

X-rated Film Boom

Author: [Yaseen Madhloom](#)

With the end of Saddam-era censorship, many cinemas look to profit from demand for porn movies.

Twenty-five-year-old Nawzad was looking at a poster advertising a racy Turkish film.

After 15 minutes of staring at the poster, which featured sex scenes, he went to the al-Rasheed cinema counter and bought a movie ticket.

"I'm a young unmarried man and I'm not in a relationship," said Nawzad, who declined to give his full name. "It's my second time here to watch this film."

Movies featuring sex scenes and nudity are becoming more popular across Iraq because of the end of Saddam-era censorship, when officials would regularly visit cinemas to make sure they were not showing porn and other banned films.

But because Sulaimaniyah is free of religious extremists and other militants - who target liquor stores and other "immoral" commercial enterprises in other parts of Iraq - business is even more brisk.

Noori Jameel al-Madfa'i, general manager of the al-Rasheed cinema, said his most popular films are those with sex scenes. He shows these titles three to four days a week, with 150-200 people turning up for each viewing. He said his customers are men between the ages of 17 and 45.

"We can show any film in the hall, as there is no censorship of films from any government parties," he said.

Ahmed Abdul-Hussein, a Baghdad resident, is in Sulaimaniyah looking for work in construction. In his free time, he sometimes goes to see movies featuring sex scenes.

"I'm here for 15 days, away from my wife," said Abdul-Hussein, 40, who has four children. "I come to the cinema to see these films to satisfy a few of my sexual desires."

Dilshad Mustafa, who is responsible for media in Iraqi Kurdistan's ministry of culture, said there's real demand for these movies and the government allows them so as not to be accused of censorship.

"Yes some cinemas in Sulaimaniyah only show sex and seduction films," Mustafa said. "The reason is that a large number of young people turn out to watch these films, increasing profits for the cinema owners."

Parween Hasan, head of the Sulaimaniyah branch of the Kurdistan Women's Union, said because Iraq is largely a Muslim and conservative society, movies featuring sex scenes provide an outlet for people.

"The customs and habits of the Kurdish family have intensified the sexual inhibition of the youth, both male and female, in Sulaimaniyah," she said.

Mohammed Abood al-Mishadani, owner of Baghdad's al-Moroog movie importing company, said pornographic films are the most popular requests from cinema owners. "[They] rarely ask for action and romance movies," he said.

Al-Mishadani said even cinemas in some towns threatened by insurgents show sex films, albeit less graphic examples than those running in the more stable parts of the country.

The fashion for pornography, though, often angers other cinema-going audiences.

"Families can not go to the cinemas nowadays because the movies are immoral, and because the audiences are mostly drunk," said Baghdad resident Kareem al-Nedawi, reflecting a widely-held view.

Yaseen Madhloom is an IWPR trainee in Sulaimaniyah.

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