*.
- 32 Motlagh, "Translating Race" and *Burying the Beloved*.
- 33 Zia Ebrahimi, *Emergence of Iranian Nationalism*; Maghbouleh, *Limits of Whiteness*. For more on the history of whiteness in the broader Middle Eastern diaspora, see Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White* and *Arab Routes*. For discussions of Iranian nationalism, see also Zakir Isfahani, *Farhang va siyosat-i Iran*.
- 34 Most premodern Persian poetry placed Persian speakers as "between" Turks and Greeks (described as "white") and Africans and South Asians (described as "black").
- 35 Notes from fieldwork in Fereydunshahr, Isfahan, 2014; Sipiani, *Dibachih*.
- 36 H. Afshar, "Age, Gender, and Slavery," 909, 912. I discuss Afshar's narrative and its implications more deeply in chapter 6.
- 37 Khosronejad, *Qajar African Nannies*.
- 38 Motlagh, "Translating Race," 51.
- 39 Conversation with Tatari, Kitabhkhunih-yi Majlis, Tehran, 2015.

- 40 Questions of modernity during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and especially during Reza Shah's rule, has been a major genre of study. See Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran*; Amin, *Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*; Grigor, *Building Iran*; Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions*; and Koyagi, *Iran in Motion*, among others.
- 41 I discuss this further in chapter 4.
- 42 Sazman-i Asnad website, <https://www.nlai.ir>, <http://www.nlai.ir/history>. Farzin Vejdani's *Making History in Iran* outlines some of the other ways Reza Shah and his government worked to usher in a new understanding of history and historiography in Iran.
- 43 National Archives and Library of Iran, "Sazman-i Asnad va Kitabkhanih-yi Milli-yi Iran" (Sazman-i Asnad), Tehran. See the Sazman-i Asnad website, <https://www.nlai.ir>, <http://www.nlai.ir/history>.
- 44 See Hathaway, "Wealth and Influence of an Exiled Ottoman Eunuch."
- 45 Ceyda Karamursel's scholarship explores the question of property from the same period in the Ottoman context, in an examination of the property of enslaved people (otherwise assumed to have been property before their manumission. See Karamursel, "Shiny Things and Sovereign Legalities."
- 46 Bsheer, *Archive Wars*, 5. Bsheer's *Archive Wars* explores these themes of organization and destruction and their connection to the secularization of the state.
- 47 There is one archive in Tehran that may be the exception, the archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Unfortunately, however, I was not given access to the collection.
- 48 Zavier Wingham, "Notes from the Field," Middle East Librarian Association (MELA) Social Justice Lecture Series, September 24, 2020.
- 49 Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 11; Zdanowski, *Speaking with Their Own Voices*.
- 50 I discuss an example of this in chapter 1.
- 51 Mira Schwerda, "Seen and Unseen," Association for Iranian Studies, August 5, 2016.
- 52 Odumosu, "Crying Child."
- 53 Drake, "Blood at the Root."
- 54 Drake, "Blood at the Root," 4.
- 55 Drake, "Blood at the Root," 13.
- 56 Browne, *Dark Matters*. The only exception here is when their visibility would have marked them for abolition efforts, which I discuss in chapter 1.
- 57 Benjamin, *Race after Technology*, 99.
- 58 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*.
- 59 I appreciate the care that Drake, Odumosu, and Samuels put into their methodology concerning reprinting photography: omitting entirely, blurring, and cropping, respectively. Drake, "Blood at the Root"; Odumosu, "Crying Child"; Samuels, "Examining Millie and Christine McKoy."

- 60 Princewill takes inspiration from the real-life account of Jamila, one of many remaining accounts of enslaved people from the early twentieth century in this region. Princewill, *In the Palace of Flowers*.
- 61 The founding members of the collective are Priscillia Kounkou Hoveyda (founder), Alex D. Eskandarkhah, Homayoun Fiamor, Pardis Nkoy, Parisa Nkoy, and Norman Soltan Salahshour (cofounders).
- 62 For more on the work of the collective, see the epilogue.
- 63 Kounkou Hoveyda invited me to serve as the resident historian of the Collective for Black Iranians in August 2020, where I have worked with artists to illustrate historical research on Black life in Iran and the broader Indian Ocean world.

PART I. ENSLAVEMENT

- 1 G. Nashat, “Anis-al-Dawla.”
- 2 Whether a king’s affection could truly free someone of their enslavement and servitude is a central question that some have grappled with when examining the life of Roxelana/Alexandra, who was enslaved and renamed Hurrem (in Persian, Khorram, or “Happy”) by Sultan Suleiman at the Ottoman court. For more on her and her ascent to power, see Peirce, *Imperial Harem* and *Empress of the East*.
- 3 Album 215, no. 13, Golestan Palace Photo Archive, Tehran.
- 4 The inscription at the top of the photograph reads “*mahbub-e Anis od-Dowleh*.” *Mahbub*, derived from *hobb*, an Arabic term for “love,” may also be translated as “favorite.” This translation raises more questions, namely, favorite what exactly? Album 215, no. 13, Golestan Palace Photo Archive, Tehran.
- 5 As I’ve mulled over the photograph’s inscription, I am reminded over and over of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, and I am left wondering if the mothers of these little beloveds ever learned of their fate, enslaved at the Qajar court.

CHAPTER 1. GEOGRAPHIES OF BLACKNESS AND ENSLAVEMENT

- 1 Ittihadiyih and Sa’ dvandian, *Amar-i Dar al-Khilafih-yi Tihran*, 28. See also section 1, “In Iran,” in “Census”; Ricks, “Slaves and Slave Trading in Shi’i Iran.” For other examples from Naser ed-Din Shah’s rule, see Rustayi and Ahmadi-Rahbarian, *Kitabchih-yi a’ dad-i nufus-i ahali-yi Dar al-Iman-i Qom*.
- 2 IOR/R/1/15/157, British Library, London. Several scholars, including Niambi Cacchioli, Anthony Lee, and Hideaki Suzuki, have written on Khyzran’s story from different perspectives. See Cacchioli, “Disputed Freedom”; Lee, “Half the Household Was African”; and Suzuki, *Slave Trade Profiteers*, 101.