During the last month of the 1978–79 Revolution, controversies about saintly dream-images and their auratic affect gained momentum in Iran. On the night of 14 January 1979, inhabitants of Tehran stood on the roofs of their houses or took to the streets and pointed their fingers up to the sky to show one another what they believed to be the image of Ayatollah Khomeini appearing on the moon.¹ The Pahlavi Shah had banned Khomeini’s pictures from mass media until the moon and its halo created a gestalt as if the face of the Imam was projected on the moon. Against the extensive secular policies of the Pahlavi regime, the public vision of Khomeini’s face not only elevated him to a saintly position but also gained a high influence in religious dissident discourse, a position that was maintained further in different social and political milieus after the revolution and the eight-year war with Iraq (1980–88). Envisioning Ayatollah Khomeini’s image collectively as millions experienced that night became the expression of a political public, in the momentum of an encounter with the aura of an image that was vaguely carved on the moon.²

In the aftermath of the Iran–Iraq War, collective visions push an image into the realm of transcendence while acknowledging the effective presence of the saints as part of pious women’s collective ritual economy.³ In women’s pious circles that are the focus of this article, saintly dreams and visions are a part of the collective ritual economy, and their auras play a significant role in the dissemination of piety. These experiences are not isolated phenomena but are part of a larger narrative of the saints and their impact on society.

¹ As Shobeiri-Zanjani (A Drop in the Sea, 3:669) reports in his memoir, the vision was experienced by a large number of inhabitants on the same night and went viral through their insistence to show it to others. In contrast with individual nocturnal dreams, this incident speaks out of a public vision with saintly qualities. Particularly, the moon as the tool of extraordinary communication between saints and their followers recalls the splitting of the moon by the Prophet.


³ Between 2014 and 2016, I conducted extensive ethnographical field research among Shi’i women’s pious circles in Iran with a particular focus on their dreams a part of my dissertation, “Women, Martyrs and Stones: Women’s Piety in Iran’s Post-war Polity” (Leipzig University, 2020). An earlier draft of this chapter was presented in the workshop on “The Prophet and the Modern State” in May 2018, Bochum. I am deeply grateful to Stefan Reichmuth, Rachida.
are interwoven, on the one hand, with the figure of Fāṭima (Fāṭema 605 or 615–32 AD), the daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad, and, on the other, with the emergent martyr-cult during and after the war. In Shīʿī discourse, Sayyida Fāṭima is not only emphasised for her perfectly “orthodox” virtues – her status as the daughter of the Prophet, her ascetic life, and her exemplary piety – but is also revered for her cosmic significance. She has been among the five persons under the mantle of the Prophet (āl-e ‘abā’) and thus occupies eschatological privileges of the same order as those attributed to the Prophet. Furthermore, the cosmological reference to her “house of sorrow” (bayt al-aḥzān) where she shed tears exists both in historical and mythical accounts. The “house” stands allegorically for her grieving for the Prophet over his grave and in the divine where she mourns for her son Ḩusayn, the third Shīʿī Imam, who was slain at the hands of the Umayyad army in 680, until the Day of Judgement. Dreaming of Sayyida Fāṭima, in this sense, forms a fundamental emotional grid over which women sublimate their loss and sufferings as akin to hers.

The intrinsic bond between the Shīʿī discourse of martyrdom of Imam Ḩusayn and Iran’s post-revolutionary martyr-cult underpins the popularity of saintly dreams in women’s pious circles. These epitomise a socio-religious field that I loosely call a “feminised version” of dreaming of the Prophet in the context of martyrdom and jihād. In the first years of the war with Iraq, the extreme death toll and inaccessibility of the surrendered landscapes to retrieve the fallen bodies left many families in limbo, as they did not know the destiny of their sons and husbands. During this period, women turned their living rooms into a space of collective ritual practices and prayer. In the absence of their men, they engaged in religious education at home while supporting the battle through collective cooking and sewing for the soldiers and

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4 The number of authored books about the figure of Fāṭima exceed 4,000. Ismael Ansāri has collected the list of sources from 400 AH onwards in a bibliographic volume published first in 1995, Qom (Ansari, Fāṭima (s.a.) in the Mirror of Books). In classical Orientalism, Henri Lammens (Fatima et les filles de Mahomet) and Louis Massignon (“Der gnostische Kult der Fatima”) have written two major contributions about her figure. Massignon provides a critical assessment of Lammens’s pessimistic presentation of Fāṭima by praising her character for her “admiration of love” that reflects Muḥammad’s personality (see Waardenburg, “Massignon’s Study of Religion and Islam”, 130). There are contradictory views between early Sunnī and Shīʿī scholars about her life; a comprehensive outlook of their differences is provided by Klemm, “Die frühe islamische Erzählung von Fāṭima”.

5 In Shīʿī literature, Fāṭima is considered as a “part of the Prophet”; see Soufī, “The Image of Fatimah”; and Ruffle, “May Fatimah Gather Our Tears”, for detailed contributions.

6 For the Karbalā’ paradigm and Iran’s martyr-cult, see Fischer, Iran; and Aghaie, Martyrs.

7 For dreams of jihād among Islamists, see Sirriye, “Dream Narratives”.

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knitting warm clothes to send to the fronts. During their work, women started narrating their latest saintly dreams that fed into lively and emotional mourning sermons (rowżeh).\(^8\) It was these saintly dream-images rather than the historical narratives of the battle of Karbalāʾ that affected the attendees and made them cry.\(^9\)

Merged with the context of war and womanhood, the women’s dreams were about Sayyida Fāṭima.\(^10\) Mothers of missing soldiers conceived a certain closeness to Sayyida Fāṭima whom they believed to protect their sons. Given her “unknown site of burial”,\(^11\) women wished for her tender care over the lost bodies of their martyrs.\(^12\) In turn, the dreams resulted in praise of other women and promotion of the spiritual status of the dreamer. Consequently, saintly dreams went beyond the individual experience of the dreamer and turned to a valuable good that women have circulated and revered until today.

The recognition and broader implementation of the “mother of a martyr” in the state’s policies as a new social status for women reinforced their elevation within the pious circles. This status was affirmed through the saintly dreams that would generate spiritual rank and invoke a connection to the divine.\(^13\) Concomitantly, the prominent discourse about the fallen soldiers of war being akin to the martyrs of the battle of Karbalāʾ went hand in hand with the image of Sayyida Fāṭima as “the mother of all martyrs”.\(^14\)

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\(^8\) Whereas documenting saintly dreams is kept as a secret among selected members, Shiʿī women narrate their dreams openly and circulate it for its blessing. On the Sufis’ closed archives of dreams, see Mittermaier, “Book of Visions”, 230.

\(^9\) Azam Torab provides a lucid view of various types of mourning sermons and “dirge rituals” in Iranian women’s pious circles; see Torab, Performing Islam, 41.

\(^10\) In comparison with Fāṭima’s strong mythic portrayal also in dream-images, the attributions of Sayyida Zaynab, her daughter, are related to healing practices; see Torab, Performing Islam, 68–70; and Szanto, “Following Sayyida Zeynab”, 146.

\(^11\) In the entry “Fāṭema” of the Encyclopaedia Iranica, Sayyida Fāṭima’s burial is narrated as follows: “She was apparently much affected by her father’s death and died of illness in Medina a few months later, in 11/633. Reports on her death, her burial, and the exact place of her grave are contradictory. ... Today three sites in Medina are visited as her burial place.” See Amir-Moezzi and Calmar, “Fāṭema”.

\(^12\) Ruffle’s ethnography among Shiʿīs of Hyderabad depicts similar dynamics: Fāṭima is believed to avenge the martyrs of Karbalāʾ and intercede on behalf of those who supported her son on the Day of Judgement; see Ruffle, “May Fatimah Gather Our Tears”, 96.

\(^13\) The context that war serves to the experience of saintly dreams, as Mittermaier has aptly put it, “is not a protective blanket of false consciousness of hallucinatory fulfilment but because they insert dreamers into a wider network of symbolic debts, relationship and meaning” (Mittermaier, Dreams That Matter, 2–3).

\(^14\) The status of Fāṭima as the “mother of all martyrs”, and mythically as “mother of the earth”, is hailed profoundly in the writings of French Orientalists Louis Massignon (“La Mubahala de Medine et l’hyperdulie de Fatima”) and Henry Corbin (Spiritual Body, 66–67).
The saintly dreams of Shi‘ī women’s pious circles will be discussed here in the rubric of “the inner prophet”¹⁵ and as a collective experience by emphasising the “aura” of the Prophet in relation to Sayyida Fāṭima’s image, which invokes emotional harmony and is performed in the collective rituals of women’s pious circles in Iran. A sense of intimacy and direct communication with the Prophet is provided not only from the proximity in the space of vision but also through relocating existing narratives of the visceral and emotional bonds between the Prophet and Sayyida Fāṭima.

**1 “He Who Has Seen Me, Has Seen the Truth”¹⁶**

Can the tropes of saintly dreams, their figurative language, reach beyond the individual and cultural narrative repertoire? Can they invoke the particular history of a social group? What would interlace the saintly dream-images to a collective pious experience of intermediation and connectedness? The following considerations relate critically to the debate on saintly dreams in Islamic studies and anthropology. For long, the prevailing approach to dreams in both disciplines was symbolism. Dreams were assumed as a part of a textual repertoire that could be deciphered, decoded, and “analysed” according to their symbolic and metaphoric content. In Islamic studies, the focus lies specifically on the Islamic tradition of dream interpretation (ta‘bīr), where the analysis of the symbols is deployed not only in popular manuals of interpretation but also used for the hierarchical categorisation of the status of dreams.¹⁷ According to this tradition, saintly dreams belong to the category of “veridical visions”

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15 See Fahd, “The Dream”, 351.
16 “Man ra‘ānī fī l-manām fa-qad ra‘ānī fa-inna al-shayṭān lā yatamaththalu bi” and “Man ra‘ānī fa-qad ra‘ā l-ḥaqq”; see Nayshābūrī, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, “Book of Dreams”, vol. 2, ḥadīth 23. It is one of the most referenced ḥadīth with regard to saintly dreams. For the discussion of this ḥadīth in Islamic philology, see Suyūṭī, “Tanwīr al-ḥalak”; Nābulusī, Ta‘ṭīr al-anām, 213–15; and Zarqāʾ, “Man ra‘ānī fa-qad ra‘ā l-ḥaqq”. See also Majlisī’s critical assessment as he provides three levels of controversy related to the ḥadīth: contemporariness, act of seeing, and the authentication of His image (Majlisī, Biḥār al-anwār, 58:235); also Krenkow, “Appearance of the Prophet”; Katz, “Shaykh Aḥmad”, 161; and Sindawi, “The Image of ‘Alī”, 190.
17 Notably, the classical Islamic dream theory exceeds the Freudian symbolic analysis. Although it encompasses Freudian sources of dream in the unconscious, Islamic tradition relates dreams and prophecy in that they both originate in the divine; see Lamoreaux, *Early Muslim Tradition*. Anthropologists have recently shown the conflicts caused by the contrast between psychoanalytical and Islamic approaches; see Mittermaier, “Matter of Interpretation”, 178–80.
whose symbols elevate the dream to the loftiest position close to prophecy while promoting the spiritual rank of the dreamer in the community.18

In anthropology, the phenomenology of dreaming is shaped by cultural codes for interpreting dreams, by an indigenous discourse about dreaming (such as dream sharing), and by the social contexts in which such discourse takes place.19 The domination of phenomenological approaches to dreams, despite relativising the systematic analysis of symbols, has neglected the collective impact of dreams. Concomitantly anthropologists have predominantly reflected on the phenomenology of dreams only in the subjective experience of the individual and as a formative “self-scape”.20 Saintly dreams, in the phenomenological view, are a constitutive part of the social reality inasmuch as they enable dreamers to communicate with the deceased, the saints, and other spiritual entities. They actualise access to a “special kind of knowledge to foresee the future”.21

In Sufi traditions of the dream, where connecting to the Prophet and the dead shaykhs is emphasised, dreaming fulfils the task of an indispensable authority-building device.22 The post-prophetic heirship that the Sufi shaykhs maintain by referencing revelatory experience in dreams legitimises their higher position for the spiritual analyses of the followers’ dreams. While authority-building is the common denominator of Sufi tradition and contemporary Shi‘i pious circles, the constitution of hierarchy for interpretation remains at odds with the collective and aural ensemble in the present study.

As much as this study builds on such contributions to the study of dreams, it also attempts to break the boundaries and limitations of the analyses that would bind the saintly dreams to the seemingly symbolic and discursive forms. In the context of women’s post-war pious circles, dream-images are neither merely part of the economy of habitus nor fabricated in individual experiences.23 Hence, my emphasis lies here in the bodily sensing of dreams.

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18 There is a canonical dictum that the vision of the Prophet is veridical (see note 16 above); see the two multidimensional edited volumes of Islamic philological scholarship concerned with autobiographical books of dreams (Pers. manāmiyyeh) and Sufi tradition: Marlow, Dreaming across Boundaries; and Felek and Knys, Dreams and Visions.


20 For the experience of a dream world in the construction of the self, see Hollan, “Anthropology”, 170–72. Also in the phenomenology of dreaming, according to Ewing, textual traditions and cultural codes play a significant role. He discusses the indigenous discourse about dreaming (such as dream sharing), and the social contexts in which such discourse takes place.


not in an inner self but rather in the relation between bodies. I build on a relational ontology that shifts the analytical focus away from the individual, which served as a prevalent unit of analysis of dreams in anthropology, psychology, and theology.²⁴

To elaborate on the collective affinity of pious women to their saintly dreams, I deploy here the multiple guises implied by the notion of “aura”. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's conception, the aura is “the fleeting elusive weave of space and time, which lends the image an air of secrecy and mystery”.²⁵ More precisely, aura captures a form of perception which addresses being emotionally tuned or feeling the energy of certain images that provokes a sense of distance and intimacy at the same time.²⁶ The concept of aura fits the aim of this study in the way it approaches collective attentiveness towards spatial emotions and binds them with religious imaginations. The “aura” of saintly dreams, as I construe the term in this study, evolves around two modalities of perception, the first being tuned by the dreams and the second, feeling the “atmosphere” that is conceived as related to those dreams. Driven from the new philosophy of aesthetics, “aura appears sometimes as an atmosphere that envelops the object, a scene or a moment”.²⁷ Throughout the chapter, however, I use the term “aura” rather than “atmosphere” not only because of the specificity of religious cultic images in the notion of aura but also due to its characterisation of “distance”, that is, the visual experience of images that contradict haptic order.²⁸ I will show how the appearance of distance acts as the crucial cause of attraction towards saintly dreams among pious women.²⁹

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²⁴ On relational ontology and the critique of the predominant role of the individual, See Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies*, 56–61.
²⁷ McCole, *Walter Benjamin*, 5. Notably, Gernot Böhme believes that Benjamin's notion of aura partially coincides with the term "atmosphere". As he writes, “aura ... determines the atmosphere of respect and distance ... as the empty characterless envelop of its presence [yet, unlike atmosphere] aura holds certain cultural values” (Böhme, "Atmosphere", 113).
²⁸ Böhme has aptly explicated Benjamin's emblematic example of aura in a scene from sunset where a blue hue covers the distanced mountains. In his interpretation, we experience the blue mountains visually but cannot touch them since by coming close to the mountain, the blue hue fades away; see Böhme, "Atmosphere", 118–19.
²⁹ Distance appears in Benjamin's work as a decisive affective element in the exposure to aura. Distance oscillates between a temporal dimension, referring to the arch-image and its ephemerality, and a spatial, corporeal dimension that addresses the affective tension it produces in the observer. In the latter case, the observer perceives the aura as familiar and strange at once, the uncanniness that sets the aura as unachievable; see McCole, *Walter Benjamin*, 4–5. The phenomenological engagement with distance was resonated parallel to Benjamin in Ludwig Klages's and Martin Heidegger's writings; see on proximity and
claim to perceive the “aura” of a saintly dream make it visible through their ritual performances. The “aura”, in this sense, is a constitutive part of the collective experience of saintly dreams as it induces collective effervescence and signals the connection to the realm of the divine. Anthropologists have recently reflected on saintly dreams as “porous experiences” and “spaces of movement between different worlds”; I deal here with a specificity of the image of Sayyida Fāṭima in women’s dreams through both its emotional harmony and its symbolic attributions. In tracing the interaction between women participants, supernatural powers, and the sensual imprints, I elaborate on the perceptions of saintly and “divine” presence beyond the analysis given by the individual human actors themselves.

I take my insight from an anecdotal niche in the classical Islamic interpretation of dreams according to which the image of the saint (here the Prophet and his family) possesses an exceptional position in the general frame of the symbolic order. His saintly image is “real”, that is, it is not an allegory but rather an image that cannot be misinterpreted or simulated. Scholars refer, in this regard, to the hadith that reads, “He who has seen me, has seen the truth”. Here, the interminglement between the dream and waking world exceeds the familiar borders of this-worldly and otherworldly, illusion and illumination. In the Islamic Republic of Iran where the state governs religious interpretations

distance, Heidegger, “The Thing”, 165–66; and Klages, “Eros of Distance” (“Eros der Ferne”), a central notion in his Of Cosmoqonic Eros, e.g. 96. Cf. Hansen, “Benjamin’s Aura”, 339. The indexical dimension entails the connection to the past in the present; however, it should not be read as a “fetish” inasmuch as it depicts a mythic bond that links the material, tactical, and habitual perception to one another. See the exchange between Benjamin and Adorno in Adorno et al., eds, The Complete Correspondence, 1929–1940, 320–21.

To compare with Erika Fischer-Lichte’s articulation of performativity: she speaks of the emergence inherent in the performative phenomena (here aura) as a sort of energy that circulates during a performance; see Fischer-Lichte, Ästhetik des Performativen, 99.


Mittermaier, Dreams That Matter, 89.

The notion of the barzakh imposes itself here as an intermediary sphere where the true images of persons and things have their existence, and where they can be accessible to visions and dreams, even the image of the Prophet himself; see Crapanzano, Imaginative Horizons, 64; and Pandolf, “The Thin Line”, 120.

According to the scholarly debates over the aforementioned hadith, its focus lies in the improbability of the image of the Prophet to be imitated, replicated, or rendered by the Devil. According to Katz, seeing the Prophet Muhammad either awake or in a dream had long been sanctioned prior to the nineteenth century by recourse to hadith such as, “Whoever has seen me in a dream, has really seen me”; see Katz, “Shaykh Ahmad”, 163–64; and note 16 above.
and practices, the determinate image of the Prophet among the pious women allows for positions at variance with established and traditional boundaries.

The acknowledgement of the specificity of saintly dream-images as surpassing any allegoric and symbolic treatment is interlaced with Walter Benjamin’s conception of “dream-reality” (Traumwirklichkeit) that addresses the interpenetration of dream-images with the waking world.35 Benjamin engages explicitly with the role of dream-images in the illusionary experience of ecstasy.36

The reference to dream-images also reappears in his articulation of the notion of “aura” as he relates it to the genealogy of a religious or magical cult. “Aura”, as Benjamin put it, is a *breeze* that wraps an image with mythical, archaic traces and atavism. In his work “The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility”, Benjamin points to the aura as “a mystifying breeze”,37 “a unique appearance of distance”,38 and “a returning gaze”.39 This can occur when contemplating saintly dream-images, the dreamer of Fāṭima is conceived to be affected by the divine presence. Rather than a personal experience, the dreamer’s body turns into a medium that reveals the unique visionary experience and transfers some of this divine inspiration in the form of sacred energies or *baraka*. This is poignantly conveyed in the overlaps of dream-reality and aura that Benjamin identifies with regard to religious imagination. Revered saints reveal themselves through the liminal space of the dreams and their sensible auras on earth.40

Meanwhile, the desire for reproduction and simulation, as Benjamin puts it aptly, is an inevitable part of perceiving auras. Rituals in this regard unfold and proliferate the unique perception of the aura of saintly dreams in that they reinforce its somatic perceptibility and recraft it through performative, visual, and sonic techniques. With performativity, I mean the constellation of veneration, ritual practices, and emotional expressions, the awe and mourning that the women perform collectively around the dreamer. Yet, the aura of dream-images might reside in certain objects as relics and thus exist independent of the dreamer subject.41 In the last part of this chapter, I reflect on women’s reverence of such a relic upon the gravestone of a martyr. This observation leads to conjuring up the performativity of dream-images, not only as

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36 Benjamin, *On Hashish*.
37 For the etymology of “aura” as a breeze in the veil of a woman, see Assmann and Assmann, “Air from Other Planets,” 148.
40 See also Kasmani et al., “Introduction”, 95.
subjective dynamics between women followers and the perceived auras but as the inner dynamics of the aura that in the context at hand succeeds to characterise Sayyida Fāṭima. The interminglement of these two modalities of aura, one more subjective and the second more objective, brings us to a better understanding of saintly dreams as collective as well as affective experiences that lend aural presence to the saints.

In the following sections, I discuss the feminised version of Prophetic dreams around the figure of Sayyida Fāṭima in Iran's martyr-cult. It follows the pious life of a mother of a martyr, Sayyida Polārak, to the point that she falls into the state of vision and shapes a home-based women's pious circle. The collective rituals that evolve around her dreams are charged by the breeze of rose fragrance that the followers claim fills the room as she fell in vision. It highlights the interlinkage between the saintly dream-images and what women experience as a scent of rose by referring to it as the “aura” of the dream in the waking world. The women celebrate these occasions as a sign of the presence of Sayyida Fāṭima and her saintly intermediation between them and the realm of the divine.

2 Dreaming of Fāṭima

In a central region of Tehran, on Iran Street, Sayyida Polārak, the celebrated mother of “Martyr Aḥmad Polārak”, is known in the neighbourhood as a pious woman with a heavenly fragrance and healing power. Here I engage with Sayyida Polārak's intermediating role between her pious circle and Sayyida Fāṭima through her dreams and visions. Her status as the mother of a fallen soldier of war is interlaced with narratives of suffering and solitude. Yet what prompts her position as a medium for saintly spirits is her veridical dreams where she receives information about the martyrdom of local youth through Sayyida Fāṭima.

In one of the largest women pious circles on this street, I observed women finishing their collective prayer by addressing her right after the Prophet Muhammad and his four closest family members, āl-e 'abā'. It was winter 2016, around one month after Sayyida Polārak's death and her burial in the section for “martyrs' relatives” in the central cemetery of Tehran. On my way to her house, the colourful pictures of Martyr Polārak on the copies of his mother's obituary were still not detached from the cement walls. Her obituaries were surrounded by numerous ad-stickers of travel agencies and house technologies, yet the red, huge, printed title “mother of a martyr” would definitely catch the eyes of any passenger. In the living room of her house, elder women of her
age were sitting in their black mourning dresses (Figure 5.1). Most of them used to gather in the same room for decades on every first Thursday of the lunar month in a pious circle. They were local women who had befriended during the war and with the loss of their husbands and sons as martyrs.

At a corner where several cushions and blankets were tied and stacked, I met Robāb. She was reclining her back to the pile while drawing her legs under the tiny stool and reading from her prayer book. I approached her when she closed the book to take a short rest. Her fragile body indicated a woman in her late seventies. Her voice was very low as coming from the depth of the chest. Robāb introduced herself to me as Sayyida Polārak’s closest neighbour and friend. First, Sayyida Polārak’s son Aḥmad was martyred and after some months, Robāb received the news of the martyrdom of her elder son. After this introduction, Robāb told me the story of Sayyida Polārak as follows:

Sayyida Polārak was a widow with poor relations in Tehran. Her husband, in a vulnerable health condition, passed away sometime before Aḥmad’s
martyrdom. Since Ahmad had joined the army as a volunteer to fight in the south-west battlefields against the invasion of Iraq's army, his mother was holding a small Qur'an recitation and prayer circle for the soldiers' well-being. Her introduction to the local networks of women happened through these meetings and expanded after Ahmad's martyrdom. Her own surname was Mūsavī and because she was of Prophetic descent from both parents, she was known as "Sādāt". Sayyida Polārak was a title she was given after the martyrdom of Ahmad.

As Robāb stated Ahmad was the first martyr in their neighbourhood in 1987. His martyrdom had a devastating impact on Sayyida Polārak, who was left in denial, fear, and solitude. Within the six months after receiving the news of the death of her son, his corpse was not returned. Awaiting further news of the missing body of her sole son invoked in her the idea of entanglement with Sayyida Fāṭima's destiny, the daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad. Robāb was among the first neighbours who learned about this issue. At this stage, Sayyida Polārak experienced dreams of Sayyida Fāṭima that were occurring consistently with a similar plot. In these dreams as Robāb says: "Khanum Hazrat-e Fāṭima was coming to her; saluting her for joining to her family, encouraging her to stand strong." I was curious to know how Sayyida Polārak recognised the image that appeared to her as Sayyida Fāṭima. Robāb could narrate the dreams after years with such vivid details as if recalling her own dreams of the prior night. Below, I present what Robāb related as Sayyida Polārak's dream. I follow Robāb in calling Sayyida Polārak "Sādāt" in the quoted passage.

The dreams were occurring before sunrise; it is said [in Islamic tradition] that this is the best time for true dreams. I would meet Sādāt later in the morning and she would narrate it to me. In one of her first dreams, she had gone on a pilgrimage with Khanum Hazrat-e Fāṭima. Sādāt had heard a knock on the door at dawn, first smooth and then strong. She tried to stand up from deep sleep but her legs were lethargic. At the end of the corridor where the entrance stood, she could see a light. She attempted another time and finally crawled through the corridor. She heard a whisper of a crowd from outside, so she drew her chador over her head and opened the door. In the doorway, she saw a large group of women standing in two lines that were making way for her to pass. She passed through them. At the end of the line Khanum Hazrat-e Fāṭima had her back to the group while making herself ready for prayer. The light that was coming from her side would not allow Sādāt to see her face. Sādāt decided to

42 Being wrapped in light is a reverberated reference to Fāṭima in classical Islamic literature. It addresses, on the one hand, the “cover” and, on the other, the projection of divine’s light.
follow Hazrat-e Fāṭima by doing wudu’ [Islamic ablution], but she noticed that she had been barefooted and ritually polluted (najis). Feeling worried where to clean her feet first, Sādāt approached Hazrat-e Fāṭima, who had by then finished with her preparation. As Hazrat-e Fāṭima turned her head, her charming smile revealed: “Do not worry! You are indeed on sacred land.” Suddenly Sādāt felt a rush, a lightning that struck her. As she looked again, there was no one other than her and Hazrat-e Fāṭima on a sandy landscape. Her knees could not support her weight and she collapsed onto the sands with her face. She woke up wailing and screaming: “My Lady (khanum jan)! Have you brought me to Karbalāʾ?”

Sayyida Polārak’s journey through the dream to the holy sites of Karbalāʾ in the company of Sayyida Fāṭima corresponds to the geopolitical conflict between Iran and Iraq. Although undertaking a pilgrimage during a dream is hardly news, her visit to Karbalāʾ references the decade-long strict legal limitation for Iranians to pass the south-west borders of the country with Iraq. More than fifteen years after the war, it was still a dream for many women to make a pilgrimage to the Shi‘ī saintly shrines in the Iraqi cities of Karbalāʾ, Najaf, and Samarra. The experience of fulfilling an impossible pilgrimage through the dream convinced the participants of her new spiritual position; they interpreted it as laid in the tradition of consanguine relation, being a descendent of the family of the Prophet (sayyida) that assisted her in receiving saintly dreams and being able to enter their realm.

Meanwhile, the invocation of saintly dreams in the aftermath of losing her son provided an insight into her status as a medium of saintly spirits among her followers. With the unprecedented number of fallen soldiers whose bodies remained missing until today, the task of tracing martyred sons became high in demand.

Moving a photo of her martyred son between the pages of her Qurʾān, Robāb continued that Sayyida Polārak was informed about the martyrdom of local youth through Sayyida Fāṭima even before the official announcement of their death. In these dreams, Sayyida Fāṭima was in her grieving and suffering gestalt. Robāb pointed to the picture inside the book and said:

In the dream that informed us about the martyrdom of my son, Sādāt had seen me here [Robāb pointed to the same corner where we were]. I was sleeping like a foetus with my knees and arms bent towards my chest.

on her; see Qurashi’s descriptions of Fāṭima: “she is the light of God shining for discerning people” (174) in Soufi, “The Image of Fatimah”, 179.
Other women were sitting in a circle around me and reciting Qurʾān. They were reciting from Qurʾān the description of the Day of Judgement:

\[
\text{Yā ayyuhā l-muzzammil / qumi l-layla illā qalīlan}^{43}\text{ [O thou wrapped up in thy raiment! Keep vigil the night long, save a little].}
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Opposite the circle of women, a baby was crying in the cradle. It was my son who returned to his babyhood in the dream. A woman covered in a green cloth entered the room with short steps and signs of pain on her face. She went directly to the cradle. As she bent over it, Sādāt saw her pregnant belly.\(^44\) She took the baby in her arm and told Sādāt while pointing to me, “Do not wake her mother up, I will calm her son.”

Sayyida Polārak’s intimate attachment to her dreams unfolds an “affective proximity”\(^45\) to the image of Sayyida Fāṭima in her. Her personal entanglement with the fate of Sayyida Fāṭima takes the trope of being “mother of martyr” to a habitual level. Concomitantly, her own subjectivity, how she defines herself together with her experiences of intermediation and transition of saintly blessings, are changed under the influence of her dreams. Her mediumship as the one who receives spiritual guidance and traces the martyrs pushes us further in articulating the affective role of dream-images in the way they embrace the past events (martyrdom of others) and comprise the collectivity of the dreams. In this sense, while her own feeling of grief over her son is cast into her dreams, the dream-images interact with her and her group on the level of collective emotions.

In recalling and reconstructing the stories of dreams, Robāb identifies Sayyida Polārak as a medium of saintly spirits, a nazar-kardeh who has received the baraka of Sayyida Fāṭima. For Robāb, the saintly dreams carried a message to the group for collective purification of themselves. This is perhaps why she keeps the record of Sayyida Polārak’s dreams meticulously in her mind and circulates them as part of an affective knowledge in the pious circles. She also reflected on the methods by which the participants appropriated the baraka through a water-drinking ritual. In each session, after the individual recitation of Qurʾān, the participants would listen to the narratives of Sayyida Polārak’s latest dreams. They would then perform a ritual around the sacred water. During this ritual, Sayyida Polārak would pray for all the participants and blow

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\(^{43}\) Q 731–2.

\(^{44}\) The pregnant woman stands for the figure of Fāṭima who is believed in Shiʿi tradition to have been pregnant and miscarried her son shortly before she died; see Khaṣṣībī, al-Hidāya, 407; Majlīsī, Bihār al-anwār, 43171; Soufī, “The Image of Fatimah”, 98–99; and Ṭabrīsī, Majmaʿ al-bayān, 1202–3.

\(^{45}\) See Navaro-Yashin, “Multiple Returns”. 
over the water from the sacred well of Zamzam\textsuperscript{46} in Mecca whose \textit{baraka} is central to the imagination of Prophetic relics. The blow of her breath, \textit{nafas-e haqq},\textsuperscript{47} would transmit the \textit{baraka} that inhered in the dream-image of Sayyida Fāṭima to the water. All the participants would drink a sip from the water. The session would then be followed by collective mourning and recitation from the prayer book. Finally, women would stand behind Sayyida Polārak as their leader to do their Islamic prayer.

Dream-images of Sayyida Fāṭima have built a collective consciousness in the circle where women actively engage in making the images present and deploy Sayyida Polārak as an intermediator. The affective proximity that renders Sayyida Polārak to the state of mediumship connects the group to the realm of transcendence. As praying to Sayyida Polārak indulges their passion for Sayyida Fāṭima, their senses of grief and loss are furnished with an intuitive feeling of being in an intimate exchange with the saints and the spirits of their own martyred sons.

3 The Scented Hands

There is a material interminglement between the claims of mediumship and the saintly dreams of Sayyida Polārak. Robāb and other local women became gradually aware of the perfume emanating from Sayyida Polārak’s hands. It was during collective prayers that the state of vision emerged in her. At these moments, as she was exclaiming “Sayyida Fāṭima” repetitively, her fists were filled with the moisture of perfume. Unlike the deliberate attempts by the dreamer in the ritual of drinking water, the release of the fragrance of rose was not in their control.

As a sensational form that organised a new level of interaction and mobilised collective rituals among the women’s circle, the perfume can be described as a “material media”, to cite Birgit Meyer, which intermediates the “absence”

\textsuperscript{46} Zamzam is a well near the Ka’ba in the city of Mecca. Its water is considered sacred among Muslims due to the mythical ground of the well, where it sprung miraculously for Ishmael, the son of Abraham, when he was thirsty as a little child. His mother, Hagar, went seeking water but could not find it, so she went up to the hillocks of al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa, praying to God and imploring aid for Ishmael. God sent Gabriel, who with his heel hollowed out a place in the earth where water appeared. Pilgrimage rites culminate in the drinking of Zamzam water, and the pilgrims carry it home to give it to the sick; see Chabbi, “Zamzam”; Ibn Hishām, \textit{al-Sīra}, 1135ff.; and Poonawala, “Ab ii. Water in Muslim Iranian Culture”.

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Nafas-e haqq} (truth breath) among pious women is associated with the loftiest spiritual rank of the heirs of the Prophet whose breath heals anyone from physical and mental pain.
and “materializes the sacred”. The perfume, in this regard, stands for “evidence”, that is, a material manifestation of the divine working in and through the waking world. More precisely, the immediate release of the perfume during the dream raises the assumption that there is a sensual rendering of the saintly dream to a divinely sanctioned scent, no matter that it is a mere fragrance of roses. The olfactory register, as the insertion of the divine into human lifeworld, furnishes the logic of the truthful dream-image of the Prophet – as stated in the aforementioned hadith – with an aura in the form of hovering heavenly fragrance.

As Robāb recalled, the scent was released in a state of trance, when Sayyida Polārak could envision Sayyida Fāṭima and “take the perfume directly from her hands”. Accounting for Robāb’s claim as what the followers perceived within the experience of the perfume, the scent can be articulated in two ways: on the one hand, through its potency to communicate the invisible, and, on the other, through its intermediary role. The specificity of the scent, in other words, lies in the double-hermeneutics of a relic and a media. As a relic, the fragrance attests to an extraordinary bodily economy that exceeds the classification of physical secretions as abject, unwanted filth. As a material media, it could be directly transmitted to other participants and mediate the experience of the saintly presence.

Robāb has collected the pieces of cloth with the perfumed oil marks. Many of Sayyida Polārak’s followers carry a small piece of such cloth in their prayer rugs. For them, the clothes that they have personally pulled on their interlocutor’s hands had preserved the momentum of vision and consequently the intimate connection to the divine. While having visions of Sayyida Fāṭima could exteriorise their close tie, being bestowed by perfume materialised this relation. Robāb, who had witnessed the incidence several times, explained it to me as follows:

49 Bandak, “Our Lady of Soufanieh”, 142.
50 The fragrance of rose is intrinsically bound to the figure of Fāṭima among Iranians. The common term for rosewater in Iran is zahrā (another name of hers) and the first incorporation for growing, distilling, and exporting of Damascene roses is called golāb-e zahrā.
51 Suzanne Evans counts the “scent” as “a form of communication in martyrologies that conforms with their role to spread the message of the truth of the faith” (Evans, “Scent of a Martyr”, 196).
52 See Kristeva, Powers of Horror, 1.
53 The transmission of mystical truth through saliva and sweat is a concept found in other hagiographies; see Amir-Moezzi, Spirituality, 200ff. A notable example here is the Prophet’s act of putting his tongue in the mouth of infant Fāṭima; Ṭabrīṣī, Iʿlām al-warā, 164.
It was amidst the prayers that she fainted; this was followed by a seizure due to which her eyes were rolling up and her hands swinging in the air. Back to consciousness, her feasted palm was wet and full of perfume. She had never asked for treatment out of the stark seizures. She was strongly against breaking our prayer when she was in this state. Leaning to the small cushion in her prayer dress, we would approach her and touch her hand with our face or veil.

Having scented palms carries what I referred to as “aura” in that it beholds a material relation to dreams, which goes beyond dream-narration and interpretation. The hollow presence of a scent appears as the “second nature” of the medium’s body. For the followers, the scent of roses is a manifest halo of Sayyida Fāṭima that transpires out of the “dream-image” of Sayyida Polārak. It shows the saintly reality of dream-images that unfolds in a plain awakening state.

The characteristic of aura as evoking the feeling of distance appears in various modalities in this context. First, as a fleeting fragrance, which is not graspable – like a shadow – but felt among the participants. Second is the entwinement of this-worldly scent of roses and the divine scent of the fruits of the Ṭūbā tree which the Prophet had tasted in heaven and felt on Fāṭima’s body in this world.54 Third, it appears in an immediate experience which is opened by being mothers of martyrs and performing revering rituals for them. These modalities suspend momentarily the boundaries between the two worlds, thus flourishing the sense of proximity and intimacy to the divine.

Contemplating the relationship between the dream-images and their aura, one might say that these images are always invested in ordinary objects, more precisely in the arabesque vested with a magical aura.55 In Robāb's account, the fragrance of rose was the condensation of the women’s connection to Sayyida Fāṭima, charged with the sense of uncanny and yet familiarity.56 Drawn from the Shi‘ī repertoire about Sayyida Fāṭima, the scent of the rose for the followers became a figure of her presence. It was an emblem of the most familial and intimate, the definition of motherly embracement that exuded from one body and entered the collective bodily economy of tension and expansion.

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54 Evans provides a comprehensive outlook of the aroma of sanctity in Christian and Islamic traditions. The scent of martyrs and saints, as she explains, could have different functions such as “penetrating the consciousness”, “horrifying the devils”, and providing an image of salvation by those who feel it (Evans “Scent of Martyrs”, 201); see also Bandak, “Our Lady of Soufaniyah”, 130; and Denaro, “Most Beautiful Body”, 103.


56 On the paradox of distance in aura, see Benjamin “Work of Art”, 222; Böhme, “Atmosphere”, 117.
In the aural correspondence between saintly dream-images and the perfume, historical indexical relationships play a significant role. While the fixed scent attains an ahistorical and uncanny dimension, dream-images cross-reference to recent and past events. The lack of knowledge about the whereabouts of their relatives’ fallen corpses on the battlefields marks the scent with a hollow tangibility to fulfil the mourning ritual in the absence of the bodies of martyrs. The fragrance of the roses on Sayyida Polārak’s hand creates some uncanny effect as it invokes familiarity and distance at the same time. Based upon the patterns, which befell her in the state of vision, women created certain rituals for circulating the effect. During their ritual, participants employed her hands as a platform for kissing, touching, and taking from the perfume as a corporeal component to the circulation of the “aura”.

The ambiguity of Sayyida Polārak’s dreams lies also in the unsubstantial state of her fragrance. The aura inhabits the space like a fata morgana that appears in the circle around and brings them into a state of trance. As I showed in this section, the uncanny feeling as a character of dream-reality obscures the perception of distance and thus succeeds in making a collective impact.

4 The Journey of the Scent

While the government in Iran has devoted a specific unit of the army to the excavation of missing corpses since 1988 (the end of the war), private practices that emphasise the intermediation of saintly spirits for tracing the martyrs have continued. Within these post-war practices, the conception of “aura” finds a distinctive position. Namely, the concept of aura can contribute to illuminating the new modalities of interactions between pious women and the divine through material objects and atmospheres. Furthermore, the conception of aura corresponds to the understanding of emergent sites of veneration as the new saintly localities.

The main ground for the continuity in celebrating such emergent forms of saintly mediumship can be traced in the very nexus of governmental discourses. Within the official martyr-cult of Iran, the spiritual-social status of mothers of martyrs becomes akin to Sayyida Fāṭima as textual as well as visual

57 Elsewhere, in the study of her son’s gravestone, I have explained the performative proliferation of the aura and staging the “spiritual atmosphere” around the scent. Against the grain of mysterious oozing of the scent, sonic and visual atmospheres are staged deliberately around the grave to reinforce the perception of “divine presence” among venerators; see Chavoshian, “Dream-Realities”, 151–54; and Eisenlohr, Sounding Islam, 59.

media.\textsuperscript{59} It is no wonder, then, that the official attempts during “discovery operations of the remains of martyrs” involve the same spiritual guidance such as dreams of Sayyida Fāṭima as established tools.\textsuperscript{60} However, private and informal practices, as in the case of Sayyida Polārak, have come into conflict with the formal discourses of commemoration of martyrs. The conflicts have arisen with regard to personal gains and to the blurring boundary between manifest saintly intermediation and superstition.

In the winter of 1989, a quarrel erupted between two young men in Sayyida Polārak’s neighbourhood, which triggered local disagreements over her perfumed hands. This resulted in a polarisation between Sayyida Polārak’s disciples and the doubtful neighbours who consisted of returning soldiers and those recently informed about her extraordinary powers.\textsuperscript{61} After some enquiries from religious authorities in Qom, state authorities forbade Sayyida Polārak to expand her pious circles and to claim mediumship. At the centre stage of the prohibitions were practices related to the strange perfume whereby her hands were examined several times. Under heavy measures of control, Sayyida Polārak retreated from public appearance and limited her pious activities to the core group of local women. Subsequently, she got ill and became unable to conduct her circle.

Later, after a long period of lockdown, Sayyida Polārak revealed and deployed her suffering differently. In the deserted midweek silence of Tehran’s main cemetery, Behesht-e Zahrā, she made possible a different account of her mediumship by claiming the reappearance of her hands’ scent on the gravestone of her son. The story of her own saintly dreams was thus crystallised into the knot of her martyred son, Shahīd Aḥmad Polārak. She spoke of her son’s corpse as “washed by the angels” (ḡasīl al-malāʾika), an evocative expression by which she reckoned the intertwining of her suffering and solitude with that of her son, and lamented her fate as a true offspring of Sayyida Fāṭima. “Washing”

\textsuperscript{59} See Kashani-Sabet, “Who Is Fatimah”, 11–19. There is an array of scholarly works on the artistic representation of Fāṭima in the post-revolutionary martyr-cult of Iran; see Bombardier, “Iranian Revolutionary Painting”; Chelkowski and Dabashi, Staging a Revolution; Flaskerud, “Redemptive Memories”; Karimi, “Imaging Warfare”; and Marzolph, “Martry’s Fading Body”.

\textsuperscript{60} Compare with the anthropological literature on the struggles for retrieving the bodily remains of soldiers of war in the context of Vietnam wars. Whereas Iran’s “Martyrs Foundation” has taken the lead in operations with the scope of finding the remains of fallen soldiers, a formal institution in Vietnam has employed soul hunters and spirit mediums to present their findings to the state; see Hüwelmeier, “Spirit Map”, 7–9.

\textsuperscript{61} A set of interviews on the issue was collected in the local monthly magazine Emtedad (no. 79, 60–81).
fabricated the new imaginative rubric for the scent of the rose, this time oozing from the gravestone of her son.

Her group moved their circle to Tehran cemetery, where her son was buried in the section devoted to the martyrs. The experience did not remain limited to her pious group but invoked a new and extended range of visitors upon Martyr Polārak’s grave.62

I visited Martyr Polārak’s gravestone in plot 26 of the martyrs’ section of Behesht-e Zahrā’ cemetery, once in 2015 and later more often in 2016. It shaped my first experience with the axial role of mothers of martyrs in Iran’s martyr-cult and triggered my engagement with the narratives of the spirit mediumship of his mother. During my visits, I encountered passengers who were led to the site by curiosity or accident. Many visitors arrived there in search of a shadow that the large green shade over the plot provided. Some were attracted to the praying crowd around his gravestone. Yet, his fame as “the perfumed martyr” is more widespread than the actual knowledge about him: it evolves around the scent of roses that according to his venerators engulfs the gravestone with a layer of cold humidity.

A walk through Behesht-e Zahrā’ not only provides a view of the martyr-cult but is also a walk through the Islamic Republic’s political history. The hierarchically ordered sections embrace the chronology of the revolution, the eight-year war, the officials killed in the terrorist bombing of the headquarters of the revolution’s Islamic Republic Party in 1981, the hajj incident of 1987, and a more recent slot for the murdered atomic physicians who were announced officially as martyrs. Each section consists of several rows of gravestones of different sizes and heights. Marking each grave is a national flag along with a framed glass case containing both religious icons and intensely intimate mementos: Qur’ānic texts, green banners bearing religious inscriptions, worry beads, and prayer stones, statues of pigeons and artificial red tulips next to photos of family and friends as well as photos from the fronts of war. There are memorial statues in each section with prayer rooms available at short distances.

Indeed, in the space filled with the memorial tombs of military high-ranked commanders, the mass veneration of an ordinary soldier like Aḥmad Polārak attracts not only public attention but also the administrative officials of the cemetery. That is why the women followers of Sayyida Polārak act very cautiously around the gravestone. They come following their interlocutor on Wednesday mornings when the place is nearly deserted, form small groups

62 In Roman Catholicism the hagiographical concept of an “Osmogenesia” addresses the sweet and pure aroma on a Christian saint’s body and corpse after death; see Benoit, “Autour de l’odeur de sainteté”.

around the gravestone for prayer, followed by a mourning ritual of Sayyida Fāṭima. On the weekends, when there are larger groups of venerated, individual members come for consulting other women on religious matters.

Martyr Polārak’s place of burial consists of a horizontal white marble plate of 1.5 metres in length. On its top, his framed photographs are placed inside the metal and glass tomb that is identical to all the other tombs in the plot. At once, there is space for up to seven venerated to kneel tightly beside one another and rest their right hand over the stone in prayer. They touch the perfumed stone, then pull the same hand over their face and head (Figure 5.2).

On the Friday morning that I visited his gravestone, the large crowd had expanded onto the neighbouring graves; hence, women formed a separate group for venerating the stone. The venerated bent over the stone and recited a prayer (Fātiḥa). One of the women laid her tightly wrapped ill baby on the stone, knelt while holding onto the low-raised fence around the grave, and started to wail and pray. Seeing this, other women started to touch the stone and the child with the same hand to transmit its healing power, while saluting the Prophet (ṣalavāt). A man from the crowd recited loudly a section from the prayer book with a resort to Shiʿī Imams; coming to the name of Sayyida Fāṭima in his prayer, he made a pause and the crowd asked for the well-being of the baby by the intermediation of her spirit. It culminated when they raised their hands from the gravestone to the sky and chanted a salute to the Prophet and his family for the acceptance of their veneration. The chain of rites around the site reinforces the “atmosphere” and the keen belief in the existence of the fragrance among the venerated.

![Figure 5.2](image_url)

**Figure 5.2**
Women venerated at Martyr Ahmad Polārak’s tomb in Behesht-e Zahra cemetery

*Photo: The Author, Tehran 2015*
On the closest bench to the row of tombs where Martyr Polārak lies, I talked to a woman who was sitting with a pile of papers on her knees. This woman, whom I shall refer to as “Narges”, introduced herself as the participant of Sayyida Polārak’s circle who was in the cemetery for the religious consult of young women. In her papers, she kept records of those whose prayers to Martyr Polārak had been granted. “What kind of records do you mean?” I asked her. Going through the miscellaneous sources, she showed me documents of religious vows (nadhr), letters, bills of people in need; there were also reports of dreams, narrating the appearance of Martyr Polārak who invited them to venerate his “Mother”, Sayyida Fāṭima, at his site of burial.

Narges, who was at first hesitant to reveal her idea about the fragrance, then referred to it as a relic. She explained to me the transmission of saintly connections in Polārak's family, starting from the mother’s title Sayyida, which demarks her as a descendant of the Prophet. In her view, the rose fragrance on the stone was a continuation of Sayyida Fāṭima’s scent transferred from the dreams of Sayyida Polārak to Martyr Polārak. In Narges’s account the transition of the scent to the gravestone, whereby a large crowd venerates it every day, was a testament to its “truth”.

Narges rationalised her idea of a relic as an inevitable phenomenon that occurred in the aftermath of the male religious authorities’ abusive treatment of Sayyida Polārak. The peculiar transfer from a human body to a stone that eternally preserves the mythic power further enhances Narges’s belief in the material chain of the scent that inhered from the Prophet to his daughter and his descendant (sayyid) who envisions them.

The officials of the cemetery have expressed vehemently their discontent against the site and particularly the women followers of Sayyida Polārak. Aside from the abusive motorcyclists around the section, administrative officers have violated the gravestone by conducting various “tests” on the stone. In the gesture of a public display, as Narges recalled in anger, they used to ignite fire over the gravestone or wash it with industrial alcohol to prove its being artificially oiled. After several unsuccessful trials, they threatened to remove and replace the stone. However, the exacerbation of the tense situation around the gravestone has strengthened the women’s belief and the identification of their fate with their spiritual leader, Sayyida Fāṭima.

The scented gravestone became, then, the site of a possible mediation, a passageway between the dreams and the divine, where the rejected spiritual recognition, the remains of a collective dream ritual, are re-encountered and can be symbolically transformed. For the vampions, the veneration of the martyr’s grave becomes one’s own saintly dream experience.
This chapter offers a new perspective on the collective and affective engagement with the dreams of Sayyida Fāṭima among Shi‘ī pious women and mothers of martyrs in Tehran. Despite the Iranian state’s recent oppressive strategies against Sufi circles, pious women’s practices of connecting to the Prophet and the martyrs of war through dreams have rearticulated Sufi traditions and underpinned new positions at variance with the established boundaries. Unlike interpretation manuals and autobiographies of dreams in the classical Islamic interpretation traditions (ta‘bīr), these women reverse the textual legacy since they preserve the saintly dreams in their sensual olfactory imprints in pieces of cloth and on the gravestone of a martyr.

The aura of the Prophet is crafted through discursive and non-discursive elements: by way of blood relation, by reference to the imaginal, as well as by addressing certain aural attributions of the Prophet. In this vein, the pious women propound a chain of interrelated events as the Prophet’s eating from the fruits of the heavenly tree, his leaving of an olfactory trace of the fruit in his daughter, and finally, reconfiguring sayyids and martyrs as the true descendants of the Prophet. In the post-war context, dream-images of Sayyida Fāṭima open up a space of intermediation between the pious women, their martyred sons, and the divine. During their rituals, the women inhabit the saintly images through collective effervescence and render visible the aura by yielding to the conventional scent of rosewater in their environment. The scent of roses that they perceive as the aura of the presence of Sayyida Fāṭima conflicts established and formal discourses of the martyr-cult in Iran. They produce a formidable incongruent niche that does not easily compromise with these discourses.

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