

Wandering in Diaspora

The Syrian American Elite and Sexual Normativity

In her 1985 book on early Syrian American experiences, Alixa Naff notes that the Syrian American intelligentsia was particularly concerned with social issues in diaspora. These issues were an interconnected set of economic, gendered, sexual, and kinship concerns: “how to channel the social and economic energies of the young and adventurous away from the ‘subversive and immoral’ and onto an upward economic path; how to reconcile the widening economic role of women with the traditional restraints; how to protect the sanctity of the family; and how to uphold the honor and integrity of Syrians.”¹ Many of these concerns manifested themselves in conversations about marriage among Syrian migrants, and the economic role of women figured centrally in these. When it came to women doing paid work, many elite Syrian Americans, as represented in the Syrian American press, focused on women peddlers, whose presence in public spaces—unsupervised and unaccompanied by men—threatened the idealized Syrian American identity that these migrants were crafting.²

The concern that women’s laboring practices in diaspora would affect their reputations intensified in the pages of the Syrian American press at the turn of the century. Arab Americans who wrote for or to these periodicals claimed that peddling marred women’s reputations and, by extension, the entire Syrian community. They specifically claimed a link between peddling and women’s (aberrant) sexuality. Over almost thirty years, the same arguments about peddling recurred across the pages of the Syrian American press. Those arguments were the following: Women who migrate alone to peddle in the United States are shameful and should be stopped. Peddling (for women) leads to degrading behaviors, including sex work; it thus tarnishes the reputations of all Syrians. Peddling teaches Syrians to deceive their customers, which is especially harmful behavior for women and

girls. Men whose wives or daughters peddle while they stay at home or hang out in coffee shops have abandoned their patriarchal duties.

The debates about peddling in the pages of the Syrian American press, particularly about “women wanderers,” index an elite migrant community’s concerns about the parameters of normative Syrian sexuality as refracted through white and middle-class American ideals. The term “wandering” (*tajul*) often appeared in discussions about peddling in the Syrian American press, sometimes more frequently than the word for “peddling” itself (*kasha*, which also refers to the box or pack). “Wandering” is notable for its connotation of aimlessness and perhaps license or unguided and unrestrained movement, and it may reflect a diminished value placed on the work of women peddlers. This conversation was highly binary and interconnected, often involving men speaking about women’s laboring choices, and women speaking to men about their duties as husbands. The idea of a normative Syrian sexuality in the late nineteenth century depended on properly laboring, binary-gendered individuals. This normativity was of course greatly inflected by class and had already been disrupted, particularly in Mount Lebanon, by the booming silk economy and the increased presence of peasant girls in silk factories.³ In addition, the extensive scholarship on the *Nahda*—that is, the “awakening,” a literary and cultural movement in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Ottoman Empire—has shown the extent to which upper-class conversations on modernity and national identity also frequently appeared in conversations about gender.⁴ But migration and peddling further changed the actual practices of sexuality and gender among Syrians, as well as the ideas that circulated about them. These discussions thus took place at a time when the grounds of Syrian sexual normalcy were already shifting as a result of changes in the Levantine economy, the *Nahda*, and transatlantic migration.

As in many other immigrant communities, migration changed marriage patterns for Syrians. Syrians in diaspora gradually shifted from endogamous cousin- or village-based marriage to exogamous marriage practices. Once marrying from within one’s kinship circle was not readily possible, these exogamous practices largely sought to preserve marriage within one’s religious sect.⁵ Once in diaspora, Syrians who could not easily marry among their kin often sought another Syrian of the same religious background for a spouse. However, interreligious marriages were not uncommon.

The conversations among elite Syrian migrants in the press show how they navigated both Syrian and white American classed and gendered norms, which become especially clear in discussions about women’s sexuality. Simultaneously, such discussions showed that those Syrian norms were being contested by women peddlers and were themselves the result of revisions stemming from *Nahda*-era cultural change. Gender was a central axis on which *Nahda* debates about modernity and national identity turned, while explicit discourses of sexuality virtually disappeared.⁶ The question of women’s rights primarily concerned the duties and

responsibilities of women, women's labor outside the home, women's education, and women's contact with the general public.

The small Arab population in the United States was relatively prolific when it came to periodical publications. From 1892 to 1930, some fifty Arabic-language newspapers were in circulation—for a population of no more than two hundred thousand, many of whom were not literate.⁷ These periodicals were sources of information on US customs and culture, Syrian and Ottoman affairs, gossip and social news, and prominent individuals in the community, and they were places where newly arrived immigrants could place notices in search of family or friends.⁸ For Syrian immigrants, they were also sites of activism regarding their homelands, repositories for articulations of race and ethnicity, venues for retaining Arabic-language practices in diaspora, and forums to work out ideas of national and transnational identity and belonging.⁹

This chapter examines the discursive perspectives regarding women's peddling found in several Syrian American newspapers. I discuss here those periodicals most referenced in this chapter and indicate the religious affiliation of each newspaper's founders and editors. However, in not all cases was the paper's readership of the same affiliation. The first newspaper was *Kawkab America* (Star of America), founded in 1892 in New York City by brothers Ibrahim and Najib Arbeely (Greek Orthodox). It ran as a weekly first and then as a daily in its final two years. *Al-Hoda* (The Guidance) was *Kawkab's* main competition. Founded in 1898 by Naoum Mokarzel (Maronite), whose brother Salloum would later become its editor, *Al-Hoda* was the longest-running Syrian American periodical, ceasing publication in 1972. *Meraat-ul-Gharb* (Mirror of the West) was founded in 1899 by Najib Diab (Greek Orthodox), who had previously edited *Kawkab America*. Diab was an Arab nationalist, and his publication lasted until 1961. *Al-Kalimat* (The Word) was started as a biweekly periodical in 1905 by Greek Orthodox bishop (and later saint) Rafael Hawaweeny. *Al-Bayan* (The Explanation) was founded in 1911 by Sulayman Baddur and Abbas Abi Shaqra (both Druze). Their publication tended to represent Druze and Muslim perspectives. Other publications discussed herein include *Al-Wafa'* (The Fulfillment), based in Lawrence, Massachusetts, where Syrian factory workers were numerous; *Al-Jami'a* (The League), published by Farah Antoun first in Cairo and later in New York City; and *Al-Akhlaq* (The Manners), published by Yaqoub Rufail, which often addressed issues of gender.

Readership statistics are difficult to compile for these publications, in part because their editors made hyperbolic claims about their circulation. For instance, *Kawkab America* claimed to have 150,000 subscribers at one point, yet in 1894 it listed a circulation of between 400 and 800 households. *Al-Hoda* claimed that it was distributed in forty different countries; this number cannot be substantiated, but the paper did run ads from Syrian companies in Latin America.¹⁰

Despite their promises to the contrary, the narrators of the published pieces examined in this chapter are generally unreliable. Many pieces were written

anonymously, or the author's name was omitted—but how intentional this was is unclear. These unsigned articles could have also been written by the paper's editor or could have appeared as a result of the author's having purchased space in the paper.¹¹

Given this unreliability, the lack of information about these authors, and the uncertainty about these papers' circulation and reach, I am using newspapers as a way to index the discursive reality among wealthier, literate, and elite Syrian migrants regarding women, sexuality, and labor in diaspora. These newspapers also functioned as a mode of community self-policing (discussed in chapter 2) through the publication of social news and as a written record of *kalam al-nas* (what will the people say?). According to Naff, "Many of [these newspapers'] readers were also contributors. Ordinary immigrants asked questions, voiced opinions, and reflected their growing aspirations."¹² But characterizing the readership and authorship of these periodicals as "ordinary" masks clear class markers which indicate that their perspectives, particularly with regard to peddling, were not necessarily those of the common Syrian peasant migrant. Furthermore, this characterization itself indicates class differences among early Syrian migrants in the United States. We can see this in particular when we realize that peddling women were largely not represented in these perspectives, and certainly not with their own voices. They were the targets of criticism, but they did not represent themselves. Nor do we hear from men whose wives or daughters peddled and who might have defended this labor arrangement. At any rate, although these newspapers each had different audiences and emphases, with disagreements between editors of rival newspapers even landing in the courts,¹³ at least one thing seemed to unite them: a concern with women's labor, and particularly with women's peddling, in diaspora.

These public discussions about gender, labor, and marriage exposed further shifts in Syrian communities relating to sexuality and gender. Could men trust women to uphold the family reputation (and, for many, the Syrian reputation writ large)? Could women count on men to live up to their patriarchal responsibilities? Were any new understandings of Syrian gender normalcy possible, related specifically to heterosexual marriage? Such questions were brought into relief as literate Syrians discussed the prevalence of women peddlers in the United States. The middle- to upper-class marriage contract was essentially put on trial as Syrian migrants debated whether and how well men and women were upholding their matrimonial promises as they wandered through this diasporic countryside.¹⁴

SYRIAN HONOR AND WOMEN'S SEXUALITY

Syrians referenced peddling frequently in the Syrian American press at the turn of the twentieth century. Some instances were practical, such as a how-to guide for new migrants who were looking to get started in peddling.¹⁵ In 1898, Salloum Mokarzel warned readers of *Al-Hoda* about American customs for visiting someone, giving explicit instructions as to the etiquette of approaching someone in

their home in the United States. For instance, one must not enter a home without knocking first. Knock softly, not loudly. Understand that someone could have a legitimate reason to refuse entry. Do not look through a peephole or keyhole to see inside. And ask forgiveness for your potential intrusion. These tips would have been particularly important for peddlers approaching a stranger's door.¹⁶ But, while some references to peddling centered on such practical advice, other authors decried the moral degradation of peddling; for example, it made Syrians hyperfocused on accruing wealth to the exclusion of other values, and it encouraged them to become proficient in the ways of deception.

In 1898, one Syrian wrote a satirical poem, published in *Al-Hoda*, that claimed, "Every time the [peddling] box opens, it cheats the buyer." Here, peddling was depicted as the cause of many people's riches and just as many others' misery.¹⁷ In 1904, *Al-Hoda* solicited essays about the so-called backwardness of Syrians and how to remedy it. Peddling figured prominently in the reader responses. Ibrahim Arbeely questioned why Syrians were not educating their "sons, daughters, and women" by sending them to public schools "like other immigrant groups." Instead, they were out peddling, where they would "use every method to deceive and lie. . . . They would swear [to Americans] that they are selling them [the goods] at the price they were purchased with, that they are committed to returning to their homeland or entering divinity schools or raising their brothers or supporting their sisters and mothers. And all of those are lies on top of lies." Arbeely criticized men who bragged about how cunning their children were and how much money their family members earned. He pleaded, "The annihilation and prevention of peddling, as previously mentioned, is necessary, and particularly among women."¹⁸ As it happened, this moral degradation turned on a specifically gendered axis—the tactics that Syrians learned in peddling were believed to be particularly harmful to women and girls.

In 1895, the editor of *Kawkab America*, Najib Arbeely, wrote of complaints about "the number of Syrian women who leave their husbands and come to America with the intent of traveling around and subsisting on buying and selling among its people."¹⁹ Arbeely warned that US immigration officials would stop women from entering the United States on their own, but he implored Syrians to themselves stop women. Specifically, he and a committee of men called on newspaper editors and religious leaders to prevent such women from immigrating to the United States without a husband or family member. Early federal immigration legislation created classes of individuals deemed undesirable for immigration, in sets of laws that revealed how gender, sexuality, class, and race were intimately connected in the white US imagination, particularly with regard to women.²⁰ These included the earliest of such laws, the Page Act (1875), which banned criminals, Chinese laborers, and women thought to engage in sex work, particularly those coming from Asian countries; the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), which solidified opposition to Chinese immigration for ten years initially; and another 1882 measure to deny entry to those liable to become a public charge. The "liable to become a public

charge” provision was strengthened in 1891, when polygamists were added to the list of excluded classes of immigrants.

Unmarried women were often viewed as liable to become dependent on the state and risked being denied entry or deported if found to be so categorized. Indeed, deportation records reflect this unease with Syrian migrant women’s economic autonomy and transgression of US marriage customs. One woman, Malake Sultan, was deported in 1914 because, though having declared herself a widow, she was accused of having left her husband and child in Syria, as well as having sexual relationships with several men besides her husband. Another Syrian woman, Zahia Antony, was married but posed as the wife of another man to come to the United States via Canada. Antony worked and successfully supported herself as a peddler, but she was deported in 1910 on the grounds that she was likely to become a public charge, pointing to the perception that peddling was not a real job.²¹ Interestingly, these cases materialized as a result of *transnational* Syrian community self-policing. The family or community members of these women in Syria were disgruntled with the women’s lives in diaspora. They then complained to the Bureau of Immigration and entreated that agency to investigate the women, leading to their deportations. Syrian community self-policing thus had the capacity to collaborate with the carceral policies of the US state.

The criticisms of women’s solo migration and peddling were most frequently directed at women themselves. An 1893 letter published in *Kawkab America* decried the participation of Syrian women in the peddling trade. Its author, a surgeon named Najib Tannous Abdou, did not mince words when criticizing the prevalence of women peddlers: “The loss of the East’s honor and reputation in the eyes of Westerners who once thought it a paradise and praised its people’s life, and you see them now cursing the East’s water and sons.” Tannous went on to specify that this tarnished image was due to Syrian women peddlers who “cheat, lie, and deceive” and who travel long distances and “enter men’s spaces,” where they are “subjected to humiliating experiences.” Americans judged Syrians based on appearances, Tannous argued. Thus, Syrians should be very careful to consider how their actions and manners appeared to those not familiar with Syrian customs. Tannous also argued that all Syrians should move into professions other than peddling.²²

For some elite Syrians, then, to peddle was to lie and deceive; for women, this was a question of honor. Shame, humiliation, and dishonor were frequently invoked in relation to peddling women, and these concepts were used to link peddling with women’s sexuality. The conversations about peddling women in the press displayed “middle-class fears of [women’s] sexuality run rampant.”²³ This discourse conflated the economic independence that some women experienced in diaspora with sexual freedom. In 1903, Ilyas Nasif wrote in *Al-Hoda* of witnessing the hardships that peddling women endured. He recounted that one day, while he was talking with a group of men gathered in a hotel lobby, a Syrian woman entered

carrying a heavy peddling pack. Exhausted, she set her goods down and said, "I will sell these men products for 4 or 5 dollars and I do not care if they laugh at me or mock me." She displayed her products while the men began to laugh and poke fun at her.

Some of them bought small materials. Others asked her if she would allow them to have one kiss if they were to buy something from her. One man even asked her if he could tie her stockings for her, another asked her to demonstrate how women tie their stockings, etc. Their only intention was to pass the time and to have fun. The Syrian woman would respond to each one of them kindly and cheerfully, [saying] that she would look into his request after he had bought [something] from her, because her standing did not assist her in behaving otherwise. The Syrian woman responded to each of them with warm smiles, she cared for all of their matters after they bought.²⁴

Nasif explained in his article that he left and then returned to the same spot hours later, where the presumably non-Syrian men were "still talking about the Syrian woman in the ugliest words possible" and berating Syrians for their barbarity and ill treatment of women. In Nasif's view, these men took advantage of the Syrian peddler's desperation and, as a result, her honor. By extension, the honor of Syrian men was violated as well.²⁵

In 1898, Yusuf Shihadeh wrote in *Al-Ayyam* chastising "ill-mannered peddlers who have entered the honorable homes of Americans and have caused a lot of dishonor for the Syrian name." The author told of one Syrian girl who sold sewing materials. She entered the home of an American woman and displayed her products. When the woman apologized because she was not interested, "the mighty Syrian girl was angered by this and began to curse the American woman. She released any and all of the terrible words that she knew. Due to the tone of her voice, the American woman was able to tell that the Syrian girl was cursing at her." To get rid of the girl, the American woman recommended one of her friends as a potential customer. This friend knew some Arabic, and the American woman wrote to her to warn her about the Syrian girl. The same scene then played out at the home of the second woman, who understood that the Syrian girl was cursing her when she was not interested in many of her products. According to Shihadeh, the two women claimed to have published a piece on their experience in an American newspaper, "warning other Americans of Syrian peddlers and asking them to be cautious when they let them enter their homes."²⁶

Ten years later, the editors of *Al-Wafa'* wrote in a similar fashion about women peddlers and "the consequences of the Syrian woman holding the wallet [an expression that meant peddling] and wandering from city to city to sell." They relayed a story told by a peddling man who went to an American customer to whom he had sold before. His customer, a woman, asked him about a Syrian woman peddler and mentioned her by name. The man knew the woman but feigned ignorance in order

to hear the American woman's opinion of her. According to the American woman, the Syrian woman had told her that her husband "was once wealthy and of the elite," but she took to peddling after his business failed and their young children at home were in need. The peddling man knew this was not the Syrian woman's actual circumstances. He called the peddling woman who created false narratives to sell products "a thief and a liar at the same time" and said that such stories prove the "degradation and humiliation" of Syrian women peddlers in general. The editors continued, "The woman that carries her purse or wallet in her hand or over her shoulder [that is, who peddles], also carries the reasons for degrading her status and value."²⁷

Here the *Al-Wafa'* editors described a chorus of outcries against dishonest and corrupt Syrian women peddlers. They seemed to repeat arguments that had come before, aware of their redundancy and exasperated by their ineffectiveness. They railed against the women themselves, their husbands, and the larger community that had failed to stop these women despite myriad newspaper publications against them. The editors defended peddling as useful and even respectable when men did it—"when it is necessary for trade"—but, conversely, as the thing that "marks a girl with dishonor, whenever she carries her purse." The editorial concluded with three recommendations for Syrian women: encouraging them to work in factories, where they could be properly surveilled; to work in stores where their parents or family members worked; or, best yet, to stay at home. The *Al-Wafa'* editors concluded, "We are in more need of dignity and good reputation than we are of the wealth made through the path of humiliation and degradation."²⁸

In this regard, much of this published criticism against women peddlers invoked their dishonor, humiliation, and degradation. In particular, the term "honor" (*sharaf*) allowed a writer to talk about sex, and specifically women's sexuality, without directly articulating it. Although the concept of honor has become epistemologically loaded in Arab contexts based on Eurocentric understandings of Arab family systems, it figures centrally in these peddling debates in the Arab press, and it is thus essential for understanding how ideas of women's sexuality circulated to constrain women's laboring choices in diaspora.²⁹ In writing about women peddlers in 1906, 'Afifa Karam singled out women who lived alone without their fathers, brothers, or husbands. An early Arab American feminist, Karam wrote prolifically about women's issues for *Al-Hoda*, often addressing women themselves. However, in this 1906 essay, Karam decided to speak directly to men "because the leash of women is in their hands." As a feminist writer, Karam was primarily concerned with women's education, well-being, and betterment.³⁰ In her piece, she appealed to men through an argument of naturalized gender essentialism, which considered that women were weak and needed men to protect them. She claimed that Syrian men's failures to protect Syrian women put them in situations as peddlers that required them to compromise their sexual integrity: "She [the woman peddler] was not created to take insults for him, to wander trading

while he goes from one place to another accompanied by laziness. She was not created to trade for him, sometimes [trading] with her honor and modesty, while he sits idly and with disgrace. She was not created to carry, on his behalf, all kinds of burdens and struggles while he does not carry anything when that is what he was created for.”³¹ The mention of trading “with her honor” enabled Karam to signal that women peddlers were put in situations in which they might be forced to engage in sexual activity for profit. Karam also used this opportunity to air her grievance that what Syrians valued was changing in diaspora. People were concerned no longer with “where were you and what did you do, but rather [with] what did you bring and how much did you make.”³² She chided those men who sent their wives “to sell and wander.”

Layyah Barakat was more explicit in her 1911 condemnation of certain forms of women’s labor in diaspora. She urged Syrian women to find respectable work: “By work, I do not mean knocking on doors bearing bags and cases because that is not considered honorable work. In fact, it is often dangerous for good, simple-hearted naïve girls who have been exposed to evil and whoredom as a result of knocking on doors. I have heard painful stories in this regard which I cannot repeat on the pages of a newspaper.”³³ Perhaps the stridency of Barakat’s message reflected the era in which she was writing. As fewer people peddled and more found work and lives that were less transient, “the tone of the opposition to women’s work grew more strident.”³⁴

SYRIAN HONOR AND RACIALIZED NATURALIZATION

In the Syrian diaspora in the early twentieth-century United States, the concept of honor was imbued with complex meaning. As a matter of gendered sexual propriety, honor was tied to the very categories of desirable and undesirable immigrants delineated by the US government. These categories were ideological, sexual, and racialized, particularly with regard to non-Christian immigrants. In 1907, after the Alabama congressman John Burnett spoke against Syrians as “the most undesirable” of immigrants, a Birmingham medical doctor, H. A. Elkourie, wrote to his local newspaper twice to defend Syrians’ fitness for citizenship. He sought in particular to distance Syrians from “prostitutes and anarchists,” who were excluded from the categories of desirable immigrants welcome in the United States. To be sure, Elkourie’s was a racial argument, but he did not use terms of color, nor did he define Syrians in opposition to Black or Asian populations, as elite Syrians later did explicitly.³⁵

This imbrication of gender, sexuality, and race also depended on discourses of religious difference. After polygamists were added to the list of undesirables in 1891, anti-Muslim racism was “translated into” US immigration law.³⁶ For instance, while Syria and the rest of the Ottoman Empire remained eligible for immigration after being excluded from the 1907 “Asiatic Barred Zone,”

Turkish Muslims in particular began to be denied admittance to the United States because of their professed Muslim faith. Despite the indigenous Middle Eastern origins of Christianity, Syrians in the United States found themselves in an ideological terrain that privileged certain kinds of Europeans above others and held Europeaness to be synonymous with Christianity. This ideology presented an opportunity for Syrian Christians to argue for religious sameness with and, by extension, racial-cultural proximity to white Americans.³⁷ Syrian Muslim immigrants faced the additional risk of deportation or denial of entry because of laws that targeted Muslims based on the association of Islam with polygamy, regardless of an individual's actual beliefs or practices.³⁸ Syrian Muslims and Druze were thus always at risk in this legal system. Although Syrian Christians and to some extent Syrian Jews may have been legally able to access this proximity to whiteness, their everyday experiences remained precarious.³⁹ Some Americans associated all Syrians with Islam and thus with a racialized difference, regardless of their actual religion. And, to some extent, because of the cultural dominance of Islam in the region and the mixed nature of religious and social life in Greater Syria, this association with Islam was true.

This question of Syrian honor thus also became a matter of Syrian whiteness and, for many, Syrian Christianity. The defense of Syrian whiteness was articulated in increasingly explicit racial terms in relation to US citizenship. As Syrian immigrants petitioned US courts for naturalized citizenship, they made legal arguments in support of their whiteness that circulated in these same publications and were linked with some Syrian elite leaders. For example, Naoum Mokarzel, the editor of *Al-Hoda*, also founded the Syrian American Association in 1909. This organization, with Mokarzel as president, went on to aid in the defense of George Dow's 1913 federal petition for citizenship through an argument for Syrian whiteness that also hinged upon Syrian Christianity.⁴⁰ When Dow's initial petition was denied, *Al-Hoda* printed a fundraising appeal from the Syrian Society for National Defense. In reference to the Dow case, the organization's secretary, Najib Al-Sarghani, wrote, "We have found ourselves at the center of an attack on the Syrian honor."⁴¹ Dow's case would eventually be decided in his favor in the US Supreme Court, which ended the federal adjudication of Syrian whiteness with regard to citizenship.

Sarah Gualtieri has analyzed how these claims to whiteness on behalf of the Syrian community moved from initially being couched in terms of civilizational and religious likeness to Europeans to also explicitly claiming that a white identity meant "not Black" and "not Asian."⁴² Indeed, in the Dow case in which the Supreme Court ultimately decided in the Syrians' favor, the argument linked Christianity to ethnological classifications of race and whiteness as central to Syrian identity. The argument also used the legal precedent of European Jews' naturalization rights and linked Syrians to them through ethnological classifications

of the Semite.⁴³ These Syrian petitioners used their proximity to Jews, even as the assumed Christian identity of Syrian immigrants played a significant role in adjudicating their whiteness.

Representing whiteness through Christianity is apparent in these claims of Syrian petitioners, who offered evidence both in terms of their religious identifications as Christians and the historical geography of Syria and the life of Jesus. Judges in these Syrian naturalization cases often viewed “Arab” as synonymous with “Muslim,” at a time when the latter was an unequivocally nonwhite racial category.⁴⁴ They also voiced concern about ancestral mixing between Syrian Christians and Muslims and thus the lack of purity in Syrian Christian claims to whiteness.⁴⁵ But these were concerns of miscegenation, which is a specific racial *and sexual* anxiety. Thus, claiming an authentic Christian identity as grounds for naturalization appealed not only to an ethnoreligious distinction from Muslims but also to a heteronormative and thus hetero-reproductive purity. As Junaid Rana has shown, the category of “Muslim” as historically constructed by Europeans has depended on “a racial logic that crosses the cultural categories of nation, religion, ethnicity, and sexuality.”⁴⁶ Race is a concept of heterosexual embodiment, in which bodies are categorized and systematized according to difference; heterosexuality, then, is “the means of ensuring, but also the site of endangering, the reproduction of these differences.”⁴⁷ Thus, claiming or gaining proximity to whiteness demands normativity in other aspects of self and, in particular, sexuality. This was the case both in how elite Christian Syrians articulated whiteness for themselves and in how they distanced themselves from their Muslim counterparts.⁴⁸

The naturalization process at this time, though primarily about racial fitness for citizenship, was thus also a question of sexual fitness and worked within an “economy of desire” in which the state “selects its own objects of desire and produces them as citizens.”⁴⁹ The naturalized subject was presumed to be a sexually reproductive one. This imagined immigrant was one who desired the United States and would sexually reproduce and raise future citizens in the nation’s likeness.⁵⁰ Syrian honor was thus a matter of sexual, gendered, classed, religious, and racial respectability. When elite Syrian Americans made appeals for women to stop peddling because it was degrading; when they argued that Syrians should be able to naturalize because they were similar to Europeans and white Americans; when Syrian American Christians distanced themselves from Islam or made anti-Muslim statements—in all these cases, the arguments revealed a burgeoning ideology of Syrian American respectability politics rooted in white American heteronormative ideals. Tracing this use of honor in debates about both women’s peddling and Syrian naturalization further illuminates the coconstitutive relationship between race and sexuality in the Syrian American diaspora. This analysis also provides historicist corroboration that, rather than merely being a culturally delineated concept, honor was an affective category that contained a range of Syrians’ anxieties about race,

sexual and gendered normativity, and modernity—anxieties that were refracted through and shaped by American white supremacist and heteronormative politics.

MEN'S PROBLEMS: THE *AL-HODA* ROW OVER WOMEN PEDDLERS

One *Al-Hoda* article published in 1903, and a series of ensuing responses, provides a microcosm of these arguments linking women peddlers with declining Syrian honor and patriarchal failure. The author, Yusuf Al-Za'ni Batruni, was a peddler himself and spoke from his peddling experience, as well as from his conversations with other Syrians. He was unflinching in his assessment that women peddlers made things more difficult for everyone, but in particular for Syrian men: "The source of all problems come from the peddling woman." He acknowledged that some might bristle at his opinion of women peddlers but said that his were "hurtful but true words." Batruni advocated for a federal ban prohibiting women from crossing state lines to peddle. He continued, "The honor and dignity of the Syrian man can be returned after peddling has been stripped from the hands of the women that have been the source of this dishonor and shame." Batruni was ostensibly motivated by his patriotism and his desire to "[protect] the Syrian name." But for him, Syrian honor and men's honor were the same. While he directed most of his consternation at women, Batruni circuitously lobbed his criticisms at the husbands of peddling women: "lazy men whose livelihood is dependent on their wives."⁵¹ If women were banned from peddling, Batruni claimed, this ban would force their husbands to do the peddling work themselves instead, thus restoring honor to Syrian men, Syrian women, and the Syrian reputation writ large.

Al-Hoda published several responses, including two follow-up pieces from Batruni himself. Unsurprisingly, 'Afifa Karam was one of those who responded. An incessant champion of women's education, Karam praised Batruni's calls for reforms and then quickly pivoted. She turned Batruni's argument against women's peddling into one for women's literacy: "You, oh virtuous, should take it from me that there are only 5 percent who are well behaved among the immigrant women, so how can we hope to reform the illiterate who cannot read?"⁵² This pivot extended more broadly to become a critique that Syrians were not reading newspapers or books. Of course, Karam had much to say about women peddlers as well: "There are many who peddle either because their husbands push them to work, or because they don't have a man, and they remain righteous and [therefore] undeserving of the scholars' anger."⁵³ Karam agreed that some women peddlers indeed ruined the Syrian name: "These women, as you have said, who themselves made the American [man] despise them and mark them with depravity, and who almost even managed to carry the germs of their disease to healthy bodies, for you rarely find an American man who sees the Syrian woman as pure."⁵⁴ It is unclear if Karam was referring here to the literal spread of disease (for instance, sexually

transmitted infections, because women peddlers were linked with sex work) or to a figurative spread that degraded Syrian standing and morality—or to both. Karam was pointed in her critique of such women, who she claimed did not think about the future or their reputations in the United States but only about returning to a home where no one would ask about their actions abroad.⁵⁵

The perspectives of women peddlers themselves were largely absent from these conversations. However, the visibility and contributions of their labor could not be entirely erased. A third article published in response to Batruni, written by Amin Silbi, features Silbi's discussion of Batruni's article with two women peddlers. Rebuking the claim that peddling marred the Syrian reputation, the women claimed that "the popularity of the Syrian name, from start to finish, is from peddling." They suggested that women peddled only because their husbands realized that they themselves could not succeed at it but their wives could. For them, this practice was not a source of shame but rather a reflection of practicality, utility, and recognition of their husbands' labor for the family: "The woman's peddling is not for the reasons claimed by the author, but done out of necessity, in order to help her husband whose hard work she has lived off of for many years. If she helps him for two or three years, there is neither shame on her or him."⁵⁶ Essentially, these women argued that they were proud of helping their families in this way when needed. The younger of the two women also took Batruni to task for his claim that he criticized women out of the pride he had in his Syrian community. She countered that Batruni's "words come from severe anger, and not from patriotic zeal, because he who is protective of the Syrian name, and especially of the gentle sex, should not be publicizing his words of ridicule and scorn across all corners of the world."⁵⁷ The two women, like others, maintained that women who migrated alone to peddle were in the minority. Instead of shaming and complaining, they suggested, men should look for ways to help those women who had no other options for income.

Silbi, who conveyed these women's words, wrote at the beginning of the piece that, when he had begun talking to them, he was "hopeful that they would quit this profession." But, unfortunately for those who shared his perspective, these comments from women peddlers showed that they were steadfast in defending it. Their perspectives seem to respond to the overwhelming print discourse that ignored women's own agency in decisions regarding migration and labor. The lack of perspectives from women peddlers and from others who might defend women's peddling work only reinforced the idea that women peddlers were either lost souls corrupted by their work and unfamiliar diasporic environments, or else unwitting pawns of their inept husbands.

When Batruni responded a few weeks later, he returned to his initial argument that 75 percent of women peddlers earn their money through "indecent actions" and that 25 percent of them were "moral and pure."⁵⁸ To those who defended single women peddlers who had no other options, Batruni reminded them that women

could work in textile factories or as seamstresses with less stain on their character. He refuted those who objected to his essay and thanked those who supported his efforts. In a second response, Batruni focused on speaking directly to the men whose wives peddled, appealing to a naturalized division of gendered labor endowed by God: "We know that the man was created to work, and since the beginning of his existence on Earth, God said to him, by the sweat of your face, you shall eat your bread. But the men who are in good and complete health," yet stay at home, "killing time and playing with the children, and send their wives to peddle; they have lost their honor and are nothing but vile, and now eat from the woman's hard work, drinking her sweat and livelihood."⁵⁹

The voices of women were present within these debates about women's peddling, but they rarely reflected the perspectives of women who actually peddled. Given the relatively low literacy rates of the Arab American population at this time and the fact that the subscriptions to these periodicals did not include the entire community, we can take these perspectives as only partial, and particularly as representing sectors of the social elite of the early Arab American community.⁶⁰ This likelihood does not mean that these ideas did not reach nonliterate audiences, as newspapers would also have been read aloud in groups. But it is difficult to tell in what ways such arguments reached and influenced women peddlers themselves.

In many of these pieces, peddling as a potential source of women's empowerment (because of the income it provided) was critiqued as an example of men's declining power. In this way, the object of scrutiny moved away from women and (back) to men. Although peddling was clearly a "women's issue," these discussions about peddling often orbited men, either by speaking directly to them rather than to women or by centering men's feelings and men's reputations.⁶¹ This raises the question: Was some animosity directed at women peddlers because of a sense of frustration on the part of male peddlers who felt they could not compete with women's peddling successes?

PATRIARCHAL FAILURE AND SYRIAN SEXUAL NORMATIVITY IN FLUX

The heated discussion about women wanderers reflects the discomfort that elite Syrian Americans felt about the changes in norms that coincided with immigration, particularly related to marriage practices. Syrians who migrated experienced broad shifts in marriage patterns, such as the move from familial or village-based (endogamous) marriage practices to religious-based preferences, the tenuous nature of transatlantic marriages, bigamy, and Syrians in diaspora not marrying at all. Akram Khater even suggests that some Syrian women migrated for the sole purpose of securing a spouse, because women who remained in Syria were overburdened with family responsibilities and subject to gossip when they remained unmarried.⁶² As much as the proliferation of these topics may indicate that

marriage was a priority for many Syrians, archival evidence also suggests that for others it was not. Some elders of this generation, when interviewed in the 1960s, recalled a variety of ideas in relation to being single, many of which were contrary to the assumption that “the state of being single was both unnatural and deplorable.”⁶³ These included the views that being single was common among Syrians in the United States, that there was no pressure for women to get married, and that there was no shame in not marrying.⁶⁴

These peddling critiques implicated husbands and fathers in patriarchal failure when women immigrated alone to the United States and began peddling. One response was to chastise men for their role in the crisis of women peddlers. ‘Afifa Karam’s previously discussed 1906 editorial implored men not to send women alone to the United States, where they would surely end up peddling, be subjected to insults, and potentially engage in sex work. Here, Karam criticized men whose wives worked as peddlers. They failed to uphold their patriarchal responsibilities, and their economic burden thus fell to their wives. The *kasha* (peddling box) that women carried became a symbol for all the “burdens and struggles” that husbands had neglected to carry for their wives.⁶⁵

Married women who peddled were most especially an indictment of their husbands, and these husbands were thus popular targets for those who deplored women wanderers. Such a husband failed to provide adequately for his family and led his wife and daughters into moral decay. The 1908 editorial in *Al-Wafa’* discussed earlier bemoaned Syrian women peddlers for spinning dramatic tales about their lives to “[steal] the emotions” of their customers. The editor continued, “How many a girl whose ears were not accustomed in her family home to hearing anything but virtuous words, heard [while peddling] words that hurt the ears and the morals, and how many a girl whose eyes have only seen the good and pure, has [then] seen then the ugly and corrupt.”⁶⁶ The writer was equally displeased with Syrian husbands who spent their time gambling and drinking while their wives peddled. These women would then come home from peddling, the editorial claimed, and give their earnings to “their lazy, despicable, and dishonorable men.”⁶⁷ Even so, the editorial quickly pivoted back to place blame on Syrian women for the ills of peddling.

Women writers were steadfast in their criticisms of Syrian men who were linked to women’s peddling work, both those in diaspora and those back in Syria. One particularly incisive critique was lodged by Zubayda Butrus Sa‘b in 1904 when she wrote that husbands were sending their wives to the United States to peddle and send money back home for the husbands to enjoy. “But the blame, all the blame, is on her husband, who thinks his wife is a slave of his, whom he can dispose of in whichever way he chooses, and so he sends her to America to make him money. And [then] she comes and finds more humiliation than she can bear, for she asks for death a thousand times during the day as she carries the peddling box on her head.”⁶⁸ Sa‘b understood married women peddlers to be exploited workers

who served their husbands' sole economic gain. According to these perspectives, women were finding themselves in a situation outside what was expected for them in marriage. In this context, the extensive discussions about marriage published in the same periodicals highlight that the very understanding of what was normative in Syrian sexuality was shifting.

When elite Syrians criticized women's peddling, they frequently cited a failure of Syrian patriarchy. That is, they blamed men for not upholding their patriarchal duty to provide for and protect the women in their families and claimed that, as a result, these women were either forced to peddle or were exposed to the dangers of peddling because they knew no better (i.e., a man did not correct them).

FREEDOM, SEX, AND MONEY: A QUESTION OF VALUES

These critical discussions about marriage emphasized some fraught consequences of migration. Discussions about Syrian values regarding money, family, marriage, freedom, and sexuality were abundant in the pages of the early Syrian American press. The last two—freedom and sexuality—were frequently linked in the Syrian press, as the changes in sexual norms wrought by migration and peddling were referenced particularly through a discourse of excessive freedom. Any consensus, if indeed one had ever existed, on the values of Syrians was shaken by transatlantic dispersal.

The preoccupation with values was often signaled in the ways writers criticized Syrian migrants' focus on money, and this criticism was often routed through the work of peddling. In one satirical story about life in the United States, a Syrian immigrant envies his educated, elite counterparts (who engage in nontransient work). The peddler-to-proprietor trope unfolds slowly here, as the immigrant moves from peddling to opening a fruit stand and later a dry goods store.⁶⁹ Yet, all the while, he still desires to be in the inner circle of the Syrian elite and moves to New York to open a store. Once in New York, he remarks that his "biggest greed" was not so much for the money he sought as for the company of these elite Syrians. "Doesn't money open the door to everything?" he asked. Indeed, the author is sure that "money opens the doors to their homes . . . money is everything!"⁷⁰

Another writer lamented this focus on money and its effects on Syrian American matchmaking. Amin Silbi wrote in *Al-Hoda* in 1902 that families were frequently more concerned with money—how much the husband would make and how large the dowry was—than with the potential groom's character and manners. In these situations, married women often ended up peddling. A woman would know no more about her future husband than these financial details; and "as soon as the girl settles in his house, and he has a hold on her," according to Silbi, the man sends his new wife out to work, to at least recover the cost of the dowry he gave her father. Silbi urged Syrian parents and their daughters to think about a

man's manners and his family of origin, rather than money and appearances: "In this way, we will no longer see many women selling in a degrading state, because the man who honors his woman will find it easier to withstand poverty and the roughness of living, rather than expose her to insult and force her to work in professions unsuitable for women. May the intelligent pay attention to this matter in the country of freedom and independence."⁷¹

Nearly twenty years later, Victoria Tannous wrote about the way that work plagued Syrians in Syria and in diaspora, but in different ways. "Life will end but work will not" was the saying passed down to her from her mother, aunts, and neighbors in Syria. Tannous said she immigrated to the United States "to escape the work" but instead found "an endless routine of work that does not stop."⁷² Whereas in Syria, a woman working outside the home was a source of shame, Tannous claimed, in diaspora men and women, young and old, married and unmarried, all left their houses daily for the drudgery of work. To be sure, Tannous writes here through an idealized lens, describing what she had expected life in the United States to be like, certainly one of relative economic ease. "In America," Tannous wrote "this mentality has flipped. The Syrian man in America believes that his own employment is a source of shame. In fact, he believes that it is one of his wife's duties to earn a living for herself and her children, and even to provide for him. I know many who are of this kind. They spend their days in coffee shops with the excuse that they cannot find work, and their wives carry the burden of working either in fabric or as peddlers."⁷³ Tannous also argued that the reverse—those men who prevented their daughters from working because of "tradition"—was wrong too. "Every family that has a hardworking, self-sufficient girl who does not rely on her father or brother has the right to be proud of her. It is the lazy girl who believes that working brings her dishonor who becomes a burden on her family."⁷⁴ Essentially, Tannous advocated for unmarried women to learn some skill to become self-sufficient, which she would then cease performing once she married: "Working for an unmarried girl is an honor and a shame for a married woman." Tannous argued that the married woman who worked outside the home enabled a lazy husband, leading him "to despise her and view her only as an object to be used to please his needs, and not as his wife and life partner."⁷⁵

In 1904, *Al-Hoda* editor Naoum Mokarzel invited women to write on issues pertaining to them for the newspaper. "He who thinks that restraining the woman is advantageous for the nation, protective of morality, and honorable for the family, is either oppressive or unwise,"⁷⁶ he wrote. "Research on women demands a woman's pen." Mokarzel lamented the attention paid to women's bodies and appearance in neglect of their character and intellect. He pointed out what he saw as a hypocrisy particular to Syrian Americans: "What is strange is that in our diasporas, we cast an ugly freedom on the woman to explore the forests and the wilderness, to go into the cities and roam the villages, while weighed down by her load. But we constrain her otherwise, for we do not allow her to give a speech as a speaker or do research

as a writer.”⁷⁷ Here Mokarzel juxtaposed the freedom given to women who peddle with the freedom denied women in matters of literacy and public intellectualism.

In the Syrian American press, freedom was a salient trope and a frequent topic of discussion, as Syrians considered the differences between living under Ottoman rule and living in the United States. But freedom could present a peculiar problem for Syrians living in diaspora. According to Iskandar Atallah, writing in *Al-Kalimat* in 1909, this freedom was, for Syrian migrants, “like putting the sunlight in their eyes, which can surely incinerate them.”⁷⁸ Atallah described how “this excessive freedom” led specifically to bigamy in the Syrian migrant population, whose men would leave wives in the homeland and marry again in the United States. He noted that some families of betrothed women in Syria were being instructed to make sure migrant men were not already married in the United States, and he praised this caution. He also urged Syrian migrant men to have letters of certification attesting to their unmarried status when they traveled back to Syria to find brides.

Druze Syrian migrants also wrestled with migration and marriage. A series of articles in *Al-Bayan* in 1914 debated the possibilities and pitfalls of Druze women joining men in the United States. The numbers of Druze who migrated to the United States were especially low in comparison to their Christian counterparts, but those of Druze women were minuscule. As in other Syrian communities, Druze religious leaders became concerned about the effect of this migration on marriage, children, and the reproduction and maintenance of Druze religious and communal practices. According to oral history interviews, these leaders required early Druze migrants to sign an oath vowing that they would return to their wives and fiancées within two years or release them from marriage.⁷⁹

The predominant tone of these articles in *Al-Bayan* sided against the immigration of Druze women. All of the writers agreed that migration was harmful for Druze women. Where they differed was in whether it was more harmful for Druze women to be in the United States or for them to be without men in Syria. In the fourth article of this five-part series, the writer Amin Abu Isma‘il argued against this immigration because for Druze women to stay in the homeland would motivate Druze men to return rather than staying in the United States permanently. Isma‘il also argued that what prevented women from migrating was not religion but morality. For immigrants to protect the “family’s morals” was impossible, Isma‘il claimed, when a woman has “absolute freedom” and her husband is forced to be absent due to his work. The bottom line? “Absolute freedom brings about immorality,” and the United States is a country of “freedom, modernization, and immorality.”⁸⁰

Others argued that while Druze men and women were not meant to be separated (which was the one argument in favor of Druze women’s migration), the United States was a land of dishonor and corruption for women that would further disperse the Druze population and prevent them from having a single place to call home. This could “lead to [their] extinction.”⁸¹ These pieces were inflected by

the questions of Druze nationalism and the role of women's reproductive capacities, biologically and socially, in nationalist ideology. Druze women's immigration posed an existential threat in which women's exposure to the kind of freedom available in the United States would lead them to abandon their traditions and moral habits. Druze women's immigration would, ironically, cause the community to lose its specificity as Druze as members dispersed and assimilated into other communities.⁸²

In the last article in the *Al-Bayan* series, As'ad Husayn Abu 'Ali wondered what would become of the Druze woman without familial support in diaspora: "And what would the supporters of women's immigration say if something were to occur that forces the woman to divorce from her husband while in diaspora, or if her husband dies and she is left without an ally or provider and was the mother of children who cannot provide for themselves; what would the result be then? And what shall that poor woman do to get the necessary sustenance for her and her children?" The only choice for survival, in these cases, was peddling. Abu 'Ali went on to remark that the trials of peddling were well known among the Druze, including "the struggles and bootlicking and other things that it includes that are inappropriate to mention."⁸³ Peddling was particularly harmful, the author argued, because Druze children were left alone while a widowed or single Druze mother peddled. The children would thus stop being raised "in the manner appropriate to human society," preventing their integration into Druze society writ large: "Their return [to the homeland] will become impossible." The tone of these pieces is both highly chauvinistic and incredibly urgent: "[Women's immigration] will be the fatal blow for the Druze sect," Abu 'Ali wrote, "and in less than tens of years, the sect will be nothing but a trace."⁸⁴ Questions of lineage, cultural knowledge and inheritance, and community religious identity loomed large. The migration of Druze women, to a land where Druze religious and cultural practices were not recognized or valued, threatened their ability to properly reproduce the Druze nation.

One satirical short story about modern marriage among American Syrians took these worries of changing Syrian values to an extreme. "Marriage on the Latest Fashion Trend" claimed that women were so free in the United States that they could experiment wildly with heterosexual marriage arrangements. In the story, Um Tannous and Abu Tannous are the mother and father of three daughters who live in the United States. Um Tannous travels from Syria to visit them, and each visit with a daughter reveals new ways that this "country of trendiness" has wreaked havoc on Syrian marriage and gender norms. First, Um Tannous visits her oldest daughter in New York, who has three children. Um Tannous inquires as to the whereabouts of her son-in-law, who has not come to greet her. Her daughter informs her that she divorced her husband and is now looking for another to help raise her children. The daughter normalizes divorce in the United States, saying that divorce was the "trend" as well as a right that belonged to both women and

men. She then goes on to list the numbers of divorced women that she knows. None of this consoles Um Tannous, of course, and she continues to think about this “trend” into the night. The next morning, the story says, “she woke up terrified, because she dreamed that Abu Tannous had come to America to divorce her and follow the trends like his daughter.”⁸⁵

Um Tannous then visits her next-oldest daughter in Jersey City, New Jersey. She is introduced to her daughter’s husband, an older man in his sixties who greets her respectfully. Soon after, a man closer to her daughter’s age enters the house, and she learns that this is her daughter’s lover. “These words fell on Um Tannous’s head like a bolt of lightning,” the story explains, “and she wished that the ship had sunk with her on it, before she had reached America and heard this news.”⁸⁶ That night Um Tannous has another dream; in this one, her husband comes to the United States to follow this trend of taking a younger lover.

Finally, Um Tannous returns to New York to visit her youngest daughter. After she spends time at this daughter’s home, her daughter announces that she is waiting for her husband. This announcement surprises Um Tannous, who has believed her daughter to be unmarried. It surprises her more because this husband has also not been home since her arrival. Her daughter explains, “Mom, I am not married based on the trend like my sisters, I am married on the ‘latest trend.’” She then goes on to reference Fannie Hurst, the early-twentieth-century American feminist whose unconventional marriage was publicized widely by the US press. This daughter explains that she and her husband live in separate residences, like Fannie Hurst and her spouse, and that their marriage follows several of Hurst’s “conditions.” In addition to living separately, these conditions include eating breakfast together only twice a week, letting any children choose which parent they are named after, and having the freedom to spend their time separately as they choose. Perhaps crucial for the debates over women’s peddling, another condition expressed by the daughter concerns the right not to have marriage impede one’s work: “Marriage has nothing to do with daily work, for if the wife was a writer for example, she has the right to continue in her job after she is married, and marriage should not stand in her way in this regard.”⁸⁷

Um Tannous spends a total of three months in the United States and ruminates daily on these developments. Increasingly, she regrets her decision to send her daughters abroad and to come herself: “At times, she would curse the day she came to this country. At other times, she would blame herself for allowing her daughters to travel alone to the country of trends, and they had been, before their travel, amongst the girls whose virtuous behavior was an example to follow.”⁸⁸ The short story closes with this self-flagellating mother’s lament as a warning to those who would send their daughters to the land of “trends.”⁸⁹

Freedom appeared to be a specifically gendered and sexualized danger. For women, freedom meant wandering alone, engaging in sex work, getting a divorce, or forming unconventional marriages. Freedom for men lead to bigamist

marriages, the breaking of patriarchal responsibilities, and diminished patriarchal power. Freedom from the Ottoman regime was welcome for many Syrians. But freedom in the United States was also one of (relatively) unrestricted movement, and it had sexual repercussions—repercussions of sexual excess—that Syrians had to guard against. Moreover, all of these sexual and gendered consequences stemmed from the problem of distance from Syrian communities and their authoritative structures, a distance that migration and peddling enabled and exacerbated. Given the intensity of the connection between peddling and aberrant sexuality in the minds of the American public, as demonstrated in chapter 1, we might expect some preoccupation with that association to pop up in the pages of the Syrian American press as well. In relation to peddling, however, this connection was rare. The media focus was decidedly on women peddlers. The more seldom mentions of men's sexuality emerged through this discourse of too much freedom.

These class-bound conversations show just how normative Syrian sexuality was sutured to properly laboring men and women. Peddling and migration disrupted that system dramatically. Women peddlers' perspectives were largely absent from these conversations, but their labor and visibility in the American diaspora provided a focus for the disquiet that elite Syrian Americans felt. An almost unanimous chorus of opinion urged Syrian women to cease peddling, and those who did peddle were accused of engaging in sex work as part of their trade. The discourse of honor used to police women's labor had significant connections to the racial discourse used to press for Syrian naturalization in the same publications. The husbands of women peddlers, presumed to be profiting from their wives' harmful labor, were subject to critiques that castigated them for leading their wives down the path of dishonor.

All of these details point to a kind of perverted freedom that Syrians experienced in the United States: Syrians worshipped money, women lost their sense of propriety and virtue, and the specific patriarchal and gendered arrangement within heterosexual, monogamous marriage was threatened. These conversations were embedded in larger anxieties about assimilation and cultural authenticity, in which questions of freedom were indistinguishable from questions of modernity. Lisa Lowe writes that the concept of modernity is the history of "liberal forms monopolizing the meaning of freedom for the human and denying it to others placed at a distance from the human."⁹⁰ The print discourse about peddling and morality, along with other oral forms of community self-policing discussed in chapter 2, shaped the ideas about this perverted freedom that were specific to the Syrian diaspora. These ideas represent the complexities of broader anxieties about assimilation, including both the racialized desire to be seen as respectable and American and the desire to maintain cultural distinctiveness, as demonstrated most clearly in the discussion of Druze women's migration. Sexuality and gender became unsurprising yet consequential focal points of these anxieties.