Conceiving Citizens: Women and the Politics of Motherhood in Iran
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Print publication date: 2011
Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: March 2015
DOI: 10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780195308860.001.0001

From Celibacy to Companionship

The Evolution of Persian Marriages
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DOI: 10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780195308860.003.0004

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter discusses how shifting public needs and political expectations prompted the reassessment of Iranian marriages. Modernity changed the role of women and men in society and these changes were reflected in family life. While Muslim marriages still required witnesses, documentation, and parental acquiescence, over time they became more than just a legal contract. For decades Iranians grappled with these ideas, and eventually they put forth new legislation intended to regulate personal relations between women and men.

Keywords: Iran, marriage, Muslims, family life, personal relations

In 1877, a discussion on the celibacy of priests spurred debate in the Persian journal Akhtar about marriage as a fundamental
social institution. The rejection of celibacy was not a novel concept in Islamic literature. Popular Shi‘i traditions rejected celibacy as well. For example, the renowned Safavid-era theologian Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (d. 1698 or 1699), credited with propagating commonly practiced Shi‘i rituals, repudiated celibacy and instead wrote about the wisdom of marriage and procreation. Building on these historical precedents, the writer of this article argued that endorsement of a monastic way of life (rahbaniyyah) ran contrary to Islam, as well as to the laws of nature and basic common sense. Restricting marriage was akin to denying the existence of God. Just as there was no difference between “aborting a fetus” (isqat-i jinin) and “killing a person” (kushtan-i adam), so there was no distinction between “forbidding marriage” (man‘-i izdivaj) and abortion, for marriage “causes the production and creation of human beings.” By denying the natural desire within them, priests were flouting the wisdom of God and a fundamental human impulse. This writer considered such precepts to be a perversion not only of nature but also of religiosity.

Iranian marriages had fallen under scrutiny and reassessment in response to shifting public needs and political expectations. The dearth of extant marriage records from the nineteenth century makes it difficult to assess whether Qajar society was experiencing an actual rise in celibacy and a decline in marriage. However, modernity imposed changes on the role of women and men in society, changes that became reflected in family life. The evolution of Persian family life, especially in urban centers, required a new look at the meaning and social significance of marriage. Muslim marriages in Iran still required witnesses, documentation, and parental acquiescence, but over time they became more than just a legal contract. For decades Iranians grappled with these ideas, and eventually they put forth new legislation intended to regulate personal relations between women and men.

A woman's chastity or promiscuity was bound to her family's honor. Many believed that Persian society had an obligation to help women remain virtuous. To do so, the state needed to create opportunities for women's industriousness, education, and domesticity. The absence of such “respectable”
opportunities could bring about temptation and vice, leading errant women toward promiscuity and prostitution. Morality was not solely bound to religion, however. The question of women's morality influenced the secular debates about women's health, marriage, and education. Women, as well as men, preoccupied themselves with the meanings of feminine virtue in an increasingly secular and interconnected society.

Matrimony had an important communal dimension. Marriage laws not only delineated the economic relationship between husbands and wives but also prescribed a social hierarchy that laid out the civic duties of women and men. In addition, marriage provided the state with a means of managing its population. After all, it was the government's sanction and enactment of religious and civic law that enabled women and men to marry, to serve as witnesses, or to officiate at a wedding ceremony. By outlining a code of conduct, marriage could preserve the virtue of citizens and further the moral objectives of the state. Marriage, as the starting point of family life, emphasized ideals such as unity, loyalty, virtue, and industriousness, which could also strengthen the bonds between citizens and the state. As Iran experimented with new forms of political governance at the turn of the twentieth century, the family became an appealing metaphor for describing the evolving relationship between citizens and the state.  

In the late Qajar era the purported erosion of marriage as an institution appeared connected to the moral laxity of Iranian society. The spread of venereal disease, accompanied by a perception of increased sexual promiscuity, reinforced the sense that Iranian society was becoming socially decadent. To counter celibacy and to curb sexual promiscuity, several writers addressed the virtues of marriage. In the late nineteenth century, a Persian translation of an Ottoman, and later Indian, rendition of a French manual on marital hygiene was published, endorsing marriage and discussing the physiological processes of human reproduction. Like French hygienists of the nineteenth century, the manual's author, Sayyid Muhammad Shirazi, “paid more attention to pregnancy and birth than to menstruation or sexual intercourse.” The purpose of marriage, Shirazi wrote, was to increase
population, for marriage served not just the individual but humanism (adamiyat) and civilization (tamaddun) as well. He believed that human beings found it “impossible to live in seclusion and alone.” Alluding to various religious and cultural traditions, Shirazi maintained that moral and practical exigencies necessitated marriage. The ancient Greek philosophers, he wrote, viewed marriage as a “great service to the homeland” that ensured “the duration of the nation.” Islam, too, opposed a monastic lifestyle (rahbaniyat).

According to hadith, or Islamic traditions, “He who is able to marry should marry, for it keeps the eye cast down and keeps a man chaste; he who cannot, should take to fasting, for it will have a castrating effect upon him.” Even the Prophet Muhammad, Shirazi claimed, had stated that the “best women are those who bear many children,” thus illustrating the extent to which women had been encouraged to produce offspring. In short, there was no higher purpose to marriage than human reproduction and continuation of the human race.

Single men and women, Shirazi went on, might suppose that they were free from the burdens of family life and child rearing, and that they enjoyed longer life spans than married couples. However, he assured them, a review of available death records would surely prove the contrary. Because bachelors lived unregulated lives—their mealtimes, for instance, were unspecified—not to mention that their solitary lifestyles invited fornication and adultery (zina’), they faced health risks that threatened to reduce their longevity. Married men, on the hand, lived orderly lives and enjoyed a happy existence because of their families’ kindness and attention. The same held true for married women. Although they confronted “veritable” fears due to pregnancy and childbirth, they experienced the joys and pleasures of spending time with their husband and children—experiences that extended their life span. Marriage, he concluded, was a virtuous and “natural act.”

Such truisms left little room for doubt or dissent—the intent, no doubt, of the author and the government censors who supported such translating endeavors, for the texts were regarded as social correctives, not as open cultural fora.

Shirazi took editorial liberties with his translation, as his numerous references to the sharia’ make clear. One can
nonetheless assume that a significant portion of his work derives from the French original. Yet Shirazi's musings are interspersed throughout his translation, and the text therefore represents one of the earliest Persian texts on marital hygiene in the modern era. In this work Shirazi articulates some of the basic tenets of reproductive health and sexuality with which Iranian maternalists would grapple in the first half of the twentieth century. By adopting a biological gaze and a scientific posture, he discussed the biology of human reproduction with uncanny openness and candor. Why was such direct discussion of sexuality possible? Hygienic literature such as Shirazi's work made it possible to discuss socially sensitive topics such as sexuality and reproduction because sexuality was couched in a pseudoscientific language intended to bring about a higher societal good: improved public sanitation and personal hygiene, as well as the birthing of healthy children. From an ethical standpoint, discussions of marriage and marital hygiene also addressed the desire to promote morality and virtue among Iranian women and men by endorsing legal and sensible marriages. At the same time, Shirazi and other maternalists were creating norms of behavior that, though not legally enforced, identified personal choices in matters of health, marriage, and even dress as "appropriate" or "inappropriate."

Shirazi's discussion of marriage reinforced such simplistic truisms, and the didactic tone of the text emphasized his writings as a corrective for Iranian families who veered from his suggested norms of marital hygiene and conduct. Legal marriage, Shirazi remarked, was one of the laws of metaphysics. Eschewing marriage and acting contrary to this natural order resulted in "lunacy" and "illness," whereas engaging in marriage and obeying the laws of nature brought about health and vigor. Ancient physicians, he noted, often attributed the illnesses of young women to love, and marriage seemed to cure the woes of young women. The proper age of marriage was difficult to determine, however, given the variability in the physical and psychological development and readiness of women and men. He admonished those who insisted on a child's marriage before the child displayed physical maturity, calling it "harmful" and
“in error.” Girls in particular who were married too young not only suffered from weakness but also had immature uteruses and thus could not nurture strong children in the womb. Older couples, too, were at risk for siring weak and chronically ill offspring. Similarly, marriage between couples with a wide age difference between them often did not bring about happiness and health. Children of such marriages, Shirazi postulated, inherited the physical condition of their aged parent and appeared “weak, ill, hunchedbacked,” and “unsightly” (bad shikl).

Mention of venereal disease stirred controversy by suggesting sexual impropriety in an Islamic society. These discussions also pointed to the need to provide rudimentary sexual education and awareness within marriage. An early Iranian maternalist, Shirazi focused on the ways in which healthful reproduction might be achieved. While Iran did not legislate eugenics, maternalists who pioneered texts on reproductive hygiene articulated and propagated such concepts. For example, Shirazi urged potential marriage partners (and their parents, who often engaged in negotiating marriage proposals) to educate themselves about their physical health. He encouraged families to expose any medical concerns prior to marriage in order to deter the couple from bearing children who might also inherit similar difficulties. In fact, he believed that such flawed individuals, including women whose physical characteristics impeded them from birthing healthy children, should be barred from marriage and reproduction in order to avoid spreading these inadequacies to the next generation. Shirazi even suggested that a law be instituted preventing individuals with “impaired physical features” (ma’yub al-’aza) and “inherited illnesses” (mawrusi al-amraz) from marrying.

A marriage based on fitness and vigor was considered the starting point of healthful reproduction and might even be an antidote to illicit sexual relations. Yet Shirazi gave tacit recognition to the reality of extramarital affairs, and his text even provided a putative cure for gonorrhea, a sexually transmitted disease known at the time.

Shi‘i traditions placed a premium on marrying virgin brides. One tradition implored men to marry virgins so that they would bear the men numerous children. Another tradition
claimed that virgin brides had a pleasing smell in their mouths. In addition, they had dry uteruses and their bodies were apparently better equipped to carry children. The same tradition maintained that the breasts of virgin brides produced more milk than those of nonvirgins.\textsuperscript{13} Even Shirazi had confirmed that among certain families it was customary to display a bloody sheet after a husband and wife first engaged in sexual relations, and that failure to provide such evidence of virginity often led to the disgraced bride being sent back to her father’s home.\textsuperscript{14} In short, the “best women” (\textit{bihtar\i zan\an}) were those who gave birth copiously, and nature rewarded virgins by enabling them to carry numerous children in their wombs. By contrast, the “worst women” (\textit{badtar\i zan\an}) were those who controlled their husbands, bore no children, and flirted with other men.\textsuperscript{15}

While it was possible to identify some of the desirable elements in a potential marriage partner, Qajar families were not always able to attain marital bliss. Some writers investigated the causes of unhappy marital unions among Iranians. In her memoirs, the Qajar princess Taj al-Saltanah, betrothed at eight years of age, lamented her marriage to Hasan Khan Shoja’ al-Saltanah and the Persian tradition that had placed her in this predicament. Taj al-Saltanah, a daughter of the nineteenth-century Persian king Nasir al-Din Shah, defied stereotypes of harem life.\textsuperscript{16} A restless soul, Taj despised conventions such as marriage, opting instead for refined pastimes such as reading and mastering the art of epistolary prose. Born in 1883, Taj grew up within the cloistered walls of the harem. Her mother, Turan al-Saltanah, was the shah’s cousin, and her parents had wed through an institution known as \textit{mut’a} (temporary marriage).\textsuperscript{17} As she rued, “Of mankind’s great misfortunes one is this, that one must take a wife or husband according to the wishes of one’s parents.”\textsuperscript{18} Even on her wedding day, Taj al-Saltanah could not conquer her misgivings about her forced fate. As she recalled, “Never will I forget that moment, when freedom and dignity were snatched away from me…. In all fairness, however, I should not be the only one cursing that day; that poor wretched youth ought to have felt the same as I did.”\textsuperscript{19} An honest and heartfelt description of her woes, Taj’s
reflections gave voice to some of the common frustrations experienced by women and men of her generation.

Other observers found some merit to Persian unions, even as they condemned the custom of polygamy. In 1891, the Ottoman writer Ahmed Bey noted that polygamy in Iran is “hardly practiced” except among “the royal family and some rich old mullahs,” although he may have understated its popularity among ordinary folk. Those engaged in polygamy, Ahmed Bey asserted, were “generally despised.”

Another source found in 1911 that in Iran only 2 percent of the population engaged in polygamy. Still, an American missionary report from 1914 stated that “polygamy and concubinage must be driven out” of the country, suggesting that polygamy, albeit rare, was actively practiced among certain Iranian communities and was likely underreported.

Few accounts exist of the relationship among the multiple wives of men, yet it is safe to assume that interactions among competing wives were not always harmonious. In 1921, an American missionary gave testimony of a bitter dispute involving two village wives. Apparently a quarrel had ensued between the two wives over a petty matter of heating the oven. In a fit of anger the second wife had thrown the baby of the first wife “from the roof to the ground,” but the child had fortunately “escaped harm.” The second wife had also bitten off a piece of the lip of the first wife. Finally the landlady intervened and had the second wife beaten. The landlady also removed a pair of gold earrings belonging to the second wife and gave it to the first wife to help pay for the medical expenses associated with having her lip sewn up by a mission doctor.

In addition to polygamy, some Western travelers to Iran spoke out against the travesty of marrying off child brides. Because family honor hinged on the chastity of girls, some Iranian parents encouraged their daughters to wed at a young age to avert the temptations of sexual experimentation before marriage and the shame associated with it. Early marriage seemed preferable to promiscuity or, worse, prostitution. In 1911, the British missionary Napier Malcolm remarked that “the usual age for a Muhammadan girl to marry is thirteen or
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fourteen, but in many places they marry as early as eight or nine.”25 Girls generally had little say in this matter, perhaps due to their youth, as Malcolm speculated. Arranging marriages before couples had reached the age of puberty made little sense and often obligated them to endure miserable marriages.

In Iran, as elsewhere, marriage gave women and men certain privileges such as citizenship, access to welfare services, and the right to (p.58) inheritance.26 Marriage also reinforced a division of labor that ordered society along recognizable gender lines. Although a number of accepted norms of marital conduct changed in Iran over the course of a century, the view that men served as protectors of their women remained relatively static. Scholars have convincingly argued that Iranian men were taught to assume responsibility for the welfare and security of their women. This “male guardianship” of women saddled men with paternalist obligations as fathers and husbands. Just as women needed to embrace domesticity to forge a harmonious family life, men had to assume their manly duties. In 1907, as the journalist Mu'ayyid al-Islam averred, material progress in Iranian society necessitated “manliness” (mardanigi) and “brave action” (harkat-i daliranah). Bravery became one of the requisite virtues of male patriotism, as without brave men and soldiers the nation's survival remained at risk and women's purity might become compromised. But bravery meant more than just success on the battlefield. Brave men used their male authority both at home and in the public sphere to support their women. “Congregating and talking,” Mu'ayyid al-Islam said deridingly, did not effect change or help to eliminate social ills.27

In a subsequent essay, Mu'ayyid al-Islam contended that the least passionate individuals are those who “do not pay attention to their wife and daughter, who abandon them without expenses or livelihood.” Instead, such persons wasted their savings on “meaningless expenses” (kharjhayah bihuddah) in gambling houses (qumar-khanah'ha), brothels (fahishah-khanah'ha), and the like.28 Still, he observed that the predicament of women with irresponsible husbands paled in comparison with the distress widows faced, especially if they
were left alone to care for their children. In fact, he concluded that widows were the most helpless and “abandoned” (dar mandah) women, and because they represented the nation's honor (namus), widows required men's protection.

Widows were quite common in Iran because of the prevalence of child marriages. As John Wishard, chief of the American Presbyterian Hospital in Tehran, noted, “Many of these children are married, often at the age of twelve, to men old enough to be their grandfathers, and this means a large number of widows.” Wishard pointed out that because many widows “are left without means of support, there is only one road open for them, and that road leadeth to destruction.” Some widows chose to become “plural wives” or temporary ones, as polygamous or temporary marriage offered them rights that might not otherwise be available to them.

The plight of widows had worsened in the months after the granting of constitutional government. Mu'ayyid al-Islam reported that several widows had congregated outside the Tupkhanah, near the parliament itself, in protest and seeking government financial assistance for their withheld pensions. That the widows had gathered in such a public place emphasized the failures of the country's men in defending their vulnerable female citizens. They had not only let down the widows but also dishonored the nation. The public display of such negligence embarrassed the male leaders of the country, including the delegates of the newly founded parliament, since it showed their inability to achieve a basic aspect of manliness: protection of the nation's female citizens. Mu'ayyid al-Islam regretted that these profligate leaders squandered money on lavish feasts but did not consider contributing funds to relieve the widows’ misery. To ease the embarrassment of having to explain the public's inaction toward suffering widows, he volunteered to have the office of his newspaper function as a depot for the collection of charitable contributions. These contributions were to come from the nation's leaders and others to help lessen the impact of poverty on widows and their families. Another newspaper, Rahnima, also objected to the hardships that these widows had endured, a situation forcing them to put up tents outside
Artillery Plaza in Tehran during the hot summer months. As this anonymous writer decried, the widows lived for months, “hunchbacked,” in these tents with little air circulation. Some became sick from living under unsanitary conditions, while others perished. Yet few, if any, passers-by offered to assist these disadvantaged, abandoned women.\(^33\)

Among the most important social changes brought during the constitutional years was the termination of the harem as an institution. Under Nasir al-Din Shah, the harem had grown into a considerable royal and social institution. To control costs, Muzaffar al-Din Shah shut down his father's harem after Nasir al-Din Shah's assassination in 1896.\(^34\) The dissolution of the harem, a symbolic institution confined to the rich, meant that even Iran's privileged classes were shifting their views on marriage. Like many ordinary Iranians, Persian royalty would grapple with the purpose of modern marriage in order to adapt to the exigencies of contemporary society. The harem had at one time signified male authority and female complicity in upholding polygamy as a necessary condition of married life. With the passing of this quintessential institution of polygamy, Iranians of all classes could begin to imagine monogamy as the preferred expression of modern marriage.

Family life had to adapt itself to the political changes transforming Iran. In 1907 the popular Persian newspaper *Habl al-Matin* declared patriotism a “necessary duty,” surpassing even one's commitment to life, property, and family. It argued: “Your wife and children are only enjoyable when the homeland and Islam are not trampled upon.”\(^35\) This was a bold and revealing statement. National exigencies, it seemed, had superseded familial obligations even in a society that considered the family a fundamental social unit. Middle Eastern households had traditionally forged kinship networks intended to support women and children. But as Kandiyoti explains, “The ‘protective net’ which households were supposed to extend over their more vulnerable members—women, children and the elderly—grew increasingly threadbare.... The material basis of traditional authority relations within the family between the young and the old and between genders was subjected to persistent assault.”\(^36\) Too,
in Iran the economic demands of urban life and the expansion of state bureaucracy necessitated a different set of skills and preparedness from both women and men in the domestic sphere and the professional world. The modern family served as a conduit for the propagation of nationalist mores and a vehicle for the enforcement of gender roles conducive to new maternalist ideals. Nationalism had created a different political language for Iranian men and women.\textsuperscript{37}

Marriage provided an ethical framework for social and family relations. An essay written in 1911, likely by the journalist Sayyid Hasan Mu'minzadah, supports this point. Mu'minzadah declared that four essential factors gave life meaning and purpose. These fundamentals included the mind (\textit{\textquoteleft aq\textquoteleft l}), property (\textit{\textquoteleft mal}), and a wife (\textit{\textquoteleft ayal}) and child (\textit{\textquoteleft farzand}). He described the wife as the “mistress of the house” (\textit{\textquoteleft kadbanu}), a modest and upright woman who managed the man's home according to the man's wishes, and who cared for his property. The ideal wife birthed, nursed, and nurtured her children. She served as a partner in the home alongside the man in her life. The emphasis on seeking out this “ideal” wife placed pressure on the Iranian woman to subsume her needs to her husband's by making his comfort and well-being her priority, instead of allowing the woman to focus on herself as an equal partner in the marital relationship. In return, the ideal wife gained her husband's constant approval. The goal of married life was the protection of honor (\textit{\textquoteleft hifz-i namus}), often used to mean the honor and welfare of the family.\textsuperscript{38}

In 1911, the editor of Amuzgar, a weekly newspaper published in Rasht, addressed marital relations in a short essay. Although this journal focused on topics of political and intellectual import, it is noteworthy that a brief discussion on marriage ensued: “Marital relations are one of the main issues of life, and its significance is such that all religions and nations of the world have established laws governing marital relations. Anyone who behaves contrary to these laws cannot be considered a person of decency and character.” The wedding night was ideally a blessed event. Even prophets and leaders celebrated their weddings with feasting. In Iran, however, although marriage was regarded as one of life's milestones, it marked the beginning of “misfortune”—a misery brought
about as a result of women’s ignorance. This misogynistic trope targeted women as the cause of men’s suffering in the family, as well as a source of domestic discord. Without education, women would not grasp the real intent of marriage and partnership, whereas women’s schooling might actually improve marital relations between Iranian men and women.

Because marriage was considered a predictable event in the lives of many Iranians, early Persian women’s journals often discussed marital relations between couples, even suggesting ways for creating happy unions, though not openly addressing sexuality. In 1910, _Danish_, the first newspaper edited by a woman in Iran, pointed out that disagreements over money often led to marital conflict and cautioned that women should avoid asking their husbands for money on a daily basis. Instead, women were encouraged to maintain a monthly household budget. Men were also reminded that they ought to speak to their wives about their experiences outside the home, particularly since few urban women spent much of their day out of the house. For this reason, men needed to anticipate that their wives might at times express frustration about their overwhelming child care responsibilities. To prevent other causes of dissent between husbands and wives, men were urged to respect their wives’ family members and to refrain from making derogatory comments about their in-laws even in jest.

Another women’s journal, _Shikufah_, also published several pieces on marriage. One essay stressed the friendship and unity between husbands and wives, arguing that they resembled “two individuals in one skin.” Instead of viewing marriage as an institution that reinforced hierarchy between women and men, such writers advocated marriage as a reciprocal partnership between women and men. Still, marriage retained its necessary public function in Iranian society. In 1915, one passage echoed the words of Sayyid Muhammad Shirazi’s nineteenth-century manual on marital hygiene in its emphasis on marriage as a way to encourage human reproduction. Population growth (takathur-i afrad) depended on marriage, and human beings, by nature, shunned solitude to seek this natural union. Unlike Shirazi, however,
the writers of *Shikufah* acknowledged that marriage in Iran remained risky, somewhat akin to fishing for oysters in deep waters: if one was fortunate, the shell would contain pearls, and if not, it would brim with something far less desirable. For this reason, marriages built on blind luck and ignorance were discouraged because of their potential for disastrous unhappiness.\footnote{By making happiness and compatibility a focus of modern Iranian marriages, such writers were advocating a novel approach to marital relations.}

In the aftermath of the First World War, discussions of marriage once again assumed social significance. Although the two earliest Persian women's journals, *Danish* and *Shikufah*, had ceased publication by then, other women's magazines appeared on the horizon and reignited the debate. In 1921, Fakhr Afaq Parsa launched a new journal called *Jahan-i Zanan* (Women's World). Born into a religious family, Parsa apparently had married her husband at the age of nine but nonetheless was encouraged to get an education.\footnote{In the second issue of her bimonthly journal, Parsa reiterated the claim that men and women sought companionship to lead meaningful lives and to fulfill their needs. She contended that men who did not have a woman's “shadow” cast over them languished in solitude. In the absence of Persian statistics on demographic indicators, Parsa cited instead European figures to show that the mortality rate among unmarried men in Germany, France, and Britain was higher than the mortality rate among their married counterparts in those countries. In short, Parsa concluded that marriage brought longevity.}

In a subsequent issue, Parsa printed a translation of an essay written by Feride Ezzat Selim from Istanbul that explored the “painful”...
predicament” of Muslim women, especially after marriage. Although women assumed much of the burden for creating a happy marriage and household, husbands also had emotional obligations to their wives, which did not vanish after they satisfied their own sexual needs. However, many husbands virtually ignored their wives. While young brides grieved over their miserable domestic life, their husbands visited prostitutes.51

In 1922, Muhtaram Iskandari, along with several other women, founded the Patriotic Women’s League of Iran, and prominent activists such as Fakhr Afaq Parsa served on its executive committee. A year later, Iskandari, the daughter of a Qajar prince, began editing an eponymous newspaper published under the auspices of the league. Like previous journals edited by Iranian women, Majallah-i Nisvan-i Vatankhvah addressed women’s hygiene, marriage, and child rearing; it even included segments on the literary achievements of accomplished women worldwide. Above all, Iskandari stressed the need to give Iranian women access to education in order to enable them to become informed mothers and desirable spouses.52 Education would enable women to manage their homes better, and this improvement
in the quality of domestic life might then bring about harmonious marital relations between husbands and wives.

Instead of making marriages family affairs, some consideration needed to be given to the wishes of the actual people in the union: the bride and the groom. In 1921, *Jahan-i Zanan* carried an article on women's suffrage worldwide, highlighting the political successes that women had achieved. It reported, for instance, on the political participation of women in Australia, Norway, and Finland, who had gained the right to vote in 1902, 1906, and 1913, respectively. Yet Parsa, who likely authored this article, noted with derision that in Iran “women still do not have the right to choose husbands.”

A lengthy essay on marriage customs in Iran condemned the betrothal of mere children to one another. It was a deep-rooted societal flaw, not just a parental shortcoming, the article claimed, one that perpetuated Iran’s dysfunctional culture of matrimony. The go-betweens—extended family members and community elders—kept these unfortunate traditions alive. Unhappy marriages, moreover, encouraged youths to seek extramarital relations, which invariably brought disgrace to the family and exposed them to venereal disease. In other words, marriage alone was no guarantee of population growth or morality. Marriages needed to be based on companionship to give meaning and bring longevity to a relationship. The unsuitability of marrying off child brides to old men recurred as a cautionary tale in discussions of Persian matrimony. In 1924, after the closure of her journal *Jahan-i Zanan*, Fakhr Afq Parsa published in another magazine the heartrending story of an...
anonymous woman who had been forced by her father to marry a fifty-year-old man when she was only eleven years old. After years of suffering from the insults of her in-laws, this woman ran away with her children and eventually managed to get a divorce, but not before having contracted numerous incurable diseases. Her message to other women was simple: mothers needed to protect their daughters from abusive marriages.55

In 1926, a preliminary report made the following pessimistic observation about the living conditions of Iranian women: “Women have no civic rights. They live in ill ventilated houses, and take no exercise. This, combined with early and repeated pregnancies, tends to lower their physical resistance to sickness.”56 The low levels of hygiene not only affected domestic life but also spilled into the sphere of public responsibility. Journalists functioning as social critics endorsed marriage and marital hygiene in the popular press during Reza Shah’s reign both to circumscribe the spread of venereal disease and to endorse population growth and preservation.57
One female activist, ‘Iffat al-Muluk Khvajahnuri, proposed the opening of sports clubs that were geared toward women and taught sports better suited to women's bodies, such as tennis.\(^{58}\) Khvajahnuri also encouraged physical fitness for other women in the context of healthful reproduction. She described Iranian girls as “the people who will become the future mothers of the nation.” Iran, Khvajahnuri wrote, had pinned its hopes on these young women “who in order to renew the greatness of this dear nation would produce brave and strong youth.”\(^{59}\) Both women and men needed to keep healthy in order not to succumb to weakness, opium addiction, and idleness. In a subsequent article on sports, Khvajahnuri cited the absence of sports in Iran as a major contributing factor in the loose morals of Iranians and in their physical and psychological decline.\(^{60}\) This physical discipline among Iranian families of the ancient era, who would teach their children riding and archery, apparently had enabled Iran to attain imperial grandeur.\(^{61}\)

Sport and fitness even became positive attributes for a potential marriage partner. As one writer remarked, “The most important trait of a suitor is complete health…and participation in endeavors such as regular exercise.” Many youngsters, upon getting married, completely stopped exercising, thus committing a grave error, for “exercise facilitates blood circulation and purifies the blood…which is important [for the quality of] semen” and therefore for the health of future progeny.\(^{62}\) In other words, marriage need not eliminate exercise from a couple's daily life. Young married couples were exhorted to continue exercising after marriage to maintain their physical vigor and the vitality of their offspring.\(^{63}\)

In addition to promoting fitness, the discourse on marriage abounded with advice to young brides about how “to hold on to husbands” (\textit{shawhar-dari}).\(^{64}\) One article questioned why divorce was on the rise in Iran, while marriage was on the decline. Women and their expensive tastes—that is, their penchant for luxury products and fancy attire, often unaffordable for most men—were faulted for being one cause of divorce among modern Iranians.\(^{65}\) Related pieces warned
Iranian women not to view marriage as a material or “commercial” union, but rather to define it as “an old duty based on the need to continue the generation and to procreate.”

The fear that polygamy might increase the spread of venereal disease among women of childbearing age became a powerful reason to deliberate the salutary virtues of monogamy. One man, for instance, was singled out for having infected three of his wives with syphilis, all of whom had died while giving birth, presumably from complications related to infection from venereal disease. In 1926, a report prepared for the Rockefeller Foundation noted that “the number of wives which a man may take is limited to four, but there is no limit to the number of concubines he may have. Polygamy is not the rule among the peasant class, except in the Caspian provinces, where the women work in the rice-fields.” The same study found that “the age of marriage of girls is from nine years upwards.”

In 1928, several articles in the Persian daily newspaper Ittila’at explored the decline of marriage in Iran. One writer unequivocally declared that marriage should be based on the “heartfelt desire” of a man and a woman, though this “desire” meant more than just a lustful infatuation if there was to be a lasting union. In marriage, men and women had distinct responsibilities and needed to regard themselves as partners in raising their children. Husbands had an obligation to respect and protect their wives, as well as to provide for their education and enlightenment. Wives needed to provide for their husbands’ comfort and to manage the household frugally. While some of these duties were delineated along familiar gender lines, others emphasized marriage as a partnership between equals.

This bevy of commentary on the unenviable condition of Iranian women in miserable marriages may not have effected immediate political change, but it gradually paved the way for introducing legislation aimed at securing women's personal rights and health through this time-honored institution. In 1931, a marriage law was passed that placed some regulations on child marriage. Two years later, the Tehran
Marriage Court of First Instance enacted an important judgment enforcing the recently passed legislation. Evidently an illiterate cobbler had married a twelve-year-old girl. After deliberating, the court sentenced the cobbler, “his sister and another ‘wooing agent,’ [and] the officiating mullahs...to varying degrees of correctional imprisonment.” The American legation may have rushed to conclusions when it cited this judgment to claim that the Marriage Law of 1931 had “practically stopped child marriage in Iran.” In remote Iranian villages the new law had barely made inroads. As one writer cautioned: “Are we aware that many widows, divorcees, and underage girls are without jobs.... Do we realize that men can throw their wives out of the house whenever they want.... Are we aware that in villages, away from the capital, they marry off a ten-year-old girl to a sixty-year-old man in contradiction to the provisions of the law of marriage?”

Recent legislation could not wholly supersede local traditions of family life, and Iranian women continued struggling to secure basic social and economic rights.

The marriage law of 1931, debated simultaneously in the press along with discussions of venereal disease and marital hygiene, made only vague references to the health of couples eager to engage in matrimony. Article 3 of the law required a health permit from a licensed physician for couples under the required minimum age of eighteen for men and fifteen for women. The permit needed to certify that the couple was physically ready for the union and that marriage would not be physically harmful to them. In addition, the civil code required men to report any other marriages to legal officers performing the ceremony. Other sections dealt with women’s dowries, and Article 1040 enabled engaged couples to request certificates of health from each other, although they were not legally bound to do so. Some religious leaders voiced opposition to these reforms. Reportedly, “mullahs who preached against the new marriage laws have been warned not to do it again, or have been exiled to another city.”

Despite concerns about the proliferation of venereal disease, the law ironically permitted men to “take an unlimited number of temporary wives, each for a period of one hour to ninety-nine years.” Revisions to the marriage law in 1937 did not
tackle health matters concerning engaged or married couples with any rigor, either.

The Persian criminal code, published by the Ministry of Justice in 1933, attempted to rectify shortcomings in the provisions that dealt with “offenses against decency and morality (rape, sodomy, abduction, adultery, prostitution, et cetera).” The American chargé d'affaires described the new law as “modified and partially modernized Islamic personal status jurisprudence.” This legislation departed from sharia’ law in important respects. First, the penalty for sodomy, rape, adultery, and incest was no longer death, but was set at “imprisonment of from six months to life.” Second, as a consequence of this law, a “woman is now theoretically competent to bring suit against her husband on charges of adultery or non-support.” However, the husband “still enjoys full right of divorce.”

The debate on marital hygiene did not deal with the religious politics of mut'a, or temporary marriage, focusing instead on the secular rationalizations of the state about procreation and population control. These debates made few inroads among the religious classes who upheld the practice of mut'a in Iran. Shi'i jurists have argued that temporary marriage could, in theory, prevent the spread of prostitution since men could achieve sexual fulfillment. As Shahla Haeri explains, “Temporary marriage, the ‘ulama believe, not only keeps men sexually satisfied, it prevents them from visiting prostitutes; hence, public health is guaranteed and morality is upheld. The ‘ulama reject any association between temporary marriage and a possibility of health hazards like venereal disease.” Both venereal disease and prostitution existed in Iran despite, and perhaps because of, the practice of mut'a. Although religious thinkers and secular reformers did not always agree on marriage laws and veiling, the maternalist focus on sexual modesty and family life provided these seemingly oppositional groups with a common cause. Public conversations about propriety in Iran's dominant Islamic culture drew not just on religious texts and sayings but also upon modern hygienic knowledge, which condemned the spread of adultery and prostitution. Public discussions of celibacy, sexuality, and
marriage did not openly address homosexuality (liwat or hamjins bazi) as another kind of social deviance, which, like adultery, remained strictly prohibited in Islam but was practiced in contemporary society. The incidence of homosexual and adulterous relationships may partly explain why the institution of marriage was viewed as being in “decline” even after two decades of maternalist emphasis. Ease of divorce was considered another reason. In 1945, a cartoon printed in a women's magazine illustrates the public cynicism about marriage and rising concerns about the prevalence of divorce in Iranian society. The image on the left depicts a bride and groom who gaze with consternation at the Office of Divorce and contemplate the possibility that their marriage, too, might end in divorce. In front of the Office of Divorce is a line of unhappy women and men parting ways.

Public scrutiny of Iranian marriage had an impact on the fate of child brides. Some evidence suggests that the age of marriage did in fact rise over the long term. In 1924, one writer explained that although statistics on marriage were wanting from nineteenth-century Iran, it appeared from “looking at the fathers of today who were the youth of twenty years ago” that marriage was in decline. The author of this essay then asserted that while Iranian youth in the nineteenth century typically married between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, after the constitutional period Iranians from twenty-five to forty years old were no longer forming families and even “despise marriage.”

Nearly three decades later, a report completed by the Rockefeller Foundation in cooperation with Iranian health authorities found that “although in the past ‘child brides’ were said to be common, there is now in existence a law prohibiting females from marrying before the age of 16.” Their survey found that “only nine of the married females were less than 15 years of age.” The report also noted a decline in polygamy: “Of the married male population only 66 out of a total of 1,876 were found to have two wives at the time of the survey and only two had three wives.” The authors speculated that “economic factors” likely made it “difficult” to sustain polygamous relationships.
Monogamy emerged as the common form of union because it flouted Islamic institutions such as *mut'a* and was in line with the evolution of marriage elsewhere in the world, especially the West. The ascendancy of monogamous marriage was epitomized by the wedding of the shah's young heir, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, to Princess Fawzia of Egypt in 1939. The Persian popular press covered the news of the shah's engagement with fascination. The symbolic significance of the marriage was not lost on British diplomat Nevile Butler, either, who conceded that the event was “of some historical interest.” Previously, Iranian kings drew “upon their own countrywomen, not necessarily of illustrious birth, to fill their harems.” Polygamous marriage, however, created “internece struggles for succession,” as the king's wives vied for his attention in part to secure for their sons the coveted throne. Muhammad Reza Pahlavi's marriage gave the appearance of “bridging, or perhaps ignoring,” the Shi'i-Sunni divide and was not “expected to be popular among the Iranian ulema.” In preparation for the wedding, “beggars are being rounded up by the police authorities and conveyed to other towns.” There were constitutional obstacles to the marriage since Princess Fawzia was not of Iranian origin, though she was eventually granted Iranian nationality. In Egypt, despite the lavish expenditures on this wedding, there was “little enthusiasm... for this alliance,” given “acute world tension and anxiety.” The marriage contract was concluded at Abdin Palace in Cairo on 15 March 1939 at a “simple” ceremony and “in accordance with Islamic Law,” and a celebration of the couple's marriage followed in Iran. Although the wedding had symbolic value, the marriage lasted less than a decade. Ironically, the shah's divorce became emblematic of the challenges that accompanied modern marriage.
In 1945, the women’s magazine *Banu* published an essay about men’s infidelity. It found that men scarcely expressed the same love and attachment to their wives after a few years of marriage. Instead, the article claimed that men had a “protean and covetous” nature that predisposed them to seek the companionship of others. Some women, fortunate enough to discern their husbands’ true emotions, might be able to avert infidelity by providing them the proper attention and affection. But as the writer noted in jest, “Each day, it is necessary to discover a new secret in the art of husband-keeping [shawhar dari].” In short, it seemed that many women had reluctantly acknowledged the likelihood that their husbands might be unfaithful to them or seek another wife. The scrutiny of marriage in Iran had not necessarily lessened marital discord.

Iranian attitudes toward marriage changed over time, but not always for patriotic purposes. Like other institutions, marriage had to adapt itself to the needs of contemporary society. These transformations culminated in the termination of the harem as a royal prerogative and the embrace of monogamy as the preferred expression of modern marriages. Monogamy did not always bring Iranians happy and enduring unions, nor did it eliminate the risk or reality of extramarital relations. Even though the crown prince embraced monogamy, the country’s other social classes did not always follow suit. Nonetheless, the public debate on marriage transformed the culture of matrimony in Iran with its emphasis on health certificates, age limits, and companionship. Some women assumed a degree of
control over the selection of husbands, and if nothing else, they were advised to receive a certificate of good health from a future spouse.

Notes:

(1.) Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, *Hilyat al-Muttaqin* (Tehran, 1959), 67–68. Majlisi's works were known to Qajar-era Shi'i 'ulama and even today are relied upon by contemporary Shi'i scholars. For an announcement in a Qajar newspaper about the printing of one of Majlis's other works, *Zad al-Ma'ad*, see *Ittila'*, No. 15, 10 November 1903, 8.

(2.) *Akhtar*, 24 Safar 1294/10 March 1877, 53.


(7.) Ibid., 9–10.

(8.) For a comparable text, produced by Mirza Muhammad Malik al-Kuttab, see *Kitab-i Vasa'il-i Ibtihaj fi Hifz Sihhat al-Izdivaj* (Tehran 1325/1907). This text appears very similar to Shirazi's work.


(10.) Ibid., 17.

(11.) Ibid., 19–20.

(12.) Ibid., 21–22.

(14.) Shirazi, *Bulugh al-Ibtihaj*, 55. Yet Shirazi also noted that to avert disgrace, some mothers would examine their daughters’ private parts before the wedding. If they detected a broken hymen, they would give their daughters a thin hide covered with pigeon’s blood that could be used instead to provide evidence of virginity.


(16.) Nasir al-Din Shah was the reigning monarch of Iran’s Qajar dynasty from 1848 until his assassination in 1896.

(17.) Shireen Mahdavi, “Taj al-Saltaneh, an Emancipated Qajar Princess,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 23, 2 (1987): 188–93. Shi’ism allowed men to take on temporary wives for a limited period. Some Shi’is believe that this practice was allowed in the time of the Prophet Muhammad and was only forbidden during the reign of the second caliph, ‘Umar. For more on this subject, see Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi ‘i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi ‘ism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 182.


(19.) Ibid., 158.

(20.) Ahmed Bey, “La Femme Persane,” *La Nouvelle Revue* 69 (1891), 378. Bey also provides an unflattering portrayal of Persian mothers, who, he believed, shirked their maternal responsibilities until their daughters reached the age of twelve, at which point they would “leave their torpor” to prepare the girls’ dowry. Ibid., 382.


(22.) PHS, RG 91, Box 1, Folder 18, “Missions in Persia—East Persia Mission,” 12.
(23.) PHS, RG 91, Box 1, Folder 18, “Hamadan Medical Report, July 1921—June 1922,” 4.

(24.) For more on honor and shame, see Keddie's introduction in Nikki Keddie and Beth Baron, eds., Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 5–10.


(26.) Cf. Cott, Public Vows, for a comparable discussion in the United States.

(27.) Habl al-Matin, Tehran, No. 60, 6 July 1907, 1.

(28.) Habl-al-Matin, Tehran, No. 103, 29 August 1907, 1.

(29.) John G. Wishard, Twenty Years in Persia: A Narrative of Life under the Last Three Shahs (New York: Revell, 1908), 244.

(30.) Ibid.


(32.) Habl-al-Matin, Tehran, No. 103, 29 August 1907, 1–2.

(33.) Rahnima, No. 8, 24 September 1907, 4.

(34.) Janet Afary, Sexual Politics in Modern Iran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 77.

(35.) Habl al-Matin, Tehran, 1 Shavval 1325/8 November 1907, 1.


(37.) Ibid.
(38.) *Parvanah*, No. 31, 22 Dhul-qa‘da 1329/14 November 1911, 4. Mu‘minzadah then extended the analogy to praise the men who had sacrificed their children to preserve the Iranian homeland in the fight against Muhammad Ali Shah and the preservation of Iranian parliamentarianism.

(39.) *Amuzgar*, No. 14, 10 Ramadan 1329/4 September 1911, 4.


(41.) *Amuzgar*, No. 14, 10 Ramadan 1329/4 September 1911, 4.


(43.) *Danish*, No. 3, 9 Shavval 1328/14 October 1910, 7.

(44.) *Danish*, No. 6, 7 Dhul-qa‘da 1328/10 November 1910, 8.

(45.) *Shikufah*, No. 20, third year, 21 Dhul-hijja 1333/30 October 1915; *Shikufah*, No. 9, third year, 2 Jumada al-Thani/17 April 1915; *Shikufah*, No. 1, fourth year, 1 Safar 1334/8 December 1915.

(46.) *Shikufah*, No. 10, 20 Jumada al-Avval 1332/16 April 1914, 1.

(47.) *Shikufah*, No. 9, third year, 2 Jumada al-Thani/17 April 1915, 1.

(48.) *Shikufah*, No. 20, third year, 21 Dhul-hijja 1333/30 October 1915, 2–3.

(50.) Jahan-i Zanan, No. 2 (1921), 26-28.

(51.) Jahan-i Zanan, No. 4 (1921), 82-83.

(52.) Majallah-i Nisvan-i Vatankhvah-i Iran, No. 3 (1924), 3-11.

(53.) Jahan-i Zanan, No. 5 (1921), 105-6.

(54.) Majallah-i Nisvan-i Vatankhvah-i Iran, Nos. 7-8, 22-31.

(55.) Majallah-i Nisvan-i Vatankhvah-i Iran, No. 3 (1924), 17-23.


(57.) Alam-i Nisvan, ninth year, No. 3 (May 1929), 108-9.

(58.) Majallah-i Nisvan-i Vatankhvah, Nos. 5-6 (1924), 51.

(59.) Ibid., 50-51.

(60.) Majallah-i Nisvan-i Vatankhvah, Nos. 7-8 (1924), 5-7.

(61.) Majallah-i Nisvan-i Vatankhvah, Nos. 5-6 (1924), 51.

(62.) “Varzish va ta'ahul,” Ittila’at, 30 Mehr 1317/22 October 1938.

(63.) “Zan va varzish,” Ittila’at, 18 Aban 1318/10 November 1939.

(64.) Badr al-Muluk Bamdad, Tadbir-i Manzil va Dastur-i Bachih-dari (Tehran: Firdaws, 1931). For the term shawhardari, see Ittila’at, 28 July 1938, 1.

(65.) Ittila’at, No. 524, 12 Tir 1307/3 July 1928, 3.

(66.) Ittila’at, No. 543, 25 July 1928, 3.

(67.) Alam-i Nisvan, fifth year, No. 2 (March 1925), 38.

(68.) “Preliminary Report on Medical Education in Persia,” July 1926, 15. Rockefeller Archive Center, RF, RG 1.1, Box 1.
(69.) “Islahat-i ijtima’i,” Ittila’at, 9 October 1928, 1. Also, Ittila’at, 11 October 1928, 1. For another article, see “Chira izdivaj dar Iran kam mishavad,” Ittila’at, No. 524, 3 July 1928, 3.

(70.) “Persia's 1931 Marriage Law Has Practically Stopped Child Marriage,” Charles Hart to Secretary of State, Tehran, 7 April 1933, 1, RG 59, U.S. Department of State Records.

(71.) Ibid. For more on this, see Amin, Making of the Modern Iranian Woman, 129-32.


(73.) Ittila’at, 3 Mordad 1310/26 July 1931, 1. Related discussions are continued in the next issue.


(76.) Ibid.

(77.) “Transmitting Test of New Persian Law on Offenses Against Decency and Morality,” George Wadsworth to Secretary of State, Tehran, 3 February 1934, 2, RG 59, U.S. Department of State Records.

(78.) Ibid.

(80.) For more on homosexuality in Iran, see Afsaneh Najmabadi, Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards: The Sexual and Gender Anxieties of Iranian Modernity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Afary, Sexual Politics in Iran.

(81.) Ittila‘at, No. 524, 3 July 1928, 3.

(82.) Banu, No. 6 (Urdhibisht 1324/April–May 1945), 3.

(83.) Nisvan-i Vatankhva-i Iran, No. 9, 6 July 1925, 12–13. This is a long and fascinating article that touches on many other aspects of the marital relationship. In conclusion, the author found that both men and women were complicitous in bringing about the decline in marriage, but that men were guiltier than women in this matter (21).

(84.) M. B. Mashayekhi and Guy S. Hayes, “Some Demographic and Health Characteristics of 173 Villages in a Rural Area of Iran,” 22, Rockefeller Archive Center, RF, RG 1.1, 771, Box 1. The survey was finished in 1951.

(85.) Ibid.

(86.) Ibid., Making of the Modern Iranian Woman, 136–38, for press coverage and discussion of this marriage.

(87.) Bourne and Watt, eds., British Documents on Foreign Affairs, 28:314.

(88.) Ibid., 28:315.

(89.) Ibid., 28:392.

(90.) Ibid., 28:392.


(92.) Ibid., 28:454.

(93.) Banu, No. 6, Urdhibishht 1324/April–May 1945), 1.
Conceiving Citizens: Women and the Politics of Motherhood in Iran
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Print publication date: 2011
Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: March 2015
DOI: 10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780195308860.001.0001

Sexual Mores, Social Lives

The Impact of Venereal Disease
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DOI:10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780195308860.003.0005

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter discusses the spread of venereal disease in Iran, its link to prostitution, and how it raised concerns over the morality of Iranian society and the honor of the nation's men as defenders of women's virtue. It argues that the maternalist discourse—and the hygiene movement in general—liberated the modern Iranian woman by opening up discussion of previously taboo subjects such as sexuality and encouraging a public reassessment of family life and women's rights in the domestic partnership. While the campaign to control prostitution and venereal disease may not have sufficiently curbed these ills in Iranian society, but it created a public space in which the discussion of such topics became permissible.
In 1894 Abu al-Hasan Khan Tafrishi, an Iranian physician who headed Tehran’s main hospital, translated into Persian excerpts of a French hygiene manual at the behest of the Iranian minister of science, Mukhbir al-Dawlah. Aside from explaining basic human biological processes, he touched on the characteristics of various contagious diseases, including smallpox, cholera, plague, and syphilis. He viewed syphilis as a disease consigned to prostitutes, whom he held directly responsible for its transmission. Prostitution not only caused emotional distress for couples but also endangered their health through the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. As he explained, “The prostitute carries the poison of this dangerous disease [syphilis], and death is considered the best end to it.” Once dead, the prostitute would no longer be able to infect other people and cause unnecessary ailments, including deafness and blindness, in others. At times a sacred site, a woman’s body could by turns be construed as a repository of evil, especially in its pursuit of sexual fulfillment. The prostitute best exemplified this double-edged reality. Arguing that “the prostitute is a public menace,” Tafrishi railed against prostitutes for not bemoaning their reputation or caring about people, since they constantly infected more people, who then spread the disease to others. It was an ailment that “destroyed homes” (khanahan suz) and “spoiled generations,” for men could unintentionally infect their wives and children. In other words, syphilis threatened the future capital of the nation: its population. In Iran, where outbreaks of famine, plague, and cholera already claimed many lives, syphilis mainly endangered the populace through the possibility of disability, and so prostitution and the proliferation of venereal disease were considered menaces.

Popular manuals such as Tafrishi’s were authored predominantly by men and were also largely composed for men in order to impart information about sex and women’s bodies. Men, like women, did not always feel comfortable talking about sex, and the popular print media made it possible to create a space for the discussion of subjects normally considered taboo.
The dearth of medical records makes it difficult to estimate the impact of syphilis in the Qajar era. Jean-Etienne Schneider, a European physician who practiced medicine in Iran, confirmed its prevalence there in the nineteenth century. He also noted that the country lacked a sanitary police force that could manage cases of venereal disease. As Schneider explained, “Among these Muslim people, there is no question that a woman cannot be examined, even if she is a courtesan.” Not only was it “inconvenient” to discuss women, but little attempt had been made to determine an accurate count of them. He admitted that these obstacles rendered it difficult even to measure the progress of syphilis in the country. Nonetheless, Schneider considered the disease widespread.

While some specialized medical texts discussed reproduction, their readership was likely limited to medical practitioners. It is nonetheless significant to document what Qajar physicians understood about venereal disease. In 1877, a Persian medical treatise on women’s illnesses addressed syphilis, for example, and recommended treatment with mercury for women of childbearing age. The Austrian physician Jakob Polak also reported on the use of mercury in Iran as a treatment for syphilis.

Western works dealing with syphilis and marital hygiene were also translated, and hygienists of the nineteenth century candidly addressed these subjects in their manuals. Travelers and memoirists wrote about the prevalence of prostitution, which, many believed, contributed to the spread of syphilis. In 1858, author and physician William Sanger noted that “numerous open and avowed” prostitutes lived in Iran, “among whom the dancing girls were conspicuous for the beauty of their persons and the melody of their voices.” Apparently the dancing girls held “considerable sway until the time of Futtuh Ali Khan [r. 1797–1834], who crowded his palace with concubines, and from among them issued edicts to suppress immorality, prohibiting the dancing girls from approaching the court, and exiling them to the distant provinces.” In fact, during the Safavid era, “public brothels were very numerous, and largely contributed to the national revenue, no less than thirty thousand prostitutes...
paying an annual tax in Isfahan alone.”

Although during the Qajar era “no licenses were given,” prostitution thrived and “public brothels” operated in several Iranian cities. As Rudi Matthee has observed, “In the absence of surviving court records, ego-documents, and sources narrating the period’s social history, and with only a few visual images and the occasional negative textual reference available, Safavid prostitution would virtually remain a closed chapter were it not for the accounts by Westerners visiting the country.”

Similar observations can be made for the early Qajar era as well. Although one wonders what access, if any, Sanger may have had to dancing girls in Iran, the endurance of this image is telling.

Some Western observers decried the institution of temporary marriage as a form of “legalized prostitution.” Shi‘i Islam allowed women and men to arrange a marriage contract for a set period of time through the institution known as mut‘a. Some Shi‘i scholars believe that this form of partnership had existed during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. As James Bassett explained, “Of all the social and religious customs, no one is more baneful in its influence over women than the custom of Sekah marriage…. It is legalized prostitution sanctified by a brief religious rite.” Robert Speer described the custom in this way: “Short period sighehs in the big cities are quasi-prostitutes…. In other words, a gigantic system of prostitution, under the sanction of the Church, prevails in Meshed.” However, both Bassett and Speer were Christian missionaries with a vested interest in denouncing a curiously Muslim social convention such as mut‘a. As Homa Hoodfar has observed, while Western writers expressed dismay about the prevalence of polygamy in Islamic societies, they rarely acknowledged the incidence of “mistresses” and the large number of children born out of wedlock in their own societies.

In 1902, an American serving with the Presbyterian mission reported on widespread “prostitution” in the holy city of Mashhad: “Prostitution has not been abolished. It flourishes in Meshed under ecclesiastical sanction, and in the cities.” Speer referred to the practice of temporary marriage common
among the Shi‘i, which allowed men and women to contract a marriage of short or long duration. Iranians, however, made a distinction between fornication not sanctified by temporary marriage, including prostitution, and what certain Western travelers commonly labeled “legalized prostitution,” or sigheh marriage. These Western sources provide a necessary window into prostitution in Iran, especially since there is a paucity of documentary evidence. However, writers such as Speer also wished to disprove the notion that Islamic injunctions “have abolished the vice of prostitution, and made Moslem lands in this vital respect cleaner than Christian lands.” In other words, some travelers may have exaggerated the prevalence of prostitution or may have deliberately conflated prostitution with what Persian locals considered licit sexual relations. That said, indigenous writers also acknowledged the existence of prostitution, and some even grappled with its moral and physical implications. In his memoirs, ‘Ayn al-Saltanah recorded that the physician of Larijan, Mirza Muhammad Khan, had put together “good entertainment” and that he had “10 to 20” female prostitutes. One Qajar reformer, Khan-i Khanan, acknowledged that urban security (nazmiyah) did not have a handle on prostitution. Recognizing both the reality of prostitution and its potential harms, he recommended that prostitutes be examined, if possible, and treated to check the spread of venereal disease.

By 1900, the Iranian press candidly acknowledged syphilis as a common malady believed to spread in part because of prostitution. In 1904, another source stated that “in northern Persia syphilis reigns in a frightful manner.” One journal even advertised medications sold by a local pharmacy (ironically called the Islamic Pharmacy) with the potential to cure syphilis and gonorrhea. Several years later, another newspaper announced the availability of a “new drug for treating syphilis” that had been tested and recently been imported from Paris.

Sources outside the urban centers of Tehran and Tabriz began to address the dangers of syphilis. In 1903, the newspaper Muzaffari, published in the southwestern coastal city of Bushehr, began a regular column on hygiene. Aside
from offering rudimentary explanations of germ theory, it edified readers about the transmission of syphilis. In addition to sexual intercourse, it was argued that syphilis could be spread orally by sharing drinks or opium pipes with infected individuals as well as through public baths. Mirza Najaf Quli Khan, a physician writing for *Adab* in 1902, cautioned his readers against using opium pipes, as well as tea and coffee cups in coffeehouses, because of the possibility of contamination. He surmised that on average one hundred people daily shared opium pipes at coffeehouses, many of whom could be infected with syphilis or other contagious diseases such as influenza. It is telling that even periodicals with a less gender-specific focus strove to educate the Iranian public about the consequences of promiscuity and, by extension, the dangers of venereal disease. In 1905, another writer reported that “ignorant people” who had not paid attention to their personal hygiene and thus contracted syphilis or gonorrhea could seek the assistance of a local physician, Mu’ayin al-Hukama, to cure their disease. Apparently this physician had successfully treated several patients with such ailments who went on to have numerous children.

Hygienists also targeted public baths in their efforts to curb infection. Najaf Quli Khan complained about the loincloths and bath towels that people contaminated with venereal diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea wore while bathing, thus infecting the healthy bathers. Given Islamic beliefs about adultery, it was more socially acceptable to regard syphilis as a contagious disease whose prevalence owed less to sexual indiscretion or moral impurity than to low levels of personal hygiene. By 1925, Joseph Gilmour, who had investigated the sanitary conditions of Iran for the League of Nations, remarked that “when enquiring into the possibility of the transmission of syphilis by the public baths, no medical men could tell me of any actual case of chancre they had seen where the infection could be traced to the bath.” As late as 1940, when Dr. Rosalie Morton visited Iran, she remarked that “poor people seldom bathe their entire bodies” and that many “do not go to the public baths for months,” but that “it is quite a usual thing to go after acquiring an infectious disease.”
Despite what Persian hygienists, or “medical popularizers,” and physicians believed, syphilis could rarely, if ever, be spread through public baths. The infection is typically passed sexually, although the syphilis bacterium, *Treponema pallidum*, discovered in 1905 by Berlin scientist Fritz Schaudinn and his associates, can be transmitted through breaks in skin and mucous membranes, as well as from mother to child during pregnancy. It is currently believed that the disease can go through four stages, and infection usually occurs during the two initial stages.

The medical discourse of syphilis in Iran extended back to the medieval period; indeed, one of the earliest Islamic works on the subject is a Persian manuscript completed in 1569 CE by ʿImad al-Din Masʿud Shirazi. Modernist understanding of the disease, however, particularly discussions of hereditary syphilis, echoed French views on the subject. For example, Alfred Fournier (d. 1914), first chair of syphilology at the Hôpital Saint-Louis, determined that an infected patient would suffer from insanity in later stages of the disease. According to Jill Harsin, “Fournier himself was partly responsible for the growing list of health problems attributable to syphilis.”

On its prevalence in Iran, ʿAli Aqa, the editor of *Muzaffari*, estimated that out of every twenty people in Iran, at least two had contracted syphilis. This figure seems somewhat exaggerated; European travelers to the country, including physicians, often wrote about epidemics there, and while smallpox, plague, and cholera attracted international attention, syphilis did not. Still, it is safe to assume that venereal disease had become commonplace in Qajar society. One observer attributed the spread of syphilis, gonorrhea, and other diseases to the filthy water that bathers used to wash themselves. Another writer spoke out against the apparent lack of public hygiene in Tehran, commenting that “syphilis has overtaken the city.” Although Islam required cleanliness before prayer, it was believed that water supplies in Iran were often polluted because people who had contracted syphilis or gonorrhea bathed themselves in those settings, making it difficult to fulfill religious obligations using clean water.
The prevalence of syphilis touched on another public concern that became audible during the constitutional revolution: the morality of Iranian society and the honor of the nation's men as defenders of women's virtue. The failure to draw up and enforce prostitution laws meant that brothels existed and sometimes were subject to public attacks. In 1907, for example, Yusuf Mughis al-Saltanah reported that several sayyids had raided brothels in Tehran.38 The inadequacy of policing mechanisms and the dearth of municipal services reflected this lawlessness.

At core was the issue of sexuality and public morality, a topic that sometimes caused divisions among different sectors of Iranian society. Even within the confines of an Islamic state, the topics of sexuality and promiscuity were cautiously being broached in popular journals. In 1907, an anonymous essay for the popular newspaper *Nida-yi Vatan* acknowledged the prevalence of prostitution in the capital city, Tehran. The writer contended that many turned to the false lure of prostitution because of “hunger” and “lack of direction” in their lives, and advocated that such women first express remorse and renounce prostitution completely, then find husbands to marry, presumably in order to help the reformed prostitutes lead a life of virtue.39 It is interesting that this writer, likely a man, did not engage in moralizing, but instead argued for the moral redemption of prostitutes and their reintegration into society as reformed women and potential marriage partners.

Given the political instability of Iran and the frequency of food shortages, prostitution persisted as a public dilemma. During the First World War, one newspaper reported that fornication was so prevalent that it would lead to moral corruption if the government did not take immediate measures to curb it. As this writer lamented, “In this city the number of profligate and unaccounted-for women has increased so much that one must cry at its condition.”40 The presence of prostitutes and the surge in “unaccounted-for women” reflected the weakening of political (and therefore male) authority in the country. In times of political uncertainty, Iran's moral dilemmas exacerbated men's concerns about the absence of guardianship over
Persian women, most glaringly witnessed in the prevalence of prostitution. The spread of venereal disease compounded these gender-related anxieties. One cartoon gave expression to these public concerns about the moral degeneration of Iranian society. An invalid representing Iranian society lies on the ground suffering from various ailments such as poverty, ignorance, syphilis, and prostitution, which have caused bodily harm.\textsuperscript{41}

In 1921, the Pasteur Institute, jointly operated by French physicians and Iranian health authorities, opened its doors in Iran. Its main branch offered medications and serums intended to cure or alleviate symptoms of plague, gonorrhea, and syphilis. For the destitute, the institute provided these services free of charge.\textsuperscript{42} The following year, a French medical publication reported that syphilis “has expanded in a frightening way in Iran, whether by contamination or heredity,” speculating that polygamy “facilitates the propagation of this disease.”\textsuperscript{43} A missionary medical report confirmed the existence of the disease even in small communities such as Turbat, a city south of Mashhad that was estimated to have fifteen thousand inhabitants in 1922. The missionary medical staff stated that “the prevalence of syphilis appalled us.... The patients’ own statement of having had the disease seemed to be of considerable value, for it is so common that they have learned to recognize many of its ordinary symptoms.”\textsuperscript{44} By 1925 medical professionals affiliated with the Presbyterian mission in Mashhad estimated that of the patients receiving services there, “the definitely syphilitic [constituted] over 10\%.”\textsuperscript{45}
Some physicians stressed that Iranian youth needed to seek out healthy marriage partners to order to ensure healthful reproduction. In 1921, Dr. Shaykha Khayyiri published a short piece in the women's journal *Jahan-i Zanan* on the legal restrictions on marriage in the United States against those ill with contagious diseases, particularly venereal disease. Dr. Khayyiri supported this idea, contending that healthy parents typically bore healthy children, whereas infected parents produced sick offspring who tended to die in childhood. While Dr. Khayyiri absolved such children of blame for their fate, she was less generous toward their parents, who she believed had married and procreated despite knowing that they carried a debilitating disease.

In 1922, a journal devoted to scientific and literary issues voiced concern that syphilis often went undiagnosed by local Persian physicians. It therefore advocated further research and training for doctors working in this area. In particular, the writer, Fath Ali Masih al-Saltanah, noted that Iranian physicians rarely used blood tests to diagnose syphilis; in the absence of such tests, Iranian doctors sometimes found it difficult to diagnose the disease because patients refused to divulge all their symptoms. Consequently, patients sometimes received treatment only after the disease had progressed to a more serious stage. Masih al-Saltanah urged doctors who had studied bacteriology to teach their skills to other physicians. In the meantime, another writer advertised the latest drugs against syphilis and gonorrhea, regarding the diseases as a legacy of Qajar misrule.

Three years later, the most celebrated Persian women's journal, *'Alam-i Nisvan*, brazenly took up this subject in an essay titled “The Outbreak of the Illness of Syphilis in Our Country.” The article claimed that nature had presented this disease to those who had “stepped outside of the circle of humanity and entered the wadi of perversion”—in other words, adulterers. The piece also recognized that those who had not committed any sexual sins were equally at risk for the disease. Syphilis might be just punishment for the “truly guilty” (*gunahkaran-i haqiqi*), but this writer regretted the pain it had caused its innocent victims, that is, young women.
and children. The essay emphasized that the disease was transmitted through sexual intercourse with an infected person as well as through the use of public baths. Presumably as a deterrent, the article also discussed the effects of syphilis on pregnancy and the physical ailments of children born to women who had contracted it.

The Rockefeller Foundation, a private American philanthropic organization established in 1913, expressed an interest in understanding and addressing Iran’s sanitary conditions during the Pahlavi era. In 1926, the Rockefeller Foundation reported that “the sanitary conditions of Persia are appalling. This refers especially to Tehran and the towns. The most important fatal or debilitating diseases are malaria, tuberculosis and syphilis.” Tuberculosis was found to be “a town disease” that affected women more than men, possibly because of “the secluded lives they live, combined with early marriage, frequent pregnancies and want of fresh air.” In addition, syphilis, though prevalent, appeared “to be of a benign type. Signs of congenital syphilis are not noticeable among the people.” The report stressed that “prostitution is forbidden by the Moslim [sic] religion,” but the report did not mention efforts to deal with prostitution, particularly in connection with the spread of syphilis.

In the same year, a six-month report on the sanitary conditions of Iran, completed by Persian health officials and presented to the Interior Ministry, made similar findings and offered suggestions for fighting venereal disease (mubarizah ba amraz-i zuhravi). The report found that prostitution was on the rise, and along with it went venereal disease. It stressed further that compulsory military service, mandated in 1925, would contribute to the spread of venereal disease to rural and tribal communities, which in the past had apparently shown a lower incidence of such illnesses. Some young men, who might typically serve a minimum of two years in urban centers to fulfill their military service, would engage in illicit sexual relations and likely contract such diseases. Upon returning to their villages, they would then spread the disease to their communities. To ward off this scenario, the report recommended the creation of health services throughout the country for the inspection of prostitutes. Licensed doctors
would take charge of treating infected patients and presenting them with certificates of health. Municipal authorities would also be required to register prostitutes in an effort to regulate them. In 1928, the Pars Yearbook noted that a clinic existed for treating patients suffering from syphilis and gonorrhea; this treatment center, apparently geared primarily to women, was in Shahr-i Naw, a locale in Tehran known to be frequented by prostitutes. One traveler to Iran reported that some efforts had been made to keep “a register of women” there.

Journalist Rawshanak Naw’dust overtly dealt with the reality of prostitution in the magazine she edited for women, observing that women turned to prostitution if they lacked solid, supportive family relationships and financial means. For this reason, she pointed out, “aside from the minority of skilled and wealthy women, prostitutes were generally poor and hard-working women.” A proponent of independent employment for women, Naw’dust argued that prostitution would remain a social dilemma in Iran until women achieved a measure of financial independence and were no longer beholden to their spouses for support. She explicitly tied prostitution to the dearth of employment opportunities for women in urban centers, and the limited financial remuneration of women in rural areas. Expanding women's access to respectable professions that offered decent wages and financial remuneration became a focus of women's activism, in part, because working women would no longer need to resort to prostitution to support themselves. However, such changes did not occur overnight, and it was still essential to monitor prostitution. Curiously, despite concerns over promiscuity and the spread of venereal disease, the shah refused to sign a bill that had passed in 1933 “making it illegal to keep a brothel.”

Tehran clinics mentioned cases of venereal disease without targeting prostitution or polygamy as a possible cause of its proliferation. The Municipal Council, founded during the constitutional years, listed seven clinics in Tehran that administered health care gratis to the poor. These clinics offered treatment for a range of illnesses including syphilis...
and gonorrhea. Services provided by the Municipal Council allowed ordinary citizens to seek medical assistance even for sexually transmitted diseases without subjecting them to moral discipline. In the month of October/November 1927, approximately 596 individuals were treated at the Municipal hospital for various diseases. Of this number 250 had been treated for gonorrhea, while 220 had been seen for syphilis, although we do not know the gender of the patients.  

Aside from causing physical discomfort, syphilis was an embarrassing social disease. In particular, women and girls who were unfortunate enough to contract it were susceptible to gossip and disparagement. For instance, this author claimed to have knowledge of a four-year-old girl who had contracted syphilis from a public bath. “Thank God the girl was four years old,” Qa'im Maqami wrote, “or else on top of this pain, her parents would also have to tolerate the disparaging remarks of people about their daughter” and her sexual misconduct. While syphilis was a recognizable public health concern, it was not an acceptable social malady, for it confirmed publicly the existence of sexual promiscuity. Moral degeneracy might in turn derive from sexual promiscuity, social pitfalls with which male and female modernists grappled. Qa'im Maqami’s observation pointed to the informal social networks such as the “gossip” circuit of neighbors and friends that monitored sexual behavior among Iranian families.

Female journalists such as Rawshanak Naw’dust urged women to take their health seriously and to beware of new drugs advertised in newspapers. Rather, Naw’dust encouraged her readers to consult physicians or to seek free medical assistance at public clinics as soon as they detected sores or any other discomfort suggesting an infection with either syphilis or gonorrhea. Women did not necessarily need to fear venereal disease; instead, they had to inform themselves and tackle it head-on. If public health considerations alone would not impel the Iranian state to deal with venereal disease, then patriotic priorities would. According to one writer, “This fatal disease
threatens the Iranian nationality by encouraging moral decay 
[inhitat-i akhlaq], laziness, weakness, and cowardice.\textsuperscript{62} 
Recommended methods of prevention included prohibiting 
infected individuals from getting married and the creation of 
hygiene centers in the provinces. It was further suggested that 
public baths be placed under the supervision of the Sanitary 
Council. Public health centers even invested money for the 
purchase of films, to be shown free to the general public, 
advising them about the dangers of syphilis and gonorrhea 
and the most effective prophylactic measures to take.\textsuperscript{63} In a 
particularly empowering move, young women were 
encouraged to take responsibility for their health by ensuring 
that their fiancés had received a clean bill of health from a 
physician prior to marriage.\textsuperscript{64} 

Apart from creating unwelcome health risks, venereal disease 
infection forced women to seek out male doctors—a prospect 
that apparently made many Iranian women (and men) 
uncomfortable. As one journalist pointed out, “The majority of 
women are shy about going to male physicians.” Thus, many 
turned to less qualified “foreign midwives who gradually give 
themselves the label of ‘doctor’ to appear more competent and 
experienced than they really are.”\textsuperscript{65} Women who consulted 
foreign health professionals often perished because of 
malpractice, another unintended consequence of syphilis. 
Women were not the only ones whose lives and fertility were 
adversely affected. Venereal disease undermined male virility 
through its physical emasculation of men. As a disincentive, 
men were reminded of their role as “head of the family” and 
advised not to put their wives and children at risk.\textsuperscript{66} 

The government gradually recognized venereal disease 
as a public health issue. The civil code listed tuberculosis, 
syphilis, and gonorrhea as infections from which future brides 
needed protection.\textsuperscript{67} Syphilis and gonorrhea also created 
commercial opportunities for those hoping to make money off 
the infected by enticing them with easy but possibly 
ineffective cures. Numerous advertisements promised 
spurious syphilitic cures and “anti-gonorrheal 
injections” (ampul-i zid-i suzak). One ad, which appeared with 
some regularity in the newspaper Ittila’at, claimed to make
available “the best and latest remedy for syphilis,” which would take effect quickly after consumption of the first dose of medicine. For men, these remedies proved all the more attractive, as male virility was celebrated in this machismo culture that glorified the king, the army, and the athlete as embodiments of male vigor. Indeed, the same newspaper that printed public announcements for anti-gonorrheal injections also advertised a male aphrodisiac pill called Hadaco for men with possible fertility problems who hoped to sire offspring. In addition to treating male infertility, the pill also promised to relieve psychological weakness and pallor, conditions to which modern male citizens needed immunity. A subsequent advertisement focused on the ills of gonorrhea, including the fact that it caused blindness in infants, and urged those infected with the disease to take Hadaco capsules.

Such quick fixes did not amount to much, as syphilis and gonorrhea spread throughout the population during the early Pahlavi period. In 1933, a hygiene journal dedicated to propagating health and to forging a “fit and vigorous” Iranian populace asserted in its first issue that Iranian society was not sufficiently informed about this “frightening disease [i.e., syphilis] that has troubled and alarmed all of humanity.” Dr. Tutiya, a physician and the editor of this hygiene periodical, reported that cases of syphilis had increased at a disturbing rate and seriously threatened future generations of Iranians. Unlike other contagious diseases, it could “transform future generations” and “transmute the race.” Syphilis remained
of special concern in pregnant women, as the infection could pass through the placenta to the fetus, causing severe disabilities in a newborn.

Gonorrhea, singled out in various publications as another debilitating venereal disease, also endangered married couples by potentially causing sterility and reducing Iran's healthy population of patriotic citizens. The physical side effects of gonorrhea were manifested in eye ailments, so infected pregnant women were advised to have their condition treated to avoid passing the disease on to their newborn.

Midwives were instructed to wash the eyes of newborns with boiled water immediately after birth to forestall infection, indicating that Iranian health practitioners were at least aware of the role of gonorrhea in loss of sight and in potential sterility. In order to prevent blindness related to gonorrhea, Iranian health officials had adopted the practice of using silver nitrate on newborns by the 1920s, a procedure introduced by French physicians in 1884.

A Persian pediatrician, Dr. Fereydun Kishavarz, explored the effects of syphilis on newborns. Kishavarz contended that its treatment with mercury, a therapy adopted “centuries ago,” remained “definitely effective” in helping children suffering from congenital syphilis, though arsenic and potassium iodide were possibly more effective in treating congenital syphilis. Since congenital syphilis was deemed an “extreme” infection, it necessitated the “most potent” therapy, though the side effects of heavy metal poisoning were not addressed.

Accurate statistics on the prevalence of syphilis, gonorrhea, and other contagious diseases in Iran are not readily available. However, the medical report of the American mission in Mashhad in 1935–36 found that “syphilis is very prevalent, and is not being adequately treated, largely because of the high cost of the necessary medicines.” Patients often did not pursue treatments regularly despite efforts by the missionary medical staff. As the mission report explained, “We hand out printed folders on the disease, emphasizing the necessity for continued treatment.”

Monthly Iranian governmental records gathered from 1935 do not offer enough data for comparative purposes. Nonetheless,
it is worth noting that syphilis and gonorrhea had spread well beyond Tehran to other cities such as Isfahan and rural communities. In July 1936 three men and eight women had contracted syphilis. In the Bakhtiyari region in August, there were four reported cases of syphilis in men and six in women; two cases of gonorrhea were reported in men and one in a woman. This suggests that at least in this small monthly sample, women outnumbered men as victims of sexually transmitted maladies, even taking into account the likelihood of underreporting. An internal government memorandum from April 1938 reported that on average 70 percent of the population of Azerbaijan province was infected with the disease. Syphilis, the report claimed, also accounted for the rise of insane individuals, whose condition “is a result of this disease.” This figure seems unusually high, especially when compared with statistics from other regions of Iran, and the report does not discuss the methodology employed to calculate this percentage. Still, these statistics imply that the provinces of Iran experienced different rates of infection. Studied collectively, they suggest that venereal disease, while undoubtedly commonplace, may not have proliferated as widely in certain areas as nationalists had led the public to believe. Even if the frenzy over syphilis and gonorrhea was exaggerated, the seriousness of the threat ultimately led to the expansion of clinics.

Some physicians advocated awarding certificates of health to uninfected individuals. For example, Dr. Alavi emphasized that sterility could be the most serious consequence of gonorrhea, as it undermined the “social value of men and women,” whose public responsibility it was to procreate. Infected individuals, Dr. Alavi believed, should be barred from “entering society” until their health had been restored and they no longer posed a reproductive threat to sexual partners. In 1939, Dr. Ali Mustashfi, a contributor to the hygiene journal Sihhat Nima-yi Iran and an advocate of health certificates for engaged couples, delivered a speech on the dangers of gonorrhea. At a meeting of the Society for the Cultivation of Thought (Sazman-i Parvaresh-i Afkar), Mustashfi stated that if left untreated, gonorrhea often caused swelling in male reproductive organs and possibly tubal defects in women. Given political
anxieties over national demography, Mustashfi’s disquisition on gonorrhea exacerbated fears of physical disability while anticipating potential problems associated with infertility. To curb the incidence of gonorrhea, Mustashfi recommended avoiding intercourse with people infected with the disease. In a particularly forward-thinking move, he even suggested the use of a “protective covering” (ghulaf-i hafizah), in other words, condoms—although, he noted, “one cannot completely trust” this method of prevention.\footnote{81} To protect partners further, Mustashfi recommended that people infected with syphilis marry only after being treated for eighteen months and if symptoms were not found during a clinical examination.\footnote{82} Similarly, prostitutes, whether healthy or infected, were advised to report to a commission on sexually transmitted diseases for checkups and to receive health certificates.\footnote{83} Marital health permits, while offering some protection to partners against venereal disease, could needlessly impede others from engaging in matrimony. To some extent, they lent legal authority and legitimacy to the belief that the purpose of Iranian marriages was primarily procreation, not self-satisfaction.

Despite the successes of modern medicine, women and their physicians could not always control the biological soundness of their fetuses. Few, if any, known personal narratives exist of women from the Qajar or early Pahlavi eras who mothered children with disabilities. Yet many families lived with disability, and many women nursed disabled children. The deviant and the disabled lived alongside the “normal” despite public reticence about them. This absence is particularly revealing because popular Iranian journals of the same era frequently discussed the culture of child rearing in Iran but omitted issues related to disabled children. Though maternalists cluttered Persian journals and newspapers with advice to mothers, they ignored the care of disabled infants, who they sometimes argued suffered because of the sexual indiscretions of their parents. Some Iranian maternalists equated promiscuity and the prevalence of syphilis with the spread of birth defects.\footnote{84}

Disabilities in newborns were often, rightly or wrongly, ascribed to syphilis. To underscore this point, Sihhat Nimayah-
i Iran published pictures of several infants with deformities purportedly caused by syphilis. The visual images were presumably meant to shock readers and discourage sexual indiscretion and experimentation. Yet these pictures, and the debates surrounding special-needs children, showed the limitations of the Iranian state and the public in dealing with the social reality of disability. While the state acknowledged disability among children, it offered little support for their physical and educational remediation.

Physical deformities resulting from the complications purportedly related to syphilis evinced the inadequacies of the Iranian medical establishment and public in grappling with the consequences of disability. The attention to venereal disease grew out of the desire to limit the spread of prostitution and related illnesses such as syphilis and gonorrhea, conditions viewed as soiling the populace and harming future generations of Iranians. In fact, the hygiene journal cited above, Siyhat-nimayi Iran, frequently published pictures of children with physical deformities believed to be caused by syphilis. It claimed that children born to syphilitic parents often died at birth; if they managed to survive, their quality of life was severely impaired because syphilis attacked the nervous system, possibly causing blindness, deafness, or insanity. These very real and dangerous consequences of syphilis necessitated a public campaign aimed at educating Iranians about the ramifications of venereal disease. However, the pictures of
physically deformed children and adults, whose condition may or may not have been a consequence of syphilis, provoked fear and sensationalism. Such medical authorities shunned syphilitics and other physically disabled people and barred them from full participation in Iranian society. While educating Iranians about the transmission of sexual diseases gave them some agency in protecting their reproductive health, it did not eliminate illicit sexual activity in Iran. In 1934, the League of Nations Committee of Inquiry into traffic in women and children found that measures put into place to limit foreign travel by Iranians, as well as provisions in the marriage law restricting the union of Iranian women to foreigners without prior sanction, helped to curtail the unlawful movement of Persian women. According to the league's report, “These two measures have been mainly instrumental in the stoppage of the traffic in Persian women to other countries which had formerly existed, especially during the war, and which was facilitated in some cases by the migration of such women as the wives of Persian pilgrims to the holy places of Iraq, where they had been abandoned, or as wives of visiting Arabs who returned to that country and divorced them.” The league pointed out that “there were only a few prostitutes of Persian nationality found outside Persia—namely in Iraq and British India.” Iraqi authorities, however, claimed that “almost half of all the prostitutes in Iraq
were of Persian origin. The considerable number of prostitutes of Persian race found in Iraq who were nationals of Iraq was composed partly of women who were Iraqi by birth and partly of those who have acquired that nationality by marriage.\textsuperscript{89} The Committee of Inquiry noted that during the war “there was a steady influx of Persian prostitutes to Mesopotamia,” most likely because a foreign army was stationed there.\textsuperscript{90} A former Persian official serving in Baghdad and Basra reported that “during his term very shortly after the war, he had had occasion to repatriate 300 Persian prostitutes to Persia.”\textsuperscript{91} This traffic of Persian women gave further proof of the prevalence of prostitution in Iran and the concomitant social quandaries that it engendered.

Addressing prostitution in an official capacity ran the risk of acknowledging the moral laxity of Iranian society, a reality that maternalists had addressed in general terms. Still, some state and medical officials supported measures to protect the sexual health of the country’s young people. In 1938, Ahmad Matin Daftari, the minister of justice, presented a bill to the parliament compelling engaged couples to receive state-approved health permits prior to marriage, a measure supported by avid maternalists, including Persian physicians.\textsuperscript{92} Ahmad Sayyid Imami, a professor at the college of medicine, was in favor of health certificates as early as 1931, when the marriage law was being revised. Imami cited concerns not only about venereal disease but also about ailments such as kidney and heart disease, which often caused hardships for pregnant women during labor and delivery. Imami posed ethical questions about whether women with such physical limitations should be denied marriage or childbirth, outcomes that could exacerbate population worries in Iran. He believed that women with certain health problems should be allowed to marry after undergoing simple medical procedures.\textsuperscript{93} Although infertility remained a touchy subject, it was a corollary to reproduction. Some Iranian couples did not readily divulge such personal matters, even to their family physician.\textsuperscript{94} As medical researchers investigated the causes of infertility and explored possible new reproductive technologies, the Persian popular press tried to keep up with these changes.
Despite worries about promiscuity and sexual morality, images of the Iranian woman in the popular press were lustful and physically revealing. These depictions contradicted the moral message implicit in discussions of venereal disease and marriage, which skirted around the socially explosive issues of adultery and polygamy. Women appeared as attractive and sexually desirable partners. The use of cosmetic products by Iranian women manifested a desire to enhance physical beauty. Customs records from 1935 indicate that 100,000 rials’ worth of cosmetic products—including facial powders, soaps, perfumes, creams, and nail polish—had been imported to Iran, revealing widespread consumer investment in these goods. By 1938, women were cautioned not to use cosmetics products wastefully and obsessively but rather to apply makeup sparingly, both to protect their skin from overapplication and to safeguard their virtue (matanat). Still, beauty continued to be marketed in urban centers and the popular press. One article took this trend to new heights by endorsing rhinoplasty for women, whose unseemly noses had apparently diminished their outward attractiveness. Women were exhorted to become beauty-conscious, as outer beauty not only reflected well on the modern citizen and state but also reinforced individual self-esteem and confidence.

The dolling up of Iranian women produced a boom in the Iranian fashion industry as Western modes of dress, whether locally tailored or designed by foreigners, increasingly became the vogue for Iranian citizens. Fashion houses (khayyatkhanah) and related technologies such as the sewing machine glutted the Iranian market. Women were not the only targets of this beauty culture, however. Men, too, became a focus of this consumerism within the expanding cosmetics and fashion industries. In 1928, when a decree was issued that Iranian men were to wear Pahlavi hats, one advertisement urged its fashion-conscious male readers to take full advantage of this opportunity and enhance their wardrobe by purchasing flannel outfits and raincoats to complete the new look.

Like the cosmetics industry, pharmaceutical companies received an economic windfall from the hygienic movement in
Iran. Local drugstores increased in number and advertised their services with regularity in print media. New drugs, or “elixirs” of life, promised to cure numerous ailments, from backaches to hemorrhoids, while others pledged to strengthen weak nerves. Hygiene thus became an antidote to infirmity, delaying physical decay and death through its focus on health and beauty, marriage and reproduction. Human betterment might be achieved if women and men could conquer their bodies and promote healthful reproduction through an understanding of hygiene and human physiology.

The maternalist discourse—and, I would argue, the hygiene movement in general—liberated the modern Iranian woman by opening up discussion of previously taboo subjects such as sexuality and encouraging a public reassessment of family life and women’s rights in the domestic partnership. As Foucault has written, “The central issue, then...is not to determine whether one says yes or no to sex...but to account for the fact that it is spoken about [and] to discover who does the speaking.” This observation is pertinent to Iran given that in 1943, syphilis, prostitution, and opium addiction were identified as persistent social challenges for the country. The campaign to control prostitution and venereal disease may not have sufficiently curbed these ills in Iranian society, but it created a public space in which the discussion of such topics became permissible.

While prostitution had long existed in Iran, it assumed a different social and national significance with the modern impetus to overhaul public health. The spread of prostitution was responsible for the proliferation of diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea that not only caused personal harm but also weakened the national workforce and undermined the constitution of the patriot. As writers and policy makers explored the reasons for the existence of prostitution, health officials launched a public campaign that controlled sexuality and childbirth as it popularized the rudiments of maternal and children’s health. Because venereal disease afflicted women and children with sterility, blindness, and other unwelcome side effects, it necessitated prompt medical attention. The reproductive capacity of Iranians...
remained threatened so long as venereal disease targeted the nation's most vulnerable citizens. For this reason, state health officials and medical practitioners went beyond moralizing about the ills of prostitution and supported the registry of prostitutes. They strove to provide medical treatment to prostitutes without penalty of imprisonment (or, worse, death) in order to check the proliferation of venereal disease. Some argued that the virtue of ordinary citizens paralleled the morality of the Iranian state. Discussions of venereal disease and prostitution, however, became about more than just public morality. This debate had enormous implications for women's rights in Iran, as it recognized that women were often put at physical risk through their marriages. Women had little choice but to take action to protect themselves and the health of their offspring.

Notes:
(1.) Abu al-Hasan Khan Tafrishi, Masa'il-i 'Umdah-i Hifz-i Sihhat (1894), 2–3. Unfortunately, Tafrishi does not mention either the title or author of the original French text, making it difficult to provide comparisons or any assessment of editorial liberties that he may have taken.

(2.) Ibid., 202.

(3.) Ibid., 203.


(6.) Ibid., 453–54. Although apparently a colleague of Fournier's (Schneider refers to Fournier as “mon vénéré maître,” “my venerated master”), Schneider believed that syphilis alone did not cause general paralysis.
(7.) “Amraz al-Nisa,” manuscript at Malek Library, #805, ch. 12.


(10.) Ibid. Also see Rudi Matthee, “Prostitutes, Courtesans, and Dancing Girls: Women Entertainers in Safavid Iran,” in Iran and Beyond: Essays in Middle Eastern History in Honor of Nikki Keddie, ed. Rudi Matthee and Beth Baron (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2000), 121–50.

(11.) Sanger, History of Prostitution, 418. For reports of prostitution in various cities, see Willem Floor, A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran (Washington, DC: Mage, 2008), 239–51.


(13.) Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Shi’ite Islam (St. Leonard's, Australia; Allen and Unwin, 1975).


(20.) *Adab*, fourth year, No. 177, 7; *Adab*, fifth year, 29 April 1906, 5. Also *Tarbiyat*, 18 May 1905, 1862.

(21.) *Bulletin de la société belge d'études coloniales*, 1904, 615.

(22.) *Adab*, fourth year, No. 180, 22 February 1906, 4.

(23.) *Khayr al-Kalam*, third year, No. 91, 13 Rabi' al-Thani 1329/13 April 1911, 4.

(24.) *Muzaffari*, 11 July 1903, 589; *Muzaffari*, 26 July 1903, 604-5.

(25.) *Adab*, second year, No. 9, 19 February 1902, 68.

(26.) *Hadid*, No. 8, 19 Jumada al-Akhivah 1323/21 August 1905, 8.

(27.) *Adab*, second year, No. 9, 19 February 1902, 68.


(35.) *Tamaddun*, No. 70, 25 April 1908, 4; *Tamaddun*, No. 74, 30 April 1908, 3.

(36.) *Shikufah*, second year, No. 20, 1 Dhul-hijja 1332/21 October 1914, 3. Also, *Hifz-i Sihhah*, Nos. 7 and 8, Sha’ban and Ramadan 1324/September–October 1906, 59.

(37.) For more on syphilis, see M. Maurice Cohen, *Défense Sanitaire de la Perse* (Paris: 1912), 77. As late as 1914, the lack of attention to hygiene and the absence of clean supplies of water remained a problem. Islam and the example of the Prophet Muhammad was once again called upon to impel Iranians and Muslims more globally to live their lives in a hygienic way and to promote cleanliness. The writer singled out women who washed dirty clothes in communal sources of water. *Jarchi-yi Millat*, fourth year, No. 27, 6 Rabi’ al-Thani 1332/3 March 1914.


(39.) *Nida-yi Vatan*, No. 31, 21 May 1907, 7.


(41.) *Nahid*, No. 15, 1923, 5.
(42.) Iran, Prime Ministry Archives, File Number 293, 2/16/44, “I’lan: Idarah-i Institut Pasteur-i Dawlat-i Iran.”


(44.) PHS, RG 91, Box 1, Folder 18, “Report of Medical Work Outside of Meshed, Year Ending June 30, 1922,” 2.

(45.) PHS, RG 91, Box 1, Folder 20, “Report of the Medical Work in Meshed, July 1, 1924–June 30, 1925,” 2.


(47.) Jahan-i Zanan, first year, No. 3, 4 April 1921, 12–13.

(48.) Dabistan, No. 2, December 1922, 26–27.

(49.) Ibid., 27.

(50.) Nahid, No. 11, 8 June 1924, 6.


(52.) Rockefeller Archive Center, RF/RG1.1, Series 771, Box 1, “Preliminary Report on Medical Education in Persia,” July 1926, 38.

(53.) Ibid.


(58.) Merritt, Persia, 289.

(59.) Majallah-i Baladiyyah, 15 Day 1306/6 January 1928, 16.

(60.) ‘Alam-i Nisvan, fifth year, No. 2, March 1925, 38.

(61.) Payk-i Sa’adat-i Nisvan, Nos. 4–5, May–June 1928, 128.


(64.) ‘Alam-i Nisvan, fifth year, No. 2, March 1925, 39.

(65.) ‘Alam-i Nisvan, twelfth year, 1932, 195.

(66.) Ittila’at, 21 November 1932, 1. Discussions on venereal disease were continued in other issues. See Ittila’at, 6 November 1932, 9 November 1932, 10 November 1932, and 20 November 1932.


(68.) Ittila’at, 22 Khordad 1306/13 June 1927, 2. For another advertisement promising a cure for gonnorhea, see Ittila’at, 21 June 1928, 4.

(69.) Ittila’at, 22 Khordad 1306/13 June 1927, 2.

(70.) Ittila’at, No. 611, 21 October 1928, 4.
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(71.) *Sihhat-Nimayi Iran*, No. 1, March–April 1933, 23. For more on syphilis, see *Sihhat Nimayi Iran*, Nuskhah-i Fawq al-‘Adah, 1934, 38–44; also, 70–72 is of interest.

(72.) *Sihhat-Nimayi Iran*, No. 2, April–May 1933, 3.


(75.) “Sifilis-i madarzadi,” *Ittila‘at*, 1 May 1937, 2.


(78.) Iran, Prime Ministry Archives, File 290000, 5/532/3, Mordad Mah 1315/1936.


(80.) *Ittila‘at*, 9 Azar 1315/30 November 1936, “Mubarizah ba Amraz.”


(82.) *Sihhat Nimayih-i Iran*, No. 4, Tir 1312/June–July 1933, 102.

(83.) *Sihhat Nimayih-i Iran*, No. 6, Shahrivar 1312/August–September 1933, 132–33.

(85.) *Sihhat-Nimayi Iran*, No. 2, April–May 1933, 3. For more discussions of syphilis and gonorrhea, see *Salnamah-i Pars*, 1307 [1928], 1308 [1929], 1309 [1930].

(86.) *Sihhatnima-yi Iran*, first year, No. 2, April–May, 1933, 2–6.


(88.) Ibid., 14.

(89.) Ibid.

(90.) Ibid.

(91.) Ibid.

(92.) *Ittila’at*, 14 Mehr 1317/6 October 1938; *Ittila’at*, No. 3627, 19 Mehr 1317/11 October 1938.

(93.) *Ittila’at*, 22 Aban 1317/November 1938. Also, Dr. Nijat’s views on this bill are in *Ittila’at*, No. 3677, 10 Azar 1317/1 December 1938. Dr. Nijat primarily supported this legislation as a way of curbing the spread of syphilis.


(95.) *Ittila’at*, No. 2022, 9 Tīr 1314/April 1935.

(96.) *Ittila’at*, No. 2576, 30 Mordad 1317/1938, 7.

(97.) Amin talks about Iran’s beauty culture of the 1930s in comparison with Western models of feminine beauty; see Camron Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*: 
Gender, State Policy, and Popular Culture, 1865–1946
(Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 208–12, and
Amin, “Importing ‘Beauty Culture’ into Iran in the 1920s and
1930s: Mass Marketing Individualism in an Age of Anti-
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Also, F. Kashani-Sabet, “Giving Birth: Women, Nursing, and
Sexual Hygiene in Iran.” Paper presented at the Biennial
Conference of Iranian Studies, May 2002. Published as “The
Politics of Reproduction.”

(98.) “Arayesh va zibayi: Ziba kardan-i bini bih vasilah-i
jarrahi,” Ittila’at, 21 Mehr 1317/ September–October 1938. Cf.
Elaine Sciolino’s article discussing Iranian women’s
enthusiasm for nose jobs: “Iran’s Well-Covered Women
Remodel a Part That Shows,” New York Times, 22 September
2000.

(99.) For advertisements regarding these products, see
Ittila’at, No. 629, 13 November 1928, 4; Ittila’at, No. 603, 11
October 1928, 1; Ittila’at, December 7, 1932; Ittila’at, No.
1824, 6 February 1933; Ittila’at, No. 1829, 12 February 1933;
Salnamah-i Pars, 1310/1931, center ad section.

(100.) Houchang Chehabi, “Staging the Emperor's New
Clothes: Dress Codes and Nation-Building Under Reza Shah,”

(101.) Ittila’at, No. 630, 14 November 1928, 4.

(102.) Pars Yearbook, 1927, 1928, 1929.

(103.) Michel Foucault, A History of Sexuality, trans. Robert
Giving Birth

Modern Nursing and Reproductive Politics

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DOI: 10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780195308860.003.0006

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter examines the transformation of the culture of birthing in Iran. These changes significantly affected gender relations, and the development of modern nursing manifested the authority of modern (male) physicians, as well as the indispensable participation of women in public health management. Women's experiences with conception, pregnancy, and childbirth—whether as mothers, health care professionals, or both—mirrored the broad cultural changes occurring in Iran. The impact of the hygiene movement on women and children is also discussed.

Keywords: childbirth, birthing, Iran, cultural change, conception, pregnancy, gender relations, public health
Birthing babies seems a mundane event. Yet even a cursory review of the history of maternity in Iran reveals the controversial culture of birthing. What women and men understood about reproduction shaped their choices about the type of care to seek during childbirth. Although specific rituals related to childbirth differed in form and spirit, and often changed with the times, their existence showed a desire to protect women in labor from some of the unknown dangers of childbirth and to assume control over a mystifying and momentous event in people's lives. The accumulation of knowledge about procreation in Iran altered men's relationships to female bodies. Male figures (hygienists, physicians, and religious leaders) who may have had little actual experience in obstetrics gradually chipped away at the authority of often seasoned female midwives in the birthing process.¹

Transformations in Iran's culture of childbirth significantly affected gender relations, and the development of modern nursing manifested the authority of modern (male) physicians, as well as the indispensable participation of women in public health management. Women's experiences with conception, pregnancy, and childbirth—whether as mothers, health care professionals, or both—mirrored the broad cultural changes occurring in Iran. In the twentieth century, Iranian physicians slowly made the transition from traditional to modern medicine, although this shift was not devoid of dissent. Despite the infiltration of Western medical thought, entrenched beliefs and superstitions sometimes made it difficult to disseminate new scientific knowledge about reproduction. Even physicians who may not have resorted to talismans to ward off the evil eye had limited access to new approaches to childbirth and maternal care.

Many Persian physicians of the modern era typically drew upon both Islamic and Western medical literature to treat patients.² Historically, Islamic notions of conception differed from Western ones, although Greek views of reproduction influenced both schools of thought. Medieval Muslim scholars did not privilege a man's contribution to conception over a woman's role, but patriarchy remained ingrained. In fact, relying on the Qur'an, some medieval Islamic jurists argued
that neither the male matter nor the female matter was more significant than the other. Islamic medical philosophers such as Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, however, asserted the dominance of the male sperm in reproduction. These discrepancies suggest that the medieval Islamic world did not have a uniform view of reproduction and female sexuality.

The dearth of medical information about women's internal anatomy meant that female sexuality—and hence human reproduction—remained poorly understood. Information about pregnancy appeared in folkloric literature and was scattered in medical works. In early modern Iran, Safavid physicians built on medieval Islamic medical knowledge to learn about female ailments and reproduction. Although some medical specialization had emerged, male doctors did not typically treat gynecological matters. Rather, midwives treated female conditions, but since most were illiterate, they left no account of their empirical experiences. Few anatomical works focused on the pelvis and other internal parts of the female anatomy, and as a result, male physicians knew little about women's internal reproductive organs. Medical manuscripts from the Qajar era typically focused on the etiology and treatment of epidemic diseases such as cholera or smallpox, or they provided general discussions on anatomy and hygiene. One treatise, however, addressed women's diseases specifically, providing explanations and treatment of diseases related to the uterus, including uterine cancer and ovarian irregularities.

In the modern era, as Western medicine rapidly made headway among the elite, Western physicians often spoke of traditional Persian physicians and midwives in derogatory terms. Yet this clash represented more than just a conflict between the East and the West. Similar phenomena had already taken place in other cultures, such as in early modern England, a society that was not influenced by Western colonialism or Islamic belief. Illiterate Muslim women were thus not alone in attaching new meaning to religious concepts related to conception and reproduction. Nor did their unscientific beliefs make them more benighted or ignorant than their Western counterparts, as some modern hygienists contended. What matters here is that both Protestant and
Shi'i women, for example, became subjected to similar structures of power intended to circumscribe their individual authority and their independent decision making in matters of reproduction and sexuality.

Because of limitations on state power, many Western-educated physicians in Iran strove to control mothering, childbirth, and sexuality less through legislation and more through a public campaign aimed at altering the traditional lifestyle and hygienic culture of the ordinary citizen. These were not dominant, however. In July 1934 the number of medical professionals educated in Iran slightly exceeded the number of foreign-trained health practitioners. Nonetheless, Western-style medicine made headway in Iran, reflected in such proposed changes as reducing the influence of local midwives.

The interest in reproduction was tied to a discourse on cleanliness and bodily health. Healthful procreation became appropriated by statist interests and attempts to populate communities with fertile, chaste, and family-oriented subjects. In times of political crisis the need to uphold patriarchy intensified, and control over women and their sexuality reinforced male authority. As Iranians came to understand the process of reproduction better, they strove to regulate maternal care through the expansion of nursing and the regulation of midwifery. These changes became possible as the political climate in Iran emphasized state centralization and the top-down supervision of health care. Iranian medical officials hoped to curtail infant mortality through improvements in municipal services and the expansion of clinics. Although male physicians gradually assumed control over the fields of obstetrics and gynecology, they had to acknowledge the salience of involving women in the politics of reproduction.

(p.98) Women's health remained a key to understanding demographic trends, and it became the state's prerogative to question and supervise women on the tenets of mothering and child rearing. Essential to this project was the need to form a modernist culture that lauded matrimony, domesticity, and motherhood. Popular newspapers as well as school curricula reinforced women's familial responsibilities, even as they
invited women to complement their household duties with work outside the home.¹⁰

In 1908, Tamaddun, one of the “best newspapers” of the constitutional era, serialized a satirical column on the state of sanitation in Iran.¹¹ The discussion took the form of a fictitious exchange between a father named Haydar Khan and his son. As the column continued week after week, Haydar Khan disparaged the ‘ulama, or religious scholars, whose duty, he believed, was to inculcate the meaning of cleanliness (nizafat). He also targeted Iranian midwives, blaming their ineptitude for having created a virtual public health crisis in the country.

In a telling passage Haydar Khan recalled the gruesome birth of his son, whose complicated delivery almost led to the death of both mother and baby. The presiding midwife, who apparently had tried all possible positions for inducing labor, eventually concluded erroneously that ‘Afifah Khanum's distended stomach was not a result of pregnancy but rather the consequence of a malignant condition that was sure to bring her untimely death. Losing hope, the midwife simply rubbed oil on her patient’s back and stomach to assuage her suffering, and, instead of sending for a physician, burned wild rue to ward off evil spirits. ‘Afifah Khanum’s death was averted only when her husband, Haydar Khan, quickly called for a doctor to rescue his wife and child from the grip of the caring yet uninformed midwife.¹²

This episode illustrated the hazards women and children faced during labor and delivery, even as it derided midwives and their common superstitions. Haydar Khan and ‘Afifah Khanum represented an ordinary Iranian couple at the turn of the century—that is, citizens who had not benefited from travel abroad, who did not have access to Western physicians like members of the Qajar aristocracy, and who relied on local hakims and midwives for basic medical services. Recounted in part to condemn the dearth of qualified midwives, this story called attention to the prevalence of maternal and infant mortality resulting from what should have been a predictable consequence of matrimony: childbirth. The lack of sanitary facilities, the article showed, posed serious health risks to women and children.
Writers and health officials considered the hazards of depopulation as they advocated policy shifts in childbirth practices. Women's sanitation seemed especially salient as hygienists, physicians, and public officials, alarmed by the high rate of infant mortality, strove to nurture a growing generation of healthy, able-bodied patriots. Although victims themselves, women curiously were singled out as the enemies of public sanitation. They were regarded simultaneously as potential founts of hygienic knowledge and perpetrators of medical ignorance. Women could help to promote hygiene as easily as they could hinder it. In Iran and elsewhere, modern physicians gradually assumed authority over childbirth and, in the process, sullied the image of the traditional midwife, who may have succumbed to magic or talismans and was often faulted for the tragedy of infant mortality in Iran. Traditional midwives in Iran could scarcely compete with the legitimacy of a new generation of licensed physicians who came to embody scientific authority and rationality.\(^{13}\)

Little information is available on indigenous medical institutions that came into existence at the turn of the century to serve women. In 1908, the newly founded Himmat Hospital in Tehran provided midwifery services, but it likely had limited capacity and popularity. Female patients, moreover, had to be accompanied by a family member who would be willing to care for them.\(^{14}\) Because the majority of births in Iran still occurred at home with the help of other women, it was imperative to teach all women the basic principles of hygiene.

Writers from varying backgrounds advocated instructing women about matters of personal and public health to reduce illness and death among women and children. Yet they also touted hygiene as a necessary component of maintaining a clean and orderly household and society. Journals published at the turn of the century for and by women focused on hygiene and child care to impart essential information to women.\(^{15}\) Several essays dealt with hygiene and pregnancy, once again highlighting the valuable role of women as progenitors of Iranian society. Pregnant women were cautioned to protect themselves against catching colds, encouraged to eat well, and discouraged from wearing tight clothing.\(^{16}\) The journal *Danish* even thanked a female American doctor for administering care...
to Iranian women, since the paucity of female physicians meant that people previously had turned to “women without knowledge” for assistance, particularly in the delivery of children, even though such women dispensed care with “impure hands filled with microbes.” Hygiene and cleanliness thus became touchstones of patriotic womanhood.

In addition to addressing the dilemmas of midwifery, maternalists dwelled on other facets of child rearing and women’s health. Because poor mothering and inadequate midwifery surfaced as the main culprits of high infant mortality, hygienists urged mothers to stop playing doctor. In one article mothers and nannies were cautioned not to treat every ailment experienced by children in the same way. “My sisters, my mothers,” the writer implored, “where did you train to become a doctor? Where did you learn about the properties of herbs? You are right to know about the beneficial properties of chamomile tea in healing children’s stomachaches...but not all stomachaches are the same.” Instead, mothers and nurses were instructed to consult physicians before administering healing herbs to their sick children, an example of the transition between traditional and modern medicine in Iran.

Breast-feeding, deemed the starting point of good health for children, was stridently endorsed by maternalists in hygienic literature. There were, of course, religious and historical precedents for this emphasis. The Qur’an, for example, states that “mothers shall suckle their children for two whole years.” Moreover, women who viewed breast-feeding as a social inconvenience and opted for wet nurses were admonished and shamed. As one journalist goaded, mothers who “out of ignorance” decided against breast-feeding in order to “keep their clothes clean, to sleep well at night, to entertain guests...or go to weddings” demonstrated their callousness and probably would not be much moved if their children died, either. In other words, non-breast-feeding mothers, whose ranks apparently were growing, hardly resembled mothers at all. “With deep regret,” he wrote, “I confess that the mothers of today have forgotten their holy duty.” To lend further credence to his view, this writer cited
the work of a British physician, Edward Ellis, who had written on children’s diseases and had endorsed breast-feeding in his works. This reference to a Western medical authority on breast-feeding seems ironic, since classical Islamic physicians also considered the breast milk of the child’s own mother the most beneficial food for a newborn. However, if for medical reasons a mother could not breast-feed, then an appropriate wet nurse was the next best alternative. The qualities of a good wet nurse, according to Muslim doctor Ibn Sina, included the right “form and physique,” relatively young age, and personal character.

Persian women writers, drawing on Islamic and local traditions, advocated breast-feeding to reduce illness and death among women and children. Some even claimed that children breast-fed by their own mothers were more capable than children nourished by the milk of a wet nurse or manufactured milk (arza’-i san’ati). In the early twentieth century, as today, controversy existed over the use of manufactured milk and its connection to infant mortality. Some believed that children “frequently” fed artificial milk products died at eight or ten years of age. Another writer maintained that women should not consider themselves too weak to breast-feed after birth. If they were strong enough to endure labor, they could certainly manage breast-feeding. In addition, the writer pointed out that breast-feeding did not cause physical harm by inducing anger or backaches in women, but rather could alleviate certain diseases and restore a woman’s uterus to its normal condition.

Pregnant women, often singled out in hygienic literature because of their vital role in abating population worries, were urged to take responsibility for creating “antiseptic” conditions for childbirth. They were instructed to provide their designated midwives with a clean change of clothes prior to delivery, soap and boiled water, and clean sheets for the procedure. Pregnant women were particularly warned to avoid midwives who had contracted syphilis and thus could infect newborns. In turn, midwives were cautioned not to rush the process of delivery and “yank out” the baby “like a
rubber tissue,” needlessly threatening the infant and mother.28

Caring for a newborn was no easy task. At a time when women routinely birthed at home with little knowledge of statistical norms for birthweight and other metrics of newborn health, one women's journal provided such basic guidelines for families. An average birthweight was considered to be just over three kilograms (or approximately six and a half pounds), with boys weighing slightly more than girls. Women were taught that although children typically dropped some weight after birth, breast-fed children would regain their birthweight after a week. Children breast-fed by their own mothers were considered to enjoy good health and to be more likely to develop superior cognitive abilities than babies fed by wet nurses or consuming artificial milk.29

Some writers encouraged women to abandon the advice of elderly women and instead to embrace modern hygiene to care for their children. In her journal Jahan-i Zanan, Fakhr Afaq Parsa provided translations of an article from Turkish that emphasized this point. The translated text warned mothers of newborns to be wary of the “sayings of old women, the doctors of the home.” In fact, this anonymous writer maintained that infections appearing in children were often caused by the actions of mothers who, for example, had failed to seek vaccinations and available treatments. Another impediment was the absence of short books on hygiene for families that could guide women and men to maintain a healthful lifestyle.30 Other articles focused on cooking, considered another necessary component of hygiene and bodily health.31

Iranian women were not always eager to adopt new hygienic recommendations. One observer claimed that Persian mothers preferred adhering to the sayings of Khulthum Nana, the apocryphal matron who advised women on their social mores, instead of accepting modern hygienic knowledge. As a result, Iranian children routinely perished because of the lack of attention paid to the prevention and treatment of common childhood illnesses.32 According to this source, while Iranian women typically gave birth to approximately ten to twelve
children, the children rarely survived. By contrast, in “civilized nations,” where women typically birthed fewer children, the population had remained constant or had increased because of the success in implementing hygienic measures that had curbed infant mortality. One writer, Iffat al-Muluk Khvajahnuri, suggested convening public hygiene sessions to educate Iran’s largely illiterate population about proper child care and personal hygiene. She contended that attention to hygiene was an urgent matter that could not be postponed until the majority of Iranians had attended school and become educated. Muhtaram Iskandari argued further that hygiene took precedence over military concerns since Iran needed healthy mothers and children to populate its army.

Without competent nurses and midwives, public officials feared, the population would fall. In 1925, the League of Patriotic Iranian Women submitted a proposal to the parliament urging Majlis delegates to address the matter of population decline related to contagious diseases and its impact on national priorities. The first article suggested requiring blood tests and other physical examinations for couples before marriage. The second item called for sending students of modest means to Beirut and Egypt in order to instruct them in midwifery. The third point stressed that locally made clothes ought to be used in schools to support indigenous industries. That women took an active role in promoting potential legislation that might serve to improve their health, and to further national ambitions, showed modest political progress, even though none of these measures was immediately embraced by the parliament.

The crisis of midwifery unsettled public health officials who hoped to combat infant mortality in part by regulating midwifery. Although the reverence for midwifery as a profession had abated somewhat since the medieval era, many Persian women’s journals supported academic nursing, which they viewed primarily as a “womanly” occupation and a suitable alternative to traditional midwifery. In 1916 one woman described nursing (parastari) as a vocation “that is everywhere considered women’s responsibility” and ill-suited to men, for nursing was a “talent that is natural in women.”
In 1916, modern training schools for nurses began operating in Iran under the auspices of Presbyterian missionaries. The mission acknowledged that “the profession is new to this part of the country and our training school is distinctly in the experimental stage.” To initiate formal nursing education, the Presbyterian missionaries provided basic guidelines for the first class of nurses in northwestern Iran, to include no more than “six candidates at a time.” Nursing applicants were required to “give evidence of good moral character, average good health, intelligence and earnestness of purpose.” The first six months of training were regarded as “probationary,” after which time approved candidates would be admitted to full-time training. The courses of study included physiology, anatomy, practical nursing, and obstetrics. The first class of nurses graduated in 1919–20, and graduation ceremonies, attended by “leading Persian physicians of the city,” were held in the men’s ward of the Tabriz hospital, which was “emptied and decorated with American and Persian flags for the occasion.” By 1919, the American Mission hospital in Tehran had classes for training native nurses, and in 1922, the American Mission hospital in Tabriz reported that “we now have eight native girl nurses in training, four having recently come in after graduating from our Girl’s school.”

The same medical report found that in an eleven-month period, out of fifty obstetrical cases only five were Muslim women. According to this source, the “Persian Moslem women only come occasionally and then in extremity. These five were such cases…. Four of these women had already been under the care of native mid-wives for hours or days. All four died within a few days after delivery at the hospital. The other case came in time, and received the benefit of a Cesarian.” These statistics, however unreliable, suggest that birthing conditions for Muslim Iranian women remained risky even within the setting of a Western-style hospital, and that maternal death was not an unusual occurrence. Why, then, were Muslim women in areas that offered Western-type medical services reluctant to take advantage of them? Perhaps one explanation may be that “time of sickness is always one of special opportunity for the Christian message so nurse and doctors have a great privilege in administering to the eternal souls as
well as relieving bodies torn by sickness and pain.” In other words, some Muslim Iranian women may not have wanted to subject themselves to proselytizing. Another explanation may have been that “there is quite prevalent among the people a prejudice to hospitals, since they seem to regard them much as a case of ‘Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.’” In other words, some may have refused hospital services out of fear for their life. Finally, the social stigma of approaching a male physician discouraged many Iranian ladies from seeking medical assistance. It was observed that “women from the lower classes and some from the upper classes as well, will come to a male physician for such ailments as eye, ear and stomach trouble.... Our obstetrical work is limited almost entirely to the Armenian and foreign community.” By 1925, the missionary medical staff acknowledged that it “will be a long [time] before Persian women will come freely to the hospital for confinement but now and again we have a patient who realizes the advantages we have to offer.” In particular, one Persian woman who had apparently received excellent obstetrical care shared her experiences with an aristocratic woman, who “came to the hospital for her own confinement.” Still, delivery in a hospital remained a rarity for Persian women at the twilight of Qajar rule.

As a measure of political stability reigned in Iran during the early Pahlavi years, institutions of health emerged to improve sanitation. The Iranian Red Lion and Sun Society met some of the needs of women, orphans, and the needy. Conceived in 1921, the society began operations in 1923 and gained international recognition from Geneva in 1924. Regional offices were established in several provinces, including Azerbaijan and Khorasan. In 1926 a branch was opened in Qum, where members of the ‘ulama welcomed the inauguration of the regional branch. Other regional branches included Sari in 1929, Isfahan in 1932, and Rasht in 1936.

In 1925, when the League of Nations commissioned a report on the sanitary conditions of Iran, it found that the municipality of Tehran managed a workhouse for the indigent as well as an orphanage that accommodated more than seven hundred children, many of whom were “found wandering in
the streets and are homeless.” A hospital, which handled infectious diseases and other serious illnesses, was attached to the orphanage. Overall, the report concluded that “the children appeared happy and well nourished.” In addition, the municipality of Tehran administered a “lunatic asylum,” intended to serve only a hundred individuals, although in actuality the asylum cared for a slightly higher number of psychologically challenged people. Some orphanages, formed to meet the needs of abandoned children, were encouraged to treat healthy children well, as healthy orphans could grow up to become productive citizens of the state and alleviate worries over population decline. The state invested little in assisting the disabled; rather, the emphasis remained on preventing disability and death among children.

Infant and maternal mortality prompted economic investment in midwifery and nursing. In 1926, a school of midwifery, apparently connected with the Pasteur Institute, opened in Tehran. Applicants were required to provide evidence of being at least eighteen years of age and to have a certificate of good standing from their previous school, as well as records of exams and other related documents from the last years of high school. But these educational standards limited women's access to Persian nursing schools. In 1929, the American Hospital in Mashhad reported that nursing instruction “must, of course, be very elementary as our Persian nurses have had very little education, a few of them still being illiterate.” The expansion of nursing instruction thus played a role in improving basic literacy levels among women as well.

At the same time Persian nursing schools were emerging, advertisements for private clinics and the services of foreign-trained midwives were published in the leading Persian newspaper, Ittila’at, indicating not only a rise in private practice but also the commercialization of midwifery as a potentially lucrative medical service. One certified midwife, Khanum-i Shahbaz, publicized her services in an advertisement claiming that she had received a permit in midwifery from the Ministry of Education, as well as a license from London to practice nursing and midwifery. Located in Tehran, her maternity clinic contained five beds and even
offered prenatal care. Because of the absence of regulation, women intellectuals faulted Iranian policy makers for not adequately confronting the “very important question” of instituting sufficient training centers for midwives—a question that was “immeasurably urgent for the next generation.”

One female journalist argued that it was “the duty of educated women...to inform their sisters about hygiene by publishing magazines...and organizing conferences.”

In 1926, Dr. Amir ‘Alam, who served as vice president of the Red Lion and Sun Society, acknowledged that untrained midwives posed a significant threat to mothers and infants. He envisioned the establishment of birth centers (dar al-waladah) run by professionally trained midwives to assist with labor and delivery—an advancement that might eventually reduce women’s mortality. Such centers could freely provide disadvantaged women with easy access to the latest techniques in obstetrics. Newborns would be turned over to parents once it had been determined that the children were in good health. Amir ‘Alam’s maternalist concerns, however, had a distinctly patriotic purpose, for state-run birth centers could directly oversee the process of childbirth. As he explained, “One of the main sources of the wealth, power, and greatness of nations is population size,” and birthing centers, he argued, indirectly contributed to that cause by reducing dangers to the health of mothers and newborns. Moreover, state-operated birthing centers could decide whether parents were ready to assume responsibility for their child, intruding into what was once considered exclusively the parents’ domain.

Maternalists took for granted women’s choice about whether to bear children. To make maternity appealing to young women, one female journalist celebrated pregnancy as a distinctive advantage of womanhood. As Rawshanak Naw’dust wrote in the inaugural issue of her magazine, “Whose countenance is more confident and proud than that of a pregnant woman’s? If attention is paid, it will be understood that no sultan at the height of his power will glow with more pride.” The belief that a pregnant woman “glowed” and that pregnancy conferred upon her a privileged and coveted status was a familiar one. However, it was sometimes
difficult to celebrate pregnancy when would-be mothers had to deal with the possibility of infant mortality.

In 1927, one observer asked, “Why, with the existence of a number of married couples, and the fact that boys and girls get married at a young age, is the population of Iran less than that of foreign countries? Is it not because of the ignorance of mothers, nurses, and even midwives? Why should Iranian midwives not be educated or be knowledgeable…?”

Inadequate birthing facilities and a dearth of certified caregivers remained a cause of infant mortality and maternal deaths during childbirth. Other recommendations intended to alleviate anxieties over population decline included the imprisonment of women for anywhere from one to three years for having an abortion. Those assisting women in this “murder” were similarly subject to prosecution. Although these measures did not necessarily translate into law during the period under review, they expressed the opinions of a select cadre of Iranian physicians and health professionals. Their recommendations circumscribed the decision-making power of Iranian women in reproduction.

Population worries prompted the expansion of nursing education. If women's education in itself was not a desirable end, nonetheless it made sense to school women in order to address the problems of infant mortality, maternal death, and, by extension, population decline. In 1930 a graduate of the Midwifery School in Tabriz delivered a scathing attack on the members of her profession. As she rhetorically asked, “Is population not the real asset of the state? Is it not the duty of every government to protect the life of its citizenry?” Why then had the state not disqualified uncertified midwives from delivering babies? Unlike other “civilized” nations, which had taken necessary steps to protect the welfare of mothers, Iran entrusted its future to those who had “no scientific knowledge.” This “certified” midwife contended that the Iranian state should “universally ban” the practice of midwifery by uncertified caregivers. Yet the reality of finding a qualified midwife proved problematic, especially for the poor, since they did not have many choices in this matter and often were ministered to by any available childbirth practitioner. Some female maternalists, while endorsing social welfare
programs, nonetheless echoed the official line by laying blame for women's mortality almost exclusively on the midwives themselves.\textsuperscript{67}

In 1930 the government approved the charter for another school of midwifery, to be supervised by the Ministry of Health. The School of Midwifery (Amuzishgah-i ‘Ali-yi Mamayi) offered a three-year course of study, after which students would receive a certificate of competence from the Ministry of Education. The subjects of academic instruction included the study of anatomy and hygiene in the first year. Clinical training gave midwives experience in the following areas: minor surgery, general nursing skills, the modes of drug dispensing, cleanliness, and precautionary measures to take in the event of epidemics. The second year of study concerned pregnancy and obstetrics, as well as child rearing and women’s particular ailments. In the third year midwives became skilled at handling atypical births.\textsuperscript{68}

Nursing education received a boost in 1935 when the Women’s Hospital (Marizkhanah-i Nisvan) opened in Tehran and included a College of Midwifery. The drive to create a cadre of licensed midwives, again touted as a promising step toward health and prosperity for women, children, and the Iranian family, was headed by Dr. Bakhtiyar. The first class consisted of seventy female students, all of whom had completed their high school education, and the instructors were recruited from among high-ranking physicians. The three-year course of study prepared the students for midwifery and qualified them to manage a similar college of midwifery elsewhere in the country. The hospital itself served as a “big, educational classroom” for nursing students, who benefited from the experience and leadership of seasoned physicians in treating pregnant women. Iran's leading male physicians such as Dr. ‘Abbas Adham, Dr. Amir ‘Alam, and Dr. Bakhtiyar supervised obstetrics, gynecology, and nursing education in this way.\textsuperscript{69} This trend continued in 1936 as Dr. Jahanshah Saleh assumed primary instructional responsibility at a newly founded nursing school jointly supervised by an American medical professional. Later that year, a specialized pediatric nursing school emerged to improve children's health care.\textsuperscript{70}
The Ministry of Education approved the charter for the establishment of additional nursing schools in 1936. These regulations stipulated that students complete a two-year program and that the nursing schools themselves be free and connected to a hospital to facilitate clinical training. Nursing applicants needed to have graduated from a three-year secondary school before matriculating. Only unmarried women between eighteen and twenty-five years of age were allowed to enroll, although exceptions were made for experienced nurses who had been working in health care institutions before the founding of such modern nursing programs. The emphasis on youth education undermined the role of older and more traditional women, who in the past had often served as midwives. The nursing curriculum mandated instruction in child care and covered the rudimentary principles of pharmacology and anatomy. In addition, nurses received training in treating common childhood illnesses as well as diseases and conditions specific to women, especially pregnancy.\(^7\) With the establishment of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Tehran, medical students also received specialized training in the fundamentals of obstetrics and in the treatment of syphilis.\(^8\)

Nursing schools, though crucial institutions of modern health care, did not completely eliminate maternal and infant deaths. Precise records regarding infant mortality rates for this period are difficult to obtain. The following observation by British officials in Iran sheds some light on why procuring these statistics proves tricky:

> The only figures available are those issued by the Municipality of Tehran. Death certificates are employed
in the capital, but their use is not compulsory. They are collected by the washers of the dead, who are not supposed to perform their duties unless a certificate is produced.... It will be seen from the list given below that in the case of more than one-eighth of the total deaths in Tehran in twelve months, the cause (p.110) has been returned as unknown, and that in sixty-five a return of “sudden death” has been made.73

Despite these difficulties, British sources offered the following mortality figures in 1925, as reported by the municipality of Tehran. There were 809 reported deaths caused by smallpox, and the age distribution of these deaths indicated that the majority occurred among children four years of age or younger.74 In the same period, 22 deaths occurred during childbirth, while the number of stillbirths was estimated as 173.75 The report also pointed out that “the number of deaths from puerperal fever is certainly underestimated” at eight dead. Six years later, in 1931, the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs distributed a statement on the death toll in Tehran during a one-month period. Eight reported deaths were attributed to syphilis. Several deaths occurred due to typical childhood diseases such as measles, smallpox, croup, and whooping cough, although age ranges were not listed for the deaths.76 New regulations intended to improve the collection of birth and death information gradually changed the management of health care. The Department of Health mandated that “statement of the cause of death must be signed by a doctor before the body-washers are permitted to accept bodies.”77 Attending doctors and midwives also had to report births.

New regulations emerged to manage pharmacies, and “public baths, tea houses and eating places, butcher shops and candy stores are being inspected.”78 Despite these advances, high infant and child mortality rates distressed families and public health officials alike. One reason for the persistence of infant mortality may have been the dearth of prenatal care in Iran. In 1933, a “leaflet in Persian on pre-natal care, adapted to Persian customs,” was being prepared. Prenatal care would enable pregnant women to receive urgent medical care for
serious complications such as eclampsia. Another familiar reason for the high death rate among infants remained the incompetence of midwives.

A physician newly arrived in Mashhad, Dr. Adelaide Kibbe, discerned “several undeveloped projects” for future work. The first concerned the teaching of local midwives: “These ‘mammans’...ready with dirty herbs, or sticks, or fingers, remain in the background, a sinister menace to every woman.” The second matter concerned children. As Kibbe described, “What a field lies here! Babies are brought to the clinic unwashed, joggled all day long...stuffed with tea or sweets or even cucumbers, or soothed with a ‘bit’ of opium.”

Even after decades of education and activism, it appeared that some Iranian families found it difficult to abandon tradition.

Although new clinics appeared in Tehran, other cities and provinces lacked sufficient institutions of public hygiene. An internal governmental report on the sanitary condition of Kerman and its environs found that qualified physicians there remained scarce and that malaria was rampant, leading to high infant mortality. According to this report, although most married couples sired approximately six or seven children, only one or two survived. This report further pointed out that venereal disease was less visible here than in other parts of Iran, but that sexually transmitted diseases nonetheless were on the rise. The office of the Kerman inspection authority, which prepared the report, recommended that the government invest in building a hospital there and when possible to provide necessary drugs and medications free of charge to the inhabitants in order to reduce mortality rates.

Outside of Tehran, some observers considered obstetrics “an untouched field.” The staff of the American Hospital in Mashhad maintained that the “‘mammans’ (midwives) are illiterate women who have never had any opportunity to learn.” In addition, the hospital staff pointed out that none “of the young women from the government's well-organized midwifery school in Teheran have come to Meshed, let alone to any of the lesser cities of Khorasan, and there is no government control of midwives.” Although the benefits of the government's midwifery school had not yet spread to the
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provinces, nonetheless it is significant that an independent party such as the mission staff had cited it as “well-organized.” Dr. Adelaide Kibbe, who had written this portion of the report for the American Hospital in Mashhad, confirmed that Persian women “still prefer the home-like old ‘mamma’...and accept as kismet (fate) what too often follows, dead babies, puerperal infection, crippled lives.” During the interwar era many Iranian families preferred the convenience and familiarity of birthing at home to the foreign experience of delivering in hospitals or maternity clinics. For this reason, midwives who were willing to care for pregnant women in their homes remained central to the birthing process in Iran even though they were “illiterate.”

Nursing schools finally appeared in other major Iranian cities, including Mashhad, Tabriz, Isfahan, and Shiraz. Although women did not matriculate in the School of Medicine when the University of Tehran opened its doors in 1934, female enrollment accounted for 3 percent of the total student participation in the Faculty of Medicine by 1941. In places such as Kermanshah, where the government had yet to launch a midwifery school, the American mission hospital worked in tandem with the state to provide obstetrical services. In fact, the government was “very willing to grant” the hospital “a permit to conduct our school of nursing in conformity with the government program.” In 1937, the hospital reported a rise in the number of visits by Persian women seeking obstetrical care. This increase was attributed in part to the high-quality care provided at the hospital: “The Iranian women are beginning to learn what it means to be properly cared for and they appreciate good nursing care and advertise it after they leave the hospital.”

Health authorities took other important steps to improve public sanitation and to curtail infant mortality. In 1932 the cabinet passed regulations to make vaccinations available without payment for children from birth to twenty-one years of age. Parents were instructed to take newborns up to six months to statewide centers to give their children the first of four injections necessary to prevent smallpox. These state-approved centers would then provide a certificate
documenting the vaccination. The next installments of the vaccine were to be administered between six and seven years of age; between twelve and thirteen years of age; and between nineteen and twenty-one years of age. Parents or caretakers discovered to be negligent in this matter were at first reprimanded and then subjected to prosecution. Hygiene remained an imperative for the Iranian government at the dawn of the Pahlavi dynasty. The need to increase public access to clean water as well as the desire to reduce the incidence of infectious diseases and mortality rates among infants informed public health policy throughout the twentieth century. There were significant demographic, humanitarian, and health care reasons for this emphasis: frequent epidemics, high infant mortality, maternal deaths and disability related to childbirth, and prostitution.

New schools played a vital role in inculcating the value of physical fitness through their curricula. Like her male counterpart, the modern Iranian woman was exhorted to engage in physical exercise to become a more productive member of the national polity. As Hajar Tarbiyat, head of the Society for Women, explained: “Women more than men require bodily and spiritual health.... Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the bodily health of girls and their engagement in physical exercise from childhood.” Presumably, women’s bodies needed specialized and constant training to assist them with the difficult ordeal of pregnancy and the necessary task of nurturing “strong-minded men” for the nation.

In addition to encouraging physical fitness, the Pahlavi state made the cleanliness of cities, towns, and villages a priority for local municipalities. A government memorandum dated August 1936 urged village authorities to assist with sanitary measures, particularly among those who engaged in animal husbandry. The state stressed that, where possible, villagers should be encouraged to tend to animals away from settled urban areas and to keep their homes as hygienic as possible. Popularization of hygiene and the stress on cleanliness were communicated through the newly founded Sazman-i Parvaresh-i Afkar as well.
The expansion of health facilities, particularly the establishment of state-run clinics and hospitals, as well as benevolent societies brought hygiene to more households and geographic areas during the Pahlavi regime. Women of the royal family served as benefactors of welfare organizations supporting women and children. Princess Fawzia, for example, oversaw the newly instituted Association for the Protection of Pregnant Women and Children (APPWC). One of the private palaces had even been converted into a bright room in which pregnant women and children received medical care provided by the APPWC. Princess Shams Pahlavi initiated another organization called the Association of Benevolence (Bungah-i Niku Kari) that had a special pediatric hospital. Indigent mothers and children received medical services gratis at these centers, which were financed in part by private individuals.

State policy showed curious contradictions despite the concern over women's health. In February 1936, for instance, just over a month after the promulgation of the revolutionary unveiling decree, a British diplomatic report from Tabriz noted the difficulties veiled women faced when approaching medical establishments. According to this source, “Doctors were forbidden to admit veiled women to hospitals.” Confronted with the “passive resistance” of many women and members of the ‘ulama to the decree, the state even compelled medical professionals to turn away women in need. This policy seems in direct contradiction to the obstreperous rhetoric urging Iranian women to rely on modern hospitals and clinics for medical care. Faced with a potential public conflagration over the unveiling issue, however, the state ranked its priorities. Temporary measures, which excluded veiled women from “the baths, the cinema, [and] the use of public carriages,” appeared justified in carrying out the women's renewal movement.

In 1938, Dr. Sami Rad wrote a series of articles on children's health, reiterating that the principal hazards to children's well-being remained “ignorant old women, illiterate midwives, opium...and inadequate nutrition.” Although more than two decades had elapsed since the establishment of the first nursing schools in Iran, the medical attitude toward midwives...
had apparently changed little. Nonetheless, female health practitioners had gained enough visibility to promote women’s welfare, capitalizing on the opportunity to instruct a new generation of midwives and nurses on the modern principles of maternal and child hygiene. In 1938, for instance, Malihah Adibzadeh, a graduate of the government’s college of midwifery, published a column in the daily newspaper *Ittila’at*, discussing women’s physiological changes during pregnancy and advising them on matters of hygiene.  

Speaking before the Society for Women in 1940, Dr. Bakhtiyar, who headed the College of Midwifery, offered a historical assessment of midwifery’s evolution in Iran. According to him, prior to the 1920s Iran had lacked sufficient hospitals specializing in obstetrics. One maternity clinic (*zayishgah*) contained only two beds, used principally for urgent cases, while the Women’s Hospital had only six beds, which were frequently unused. By contrast, in 1939 the Women’s Hospital accommodated sixty beds and enrolled eighty students in midwifery classes. Its maternity clinic, which also offered courses in nursing, increased its capacity to forty beds, which “are always full.” The municipality of Tehran further planned to build a maternity clinic to include one hundred beds.  

If somewhat exaggerated, Dr. Bakhtiyar’s figures nonetheless broadcasted recent advances in women’s health care while bringing women’s medical concerns to the fore of hygiene efforts and national politics.

Obstetricians likely encountered birth abnormalities such as conjoined twins in their practice, but these aberrations were barely addressed in discussions of child care. The image of conjoined twins perhaps illustrated the most glaring example of birth defect, or “oddity,” for the Iranian public. The very phrase used to describe such bodily deformities, *aja’ib al-makhluqat* (oddities of creation), became an expression of wonderment about human peculiarities. The reference to conjoined twins as “oddities” defined their physical difference as either monstrous or animal-like, thus embodying the antithesis of the human condition. That physicians and observers continued using this terminology well into the twentieth century suggests the acceptance of physically deformed individuals as existing somehow outside the pale of
“normal” humanity, despite the fact that the lives of conjoined twins could be filled with typical human experiences such as travel, entertainment, and procreation.

Discussions of deformity, often couched in negative terms, departed from the positive and life-affirming language and message of Iran's health-related propaganda. Like other countries, early twentieth-century Iran became enthralled by the promises of hygiene and the curative potential of modern medicine, precisely because it was hoped that modern medicine might obviate disease, deformity, and even ugliness. The hygiene movement in Iran embraced health and fitness while simultaneously eschewing disease and disability. Although the popular press endorsed beauty and health, it rarely published pictures of disabled people, even in articles about the consequences of infectious diseases with the potential to disable and disfigure. At the same time that charitable organizations provided new services to the disabled, the state regarded disability as a social condition that needed to be circumscribed. This attitude partly explains the absence of photographs depicting the disabled community in the popular press and the dearth of social services for disabled people during the early Pahlavi era. In short, ugliness and deformity were not modernist, patriotic virtues—or even “feel-good” topics intended to convince citizens of the benefits associated with the hygienic movement—and thus did not become common discussion points in Iran's heavily sanitized press.

In the 1930s, a scientific journal dedicated to the popularization of hygiene notably departed from this trend, however. Edited by a French-educated Iranian physician, Dr. Tutiya, the journal Sihhat-nimayi Iran (Iran's Hygienic Image) frequently published pictures of people with physical deformities. These depictions featured...
conjoined twins, identified as *aja'ib al-makhluqat*. The term used to connote “typically developing” in Persian, which is originally an Arabic phrase—*sahih al-khilqah*—makes explicit that “correct” and “incorrect” types of human being exist. Deviations from the norm represented not just difference but oddity. The journal’s introductory issue discussed the birth in Tehran of a set of conjoined twins connected at the chest. Apparently the twins perished shortly after birth “because of neglect.” Their parents, in an effort to hide the deaths, buried them in their yard, but the police discovered and later retrieved the bodies of the twins. The journal does not mention whether the parents suffered any criminal consequences for their neglect, pointing out only that the mother had a history of giving birth to twins.

In her study of teratology, or “the study of monsters,” in the British Empire, Carrie Yang Costello argues that obstetricians encountered birth abnormalities at the time of delivery and that such children were termed “monsters.” Costello points out that discussions of teratology, which has commonly become known as the study of birth defects, did not consider the treatment of such infants, not because treatments did not exist but because medical discussions of deformities spoke to
a “cultural fetish.” Iranian discussions of aja'ib-i khilqat displayed a similarly “freakish” curiosity about people with physical differences, rather than an enlightened or informative medical approach intended to assist and educate Iranian physicians. In nature, Dr. Tutiya wrote, one frequently observed physically deformed infants, but his essay offered little in the way of treatment options or other medically relevant information about the care of conjoined twins. The discourse on deformed children created norms of physical and mental fitness to which modern Iranian citizens needed to aspire. While hygienists redoubled efforts to limit the spread of infectious diseases and the disabilities resulting from them, they were slow to reach out and recognize the legal rights and educational needs of the disabled, including children. Despite these limitations, public health officials pioneered many organizations that targeted the elimination of illnesses such as malaria, smallpox, and venereal disease.

What impact did the hygiene movement have on women and children? Women's and children's health received a boost from this vigorous campaign. Although hygienic conditions for these two populations remained far from ideal—according to Byron Good, a study undertaken by a company called Overseas Consultants in 1949 found infant mortality in Iran to be over 50 percent—still, some measure of vital progress had been achieved. In the context of public health care, women trained as professional nurses, not just midwives, serving to increase the longevity of infants, mothers, and the infirm. Hospitals built separate women's wards to treat obstetrical cases. Women gained the opportunity to train in the latest techniques of nursing and midwifery and thus prepared the ground for the first class of female physicians. In addition, women paid attention to venereal disease, as well as to pregnancy and child rearing. To be sure, the mortality of women and children decreased somewhat in the early Pahlavi years, but the ever-expanding state also intruded further into the lives of citizens as a result of the maternalist discourse.

Caught in the crossfire, women informed this hygienic culture even as they vied for control of their sexuality and family life. In 1940, Dr. Morton concluded, “The health influence of
women is a new movement.... Along with railways and factories will come wholesome baby foods, proper nursing bottles, plumbing, and bathing facilities, disinfectants, healthful clothing, and all the rest of the modern hygienic materials by which Iran may turn from the road of doom and keep going upward to new health and happiness."

Even if Morton's optimism seems somewhat misplaced, the attention paid to the female role in human reproduction brought new career possibilities for women.

In 1944, Dr. Iran A'lam, head of Tehran's maternity service, reflected on her career in an interview with a women's magazine. Daughter of the famed physician Dr. Amir A'lam, Dr. Iran A'lam had received her medical degree from France, specializing in women's health and gynecology. She returned to practice medicine and served women of varying social backgrounds. As she confessed, “The best pleasures for me are when I cure a patient and can alleviate her pains.” The professional achievements of Dr. Iran A’lam perhaps served as the best testimony to both the historic impact and the limitations of the politics of reproduction in Iran. Dr. A’lam did not shed her traditional identity as mother and wife despite having pursued a medical career. Instead, she maintained that “women's first responsibility is to managing her home and to taking care of her husband and children.”

This statement may seem ironic given the groundbreaking accomplishments of Dr. A’lam. Her comment was an indication, however, that maternalist ideals remained deep-rooted even among the growing class of professional women. The entry of Iranian women into the professional workforce did not always impose upon them a choice, but rather offered them multiple identities as physicians and nurses, mothers and wives.
Originating amid somewhat justifiable fears about population decline, the hygiene movement that in its inception had provided liberating and humanistic ideals of extending human life and achieving human betterment became appropriated by statist and nationalist obsessions about population growth, fitness, and social control. As Iran grappled with its social welfare policies, maternalist ideology would alternately broaden or restrict women's choices in matters of marriage, maternity, and personal hygiene. Women emancipated themselves somewhat from the patriarchy of modern medicine and the hygiene movement by shaping the nation's social agenda. In Iran, as elsewhere, the impact of modern medicine remained revolutionary, and official discussions of health care reflected the newfound authority and legitimacy of contemporary physicians. Although women did not overturn medical patriarchy, they gave expression to their reproductive concerns, not just as breeders but at times as peers.

Notes:

(1.) This section is adapted from my review article of Fissell's work, "Stepping Out of the Womb: Women and the Politics of


(6.) “Amraz al-Nisa,” Jumada al-Avval 1294/May 1877, manuscript at Astan Quds Razavi, Mashhad, Iran, #805, ch. 12.


(9.) For an article encapsulating this idea, see “Sihhat-i 'umumi,” Ittila’at, No. 582, 17 September 1928, 2.

(10.) For more on this idea, see Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, “Patriotic Womanhood: The Culture of Feminism in Modern Iran, 1900–1941,” British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 32, 1 (2005): 29–46.


(12.) Tamaddun, No. 75, 2 Rabi’ al-Thani 1326/3 May 1908, 4; Tamaddun, No. 76, 4 Rabi’al-Thani, 1326/5 May 1908, 3–4.

(13.) As McGregor has argued in her study of midwifery in America, “Physicians came into cultural authority as representing science and the social structure of the larger political and economic system when they began to supervise childbirth.... Physicians with forceps in hand, even though they would not use them for decades, became a symbol of power.” See Deborah Kuhn McGregor, From Midwives to Medicine: The Birth of American Gynecology (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 122.

(14.) Sur-i Israfil, No. 24, 24 Muharram 1326/27 February 1908, 5.

(15.) The two main journals published for women in the early twentieth century were Danish and Shikufah, and parts of these journals have recently been reprinted in Iran. See Shikufah bih Inzimam-i Danish (Tehran: Kitabkhaneh-i Milli-yi Jumhuri-yi Islami-yi Iran, Fall 1377/1998). Danish began publication in 1910 under the editorship of Banu Kahhal and Shikufah in 1912 under the editorship of Maryam Muzayyin al-Saltanah, both in Tehran.

(16.) Shikufah, No. 6, 8 Rabi’ al-Thani 1333/23 February 1915, 4.

(17.) Danish, No. 14, 17 Muharram 1329/18 January 1911, 2.

(19.) Qur'an, Sura 2:233.


(21.) Ibid., 22.

(22.) According to Giladi, “Approval of maternal breastfeeding seems to have been unanimous among Muslim doctors,” among them Ibn Sina. Avner Giladi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses: Medieval Islamic Views on Breastfeeding and Their Social Implications* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 48.

(23.) Ibid., chapter 2.


(25.) *Jahan-i Zanan*, No. 1, 15 Dalv 1921, 12.

(26.) *Shikufah*, 2nd Year, No. 12, 1 Rajab 1332/26 May 1914, 4.

(27.) *Shikufah*, 2nd Year, No. 10, 20 Jumada al-Avval 1332/16 April 1914, 3. For a continuation of these themes in another journal, see *Farhang*, Nos. 4–5, Summer 1928, 149–60.

(28.) *Shikufah*, 2nd year, No. 10, 20 Jumada al-Avval 1332/16 April 1914, 2.

(29.) *Jahan-i Zanan*, No. 2, 15 Hawt 1299/1921, 39. This advice is not much different from the information given to parents of newborns today. This discussion continues in the fourth issue of this journal, 11–12, where recommended amounts of milk consumption (both breast milk and artificial milk) are given for newborns.

(30.) *Jahan-i Zanan*, Mashhad, No. 1, 1921, 10-11.

(31.) Ibid., 18.


(33.) Ibid., 16.
(34.) Ibid., 16-17.

(35.) Ibid., 24.

(36.) Nisvan-i Vatankhvah-i Iran, No. 9, 6 July 1925, 2-3.


(40.) PHS, Record Group (hereafter RG) 91, Box 4, Folder 11, Received 23 November 1916, “Medical Report,” Urumiyah 1916, 2.

(41.) Ibid.

(42.) Ibid.


(44.) PHS, “Report of Women's Work in Tabriz, Persia, August 1918 to August 1919.”

(45.) PHS, “Report of the American Mission Hospital at Tabriz, to the Annual Meeting held at Tabriz, Persia, August 1922.”


(49.) PHS, RG 91, Box 1, “Report of Medical Work in Meshed, July 1st, 1920—June 30th, 1921,” 5.
(50.) PHS, RG 91, Box 1, Folder 20, “Resht Medical Report 1924-5,” 6.

(51.) Ibid.

(52.) The Iranian Red Lion & Sun (Red Cross) Bulletin, no. 1, March 1947, 22–23.


(54.) Bakhtar, No. 6, April/May 1935, 421–24. This writer advocated decent treatment of orphans using the Prophet Muhammad as an example to show that other orphans, too, could achieve extraordinary feats during their lifetime if given the opportunity.

(55.) Prince Nusrat al-Dawlah Firuz gave impetus to the creation of the Pasteur Institute in Iran. While in Paris to attend the peace conference, he visited the Pasteur Institute in Paris and advised Iranian officials to start a similar institution there. Dr. Joseph Mesnard was appointed its director. Rockefeller Archive Center, RF, RG1.1, Series 77, Box 1, “Preliminary Report on Medical Education in Persia,” 31. For more on the history of the Pasteur Institute, see Amir A. Afkhami, “Institut Pasteur,” Encyclopaedia Iranica, online version. Also, Mohammad-Hossein Azizi and Touraj Nayernouri, “The Establishment and the First Four Decades of the Activities of the Pasteur Institute of Iran,” Archive of Iranian Medicine 11, 4 (2008): 477–81.

(56.) PHS, RG 91, Box 20, Annual Report of the Medical Work at Meshed, Persia, American Hospital, Year Ending June 30th, 1929, 1.

(57.) Ittila’at, 12 Mehr 1305/5 October 1926, 2. The services of Mme. Chichlo, a midwife certified by a school in Petrograd, were publicized.
(58.) *Ittila’at*, December 7, 1932, 4. Five years later, another private maternity clinic was in need of nurses and placed an announcement for this purpose. *Ittila’at*, 18 October 1938.

(59.) *Payk-i Sa’adat-i Nisvan*, No. 2, January 1928, 44.

(60.) Ibid.

(61.) Dr. Amir ‘Alam had headed the Sanitary Council from 1914 until it was subsumed under the newly established Ministry of Health in 1921. He contributed regularly to the society’s journal.


(63.) *Payk-i Sa’adat-i Nisvan*, No. 1, October-November 1927, 6.

(64.) *Ittila’at*, No. 385, 24 Aban 1306/1927, 2.

(65.) *Sihhat-Nimayah-i Iran*, No. 6, Shahrivar 1312/August-September 1933, 140.

(66.) ‘Alam-i Nisvan, tenth year, No. 6, November 1930, 281.

(67.) Ibid., 282–83.


(70.) *Ittila’at*, 19 Mehr 1315/11 October 1936, 1.


(72.) Ibid., 490–91.

(74.) Ibid.

(75.) Ibid., 7:442–43.

(76.) U.S. Confidential Department of State Records, RG 59, Iran, 1925–1941, Charles Hart to Secretary of State, 11 March 1931, and enclosure: “Death Toll of the City of Teheran During the Month of Dey, 1309.”


(78.) Ibid., 9.


(80.) PHS, RG 91, Box 20, “Fifteenth Annual Report of the American Christian Hospital, Meshed, Persia, 1929–1930,” 35. Kibbe’s comments echoed the observations of Lady Sheil and others who had first broached these subjects in the nineteenth century.


(83.) Ibid.


(85.) Encyclopaedia Iranica, “Faculties of the University of Tehran, Faculty of Medicine.”


(87.) Ibid., 4.

(89.) Khatabah-hayah kanun-e banuvan (Tehran, 1314/1935), 13.

(90.) Iran, National Archives, Prime Ministry Files, File 290, 23 Mordad 1315/1936.

(91.) Alam-i Zanan, No. 5, Aban 1323, October–November 1944, 3.


(94.) Ibid. After the fall of Reza Shah in 1941, women gradually gained the privilege of choosing whether to veil or not to veil. In theory, clinics could once again revert to ministering to pregnant women regardless of their public appearance or expressions of religiosity.

(95.) Ittila’at, 22 Mehr 1317/14 October 1938, 10.

(96.) Ittila’at, 20 Aban 1317/11 November 1938, 10; Ittila’at, 21 Aban 1317/12 November 1938.

(97.) Ittila’at, 6 Bahman 1318/27 January 1940, “Sanjish-i mama-yi, diruz va imruz.”


(100.) Sihhatnima-yi Iran, first year, No. 1, March–April 1933, 12-13.


(103.) Ibid., 59. A subsequent discussion of physical deformity, entitled the “oddities of nature” (*aja‘ib-i tabi‘at*), was rendered into French as “les monstres.”


(106.) *Alam-i Zanan*, No. 6, Azar 1323/November–December 1944.

(107.) Ibid.
Schooling Mothers

Patriotic Education and Women's “Renewal”

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DOI:10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780195308860.003.0007

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter discusses efforts to promote the education of women in Iran in the early twentieth century. Topics covered include how Iranian women made education a focus of their activism after World War I; how popular women's literature reinforced mothering as a modern profession; the role of Islam in women's education; and how patriarchy influenced the language and emphasis of the women's movement.

Keywords: Iranian women, Iran, women's education, Islam, mothering, patriarchy

In 1907, one writer labeled Iran's women “the most unfortunate and the most miserable people of the world.” Because many lacked jobs, they became dependent on men for their economic livelihood. Despite having to endure such
hardships, “ignorant, unfair men” refused to grant Iranian women any “rights of humanity” (*huquq-i insaniyat*).¹ This provocative article, though fomenting little institutional change, was nonetheless a significant public recognition of the inherent need to honor the rights of Iranian women in the evolving political climate of early twentieth-century Iran. Prior to this, few public utterances openly addressed the inferior position of Iranian women or acknowledged their basic human rights, including their right to an education.

Two years later, another Iranian journalist reiterated the sentiment, conceding that his countrywomen mattered less than “the animals of other nations.” Although granted various privileges through Islamic law, or sharia’, they lacked “human rights” (*huquq-i bashari*).² For sure, Iranian women lacked many basic political and social privileges. Much has been written about the failures of the Iranian constitution of 1906 and its denial of suffrage to women. Still, women pursued groundbreaking activities during those years.³ And to frame the story of Iranian women at the turn of the century around this sour note would miss the historical progression of women’s social activism, as well as the level of public engagement and debate that opened up some political venues, promoted public health, and presented enhanced educational opportunities for modern Iranian women.

Since the nineteenth century Iranian writers and policy makers had made education a priority, and in the coming decades Iran would invest significant capital to expand education and literacy.⁴ In 1897, a Qajar courtier, Khan-i Khanan, composed a fascinating treatise that espoused institutional reform in various sectors of Iranian society, including its educational infrastructure. Khan-i Khanan argued for the education of women since mothers played a crucial role in the upbringing of children.⁵ Endorsement of women’s education became a talking point in the flourishing Persian press at the turn of the century.⁶ In 1904, one writer submitted an editorial to the newspaper *Ittila‘* in support of women’s education. This anonymous essayist noted that some considered women “naturally deficient” (*naqis al-fitri*) and thus not in need of education. However, this writer asserted
that women deserved to become literate in order to raise informed children. Educated women would pass on knowledge to their offspring, instead of corrupting them with superstitions.\footnote{7}

The constitutional revolution introduced a heightened phase of social activism as women founded clubs, societies, and schools. They raised funds for the “maintenance of one free school for orphans and one industrial school.”\footnote{8} In 1910, volunteers who had organized a school for orphaned girls also made available clothes and supplies free of charge.\footnote{9} Notices appeared seeking female teachers qualified to teach the Qur’an, Farsi, and sewing.\footnote{10} In addition, the parliament made provisions for education and mandated that the government foot the bill for building schools.\footnote{11}

Women asserted their political will in other ways as well. When American financial advisors, led by W. Morgan Shuster, were expelled from the country as a result of Russian pressure, “bands of women went to tea houses and other shops and destroyed the Russian goods...or to the mosques to deliver speeches, hoping to arouse the men to patriotic action.”\footnote{12} Economic hardships and the lack of basic food items impelled Iranian women to go to the home “of Mr. Shuster demanding bread.” Some Muslim women turned to Christian missionaries, who organized a “class in needlepoint, in which such poor women might be trained so they could at least earn their bread,” although such classes were accompanied by “prayer and a gospel talk.”\footnote{13}

What access did Muslim Iranian women have to educational facilities at the turn of the century? Missionary and other religious schools existed for various minority groups that also accepted Muslim girls.\footnote{14} During the constitutional period, numerous schools appeared around the country, but mostly in Tehran and often of limited duration, providing girls an elementary education in home economics and basic literacy.\footnote{15} However, the dearth of qualified teachers hampered efforts to bolster education. Even existing schools such as the Dar al-Funun and the Military Academy faced budgetary shortfalls and could not pay their teachers.\footnote{16} One bystander complained
that, despite the talk about education, Iran lacked a teacher training college, illiteracy remained rampant, and many rural communities were deprived of educational opportunities.\(^\text{17}\)

The impetus to educate Muslim women faced some controversy. A prominent Shi‘i scholar, Shaykh Fazlallah Nuri, commented on the social changes spurred by the constitutional revolution and virtually equated the education of women with profligacy. The consumption of alcoholic beverages and “the propagation of brothels,” he claimed, signaled the hazards of eroding Islam from public life. These perils included opening schools to educate women and girls.\(^\text{18}\) Nuri was writing at a time when the country reeled from strife over differences about the role of Islam in Iran. Although the constitution declared Twelver Shi‘ism the official religion of the country and eventually set quotas for the participation of non-Muslims in the parliament, conservative scholars such as Nuri wondered about the impact of secular legal innovations on the application of Islamic law.

Not all religious scholars shared Nuri’s trepidation about female education. Mrs. Safiyah Yazdi, the wife of a leading mujtahid, Aqa Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Yazdi, in fact pioneered a school for girls called the ‘Iffatiyah School. Interestingly, the Yazdis’ daughter went on to study the modern sciences and their granddaughter earned a doctorate in medicine and practiced as a gynecologist. The ‘Iffatiyah School eventually turned into a secondary school and included distinguished scholars among its faculty.\(^\text{19}\) Another woman responded directly to Nuri’s censure. In a long editorial, this unidentified author demanded from Nuri the exact passage in the Qur’an and hadith that prohibited women from acquiring knowledge.\(^\text{20}\) Nuri, of course, could not pinpoint a Qur’anic passage that forbade women from reading and writing. But this was not the only issue. What mattered was the way in which women threatened the old order. A famous exchange between memoirist of the revolution Nazim al-Islam Kermani and Sayyid Muhammad Tabataba’i, a jurist at the forefront of the movement, reminded readers that some believed that women’s seclusion needed to be secured before girls’ schools could thrive in Iran.\(^\text{21}\)
In 1909, Iran emerged from its civil war bruised but intact. Nuri was executed for his association with Muhammad Ali Shah, the monarch who had precipitated the civil war by refusing to acknowledge the authority of the newly constituted Majlis. Emboldened by their victory, patriots supporting constitutional rule wrote with heroism about the will of the Iranian nation. One essayist remarked that even women, “who are hiding behind their veils,” would take their head and neck scarves and convert them to weapons to defend Iran.22

Over the next two years Majlis delegates passed reforms that promoted secular education for women. However, existing schools in Iran faced a shortage of funds and teachers. Public morality also remained a concern for some. Complaints from Najaf, Iraq, reached an editorial office in Iran that the civil war had not been fought in order to eradicate Islam from the country and to allow the sale of alcoholic beverages in the streets. Journalists and their newspapers, essayists warned, ought not to lose sight of their objectives by filling their pages with advertisements about the sale of pianos and alcoholic drinks.23

Formal female activity had its limits at the turn of the century, as women were denied voting privileges. In 1911, when Majlis delegates debated the women’s suffrage bill before them, one deputy, Hajji Vakil al-Ru’aya, argued that women had the right to vote. Shaykh Asadollah, however, challenged Vakil al-Ru’aya by asserting that women had no such political prerogatives as the “weaker sex,” since they lacked the capacity for judgment.24 In 1911, women lost the suffrage battle, but this defeat did not stop them from voicing discontent about the social hardships in their lives. As the capital faced food shortages, five hundred women took to the streets of Tehran and demonstrated outside the home of the premier, Sipahdar. The police finally dispersed the women, “several being wounded, one possibly mortally.”25 This incident would not be the last time that an Iranian woman would give her life to stand steadfastly for her convictions. Many women activists pursued their political aspirations in other ways. This included another push for suffrage. In 1913, Iran was represented at the Congress of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, although Iran remained unaffiliated
with the alliance. Carrie Chapman Catt of New York, the international president, noted that Iran and some other countries lacked “an organized woman suffrage movement.” Although Iranian women failed to organize an effective suffrage movement until later in the century, they enhanced their educational and professional opportunities after World War I.

To avoid giving the impression that women would be led astray if educated, advocates of women’s literacy centered female education on the notion of patriotic motherhood. As nationalism became state policy, particularly during the Pahlavi years, women’s education endorsed patriotism as it inculcated the virtues of family life, marriage, and motherhood. The content of women’s education reflected this emphasis. Although the concept of patriotic motherhood politicized domesticity to fit state interests and priorities (and continues to do so under the Islamic Republic), it enabled Iranian women to regard themselves not just as participants in the domestic realm but also as contributors to the civic community. Perhaps unintentionally, patriotic motherhood opened the door for women’s education in fields outside of home economics and nurtured their political socialization.

In 1905, the newspaper *Hadid* articulated this new meaning of motherhood in its embrace of literacy for women. Women were the essential lifeline of humanity, it argued, and for this reason they needed to be educated. According to its editor, Aqa Sayyid Muhammad Shabistari, “Women are the basic elements of the social fabric of humanity…. Mothers, no matter how kind they may be, if they are ignorant, they are the enemies of humanity.” As Iranians grappled with disease control, they made hygienic education a mantra of patriotic motherhood. Infant life expectancy was reduced by smallpox, measles, scarlet fever, and other diseases, as well as the unsanitary medical practices of physicians and midwives, who were blamed for the crisis of infant mortality. The high incidence of mortality threatened women and children and undermined the nation’s ability to raise a community of dutiful compatriots.
Women were the true nurses and caretakers of a hygienic household, and thus a natural conduit for spreading the salutary and patriotic virtues of hygiene and humanism. It behooved them to become educated and learn the principles of hygiene: “Whenever the kind mothers know something about what a microbe is, the innocent children, who are the new generation of the homeland, will not fall prey to hard-to-cure illnesses or the arrow of death.” Practical considerations such as fear of the spread of disease in the household, as well as in the nation, made it necessary for women to receive a rudimentary education, especially hygienic education, even if they were discouraged from learning abstract subjects such as mathematics or philosophy in their formal training or social indoctrination. As Shabistari argued, “For women, logic and... jurisprudence are not necessary.” In practice, however, it became difficult to restrict women’s education into narrow categories of learning.

If the struggles of the constitutional and Pahlavi years restricted women’s ability to venture too far beyond the perimeters of home and family—and, when they did leave those confines, usually in ways sanctioned by the state—it also emboldened Iranian women to fight and seek respect for their position in society as educators, as participants in civil society, as standard-bearers of patriotism and modernity, and finally as mothers and wives. These enterprises helped extend the ideal of patriotic motherhood to that of patriotic womanhood. The modern Iranian woman would become not just a capable homemaker but also a laborer, an athlete, a teacher, a nurse, or a state employee. This feminine ideal was a womanhood in tune with the nationalist discourse of the secular state, while alternative expressions of feminism, particularly those tied to Iran's rich religious culture, were somewhat muted.

Still, the secular women's movement left a legacy of activism, institutional reform, and cultural ideology that has enriched the country's contemporary religious culture. Even if religious symbols disappeared from the official rhetoric of the women's movement, the emphasis on themes such as morality and chastity in the debate on physical and mental hygiene had religious undertones eventually picked up by traditionally minded activists.
In 1910, the first newspaper written by a woman for women began publication in Iran. Entitled *Danish*, meaning “knowledge,” it primarily aimed to educate readers about their maternal role, focusing on child care and home management. That “knowledge” became this journal’s mission spoke to the new status women had gained in the public sphere following the constitutional revolution. But it was a domestically focused knowledge imparted to Iranian women. A cursory look at the themes in *Danish* suggests that maternity, child care, and home management dominated discussion despite the political awareness that had resulted from the constitutional revolution. Though eschewing politics, *Danish* made literacy and formal schooling an objective for Iranian women, even calling them obligatory. To attract readership, the journal’s editor, Dr. Kahhal, advised: “For women who cannot read, it is submitted that men read this journal to them every week, so they won’t be deprived of its advantages; perhaps this will cause them to take up literacy.” The periodical endorsed female industriousness and the pursuit of work as a means to social betterment.

Even newspapers that were not gender-specific contained features on women’s schooling, although female education remained embedded in the domestic sphere or became linked to nationalist priorities. The weekly journal *Amuzgar* (Instructor) argued that educated women “became a source of comfort for boys.” Citing a tradition attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, the writer averred that “stupid, ignorant women should not be in charge of nursing their children.” While the acquisition of knowledge was in itself a noble aspiration, for women “what matters after receiving an elementary education is the learning of ethics and living [‘ilm-i akhlaq va zindigani].” Women’s schooling needed to reflect these values and instill the requisite skills and virtues of matrimony and motherhood.

Women’s education made sense since mothers bore the responsibility of educating sons. The writer, presumably a man, even argued that women’s schooling promoted their modesty (*nijabat*) and moral decency. Others promoted women’s education as an end in itself, while keeping in mind
the need to protect women against moral corruption. In 1911, the Society for the Advancement of Iran included in its charter a clause giving special attention “to educating women and to establishing special women’s schools with teachers who have correct comportment [mu’alimat-i sahih al-akhlaqi].” Although support for women’s schooling became an ethos of Iranian feminism, some proponents circumscribed the nature of female learning. Yet the nature of the threat to men and to women’s virtue sometimes remained vague and unspecified in male discourses on women’s education. Education meant empowerment, but women needed to be empowered within the domestic sphere and with a larger goal in mind than mere self-indulgence.

In 1912, a second women’s journal, Shikufah (Blossom), began publication in Tehran under the editorship of Maryam Muzayyin al-Saltanah, a woman committed to female education. Here, too, the domestic concerns of women in their roles as wives, mothers, and daughters were elaborated. She touched on topics such as pregnancy, marital relations, and especially patriotic motherhood—that is, mothers committed to the family who also identified with the ideals of the nation, whether in promoting national goods or in spreading the sentiment of love of homeland (hubb-i vatan). Shikufah made patriotic motherhood both respectable and requisite for modern Iranian women. Maryam Muzayyin al-Saltanah encouraged women to pursue the virtues of education, hygiene, and cleanliness, making practical knowledge about the basics of “patriotic housewifery” the focus of her articles. She also tried to set parameters on women’s education to safeguard women’s virtue. For instance, “a woman who in the street or the bazaar jokes with a foreign man and removes the veil between him and herself cannot be called a cultured and educated woman.”

The mere founding of these women’s journals (notwithstanding their domestic emphasis) stood out as revolutionary. While promoting education and literacy for women, these journals also forged a cult of domesticity, with the intent of lending a new import and gravitas to activities that had long been a part of women’s lives. But who exactly
was the patriotic mother? Both male and female journalists often cast patriotic mothers as attentive women who strove to understand and promote the essentials of hygiene and cleanliness within the domestic sphere, particularly where pregnancy and child rearing were concerned.43

Mothering was not just a simple inborn instinct. As the numerous references in Shikufah to children's hygiene, breastfeeding, and familial relations make clear, such duties required forethought, planning, and sometimes specialized knowledge. In addition, without patriotic motherhood societal progress would be limited. In a column entitled “The Services of Women to Society Are Not Less than Men's but Are Actually More,” it was argued that children's first schooling took place on their mother's bosom, and that even the great philosophers and inventors were educated until the age of twelve by their mothers. Women thus provided the essential care and rudimentary training that enabled great thinkers to excel in mathematics, sciences, and other fields.44 Finally, in discussing literacy, female industriousness, or equality, the journals helped to blur the boundaries of domesticity.

Male patriots, who also had family obligations, could “prove” their patriotism through self-sacrifice often in warfare and through official service to the state. In 1912, for instance, a textbook on civic studies, Ta'limat-i Muduniyah, to be used presumably in boys’ schools, there was an interesting chapter on family and homeland (khanahvadah va vatan). It defined a person’s duty to the homeland “as working toward its advancement” and not withholding life and property for its protection. A husband’s responsibility to his wife consisted of treating her with kindness and providing for her comfort and happiness.45 Men's civic obligations need not surpass their familial ones.

There is little information on existing schools for girls during World War I. In 1916, Samuel Jordan, credited with founding the Alborz Boys’ College in Tehran, maintained that Tehran had approximately seventy schools for boys and about forty for girls. Jordan observed that despite the war, Iranians had not diminished their “deep enthusiasm…for education and their abiding faith in it as the only hope for the future.”46 Another
report written during these years from the American Presbyterian mission in Urumiyah noted the “difficulties of organizing school work where girls are not expected to go to school.” 47 Notwithstanding these obstacles, Sadiqah Dawlatabadi, daughter of the leading Shi‘i jurist Shaykh Hadi Dawlatabadi, opened a school for girls in Isfahan called Umm al-Madaris (the Mother of Schools). 48 Iran also established its first state schools for girls in 1918. 49 In 1923, an announcement in a Persian newspaper advertised that the Franco-Persian School was accepting girls for the elementary and middle school years. 50

Although Iranian women made education a focus of their activism after World War I, they continued pushing for suffrage. In 1919, the International Woman Suffrage Conference issued a resolution articulating its desire “that the franchise be granted to the women of all countries on the same basis as men; that married women shall not be deprived of their nationality without their consent, and that existing inequalities between men and women shall be removed.” 51 The resolution sought equality in employment opportunities for women and men and parity in the “moral standard” of both sexes. Although this congress had no legal impact on the lives of women in Iran, its demands would later be echoed in resolutions adopted by the United Nations, an international organization that Iran would join and whose resolutions regarding women would be bitterly opposed by some religious groups in the country, including the Fedaiyan-i Islam. 52 In May 1926, an Iranian delegate attended the International Congress of the Woman Suffrage Alliance, held in Paris. 53

Majlis delegates, however, dodged the issue of suffrage and instead took up the subject of women’s education. 54 Some considered illiteracy an impediment to women’s equality and social progress. 55 Others wondered whether the founding of schools would be sufficient to change attitudes and public ethics. As one writer speculated: “Will literacy teach patriotism…unfortunately one must emphatically answer ’No!’ From reading a book no one can acquire wisdom and ethics.” 56 Yet motherhood and motherly love could teach
values that might prove impossible to inculcate through schooling and education alone: “Yes, in the word *mother*, in this meaningful word, the future of humanity is made. If the heart of a mother becomes devoid of this love, families will be ruined…and humanity will be sacrificed.”  

The content of women’s education instilled maternalist themes such as child rearing and marriage, along with literacy.

These subjects predominated in the pages of the periodical press. In 1922, for instance, *Bahar* considered the position of women in the twentieth century. Reflecting on the advances of the “civilized” world, this piece bemoaned by contrast Iran’s backwardness. Such discussions, of course, were not new among Iranian intellectuals, but at this time momentous political changes had taken place in Iran. Just a year earlier, Reza Khan and Sayyid Zia al-Din Tabataba’i had orchestrated a coup that marked the eventual demise of the Qajar regime. Moreover, the country was recovering from the hardships of the First World War, which had hampered efforts to bolster public education for both women and men. This article maintained that Iran’s troubles were rooted in the ignorance of its women, who in the past had been denied basic opportunities. However, the writer posited that “wherever women have shared in social responsibilities…order and stability have been evidenced in society.”  

Lauding the positive contributions of women historically, and in particular their success in overcoming prejudices encountered over their purportedly inferior abilities, this piece concluded optimistically with the statement that the twentieth century was the century of women (*qarn-i bistum qarn-i zan ast*).

Women redoubled their literary output after the war, and new publications inculcated the virtues of patriotic motherhood. In 1921, Fakhr Afaq Parsa, editor of the newly founded journal *Jahan-i Zanan* (Women’s World), argued for women’s literacy since educated women could benefit from reading necessary literature on hygiene and household management (*khanah dari*). Without access to this written advice, girls had no choice but to gain knowledge of home economics from uneducated nannies, thus perpetuating a cycle of dysfunction in the home. Afaq cited a saying attributed to the Prophet
that the pursuit of knowledge was incumbent upon men and women. “Pursue knowledge,” she quoted, “even if it takes you to China.”  

The schooling of women appeared less threatening to men and to the patriarchal status quo if situated in the familiar surrounding of the home. As Afaq contended, a man’s duty was to work “outside the home,” whereas a woman’s role was “maintaining the home.” Yet during its short run her publication also carried features on housekeeping that went beyond teaching women about child care, including an essay on preventing fire hazards in the home.

This journal provided a rough estimate of students attending schools in Tehran and Mashhad. Using statistics cited in another women’s journal, ‘Alam-i Nisvan, Afaq reasoned that approximately twenty women out of a thousand in Tehran had access to an education in a population of approximately 500,000, while in Mashhad the number amounted to no more than three per thousand in a population of approximately 200,000. Afaq went on to compare the dearth of educational facilities in the province of Khorasan with the neighboring country of Afghanistan, which had recently opened a school for girls in Kabul.

The burgeoning women’s movement, partly in conformity with the secular emphasis of the state, typically adopted non-religious symbols to convey its message of political activism and inclusion for women. In a schoolbook from the late Qajar era designed specifically for girls’ schools Joan of Arc, by virtue of her patriotism, appeared a more appropriate paragon for modern Iranian girls than did Fatima. Yet some women journalists such as Fakhr Afaq looked to Islamic history in search of exemplary women as they tried to promote modern virtues like education. The inaugural issue of her journal, Jahan-i Zanan, maintained that during the golden age of the khilafat women’s social stature improved, and many learned women lived among the Arabs of the first Islamic century. She then went on to argue that during the Umayyid period “women's misfortune began.” Afaq Parsa was forced to shut down her paper after she published a scathing letter by a woman from Kerman who had criticized the slow pace of
reform for women in Iran. When this letter was printed, the 'ulama apparently objected to its contents, and Afaq's journal ceased publication. Afaq did not end her career after this episode, however, and continued publishing her views in other women's magazines, including the one associated with the Patriotic Women's League.

Popular women's literature reinforced mothering as a modern profession for the expanding community of readers. In 1923, a magazine affiliated with the Patriotic Women's League of Iran began circulation under the editorship of Muhtaram Iskandari. Writing at a time when Iran faced political uncertainty, Iskandari, who headed the League, made the tutelage of women a focus of her patriotic activity by founding a school for the education of adult women. The lead article in her magazine, Majallah-i Nisvan-i Vatankhvah-i Iran, dealt with women's education and stressed that “only the acquisition of knowledge brings progress for human beings and their children.” Ethics or manners (akhlaq), Iskandari continued, came from the Arabic root khalq, meaning “creation,” and so the study of ethics needed to focus on perfecting human beings and their nature. In a subsequent essay, Iskandari contended that the only reason women in the East were regarded as “cognitively deficient” was because they had little access to education, a condition worsened by the inattention of Eastern men to this matter. Women's education, however, had to embrace themes of moral and national import such as physical fitness, marriage, hygiene, and population growth in order to be relevant.

Modern educators stressed hygiene as a social necessity as well as a patriotic duty, and emphasized the need for women to maintain an active lifestyle. Women took on the role of nurses, both literally and figuratively, in incorporating hygiene into the girls’ curriculum. A schoolbook written for girls in 1923 reflects this point. Devoting approximately one-third of the text to the subject and to the practice of cleanliness (nizafat), the book included a section on caring for the sick (mariz dari), which it considered a “natural” function of women and a skill that necessitated women's familiarity with elementary medical principles. In addition, the six-year
course of study for girls in elementary school included a class each year on hygiene. In the fifth and sixth years, the class pursued a curriculum that included a detailed exploration of disease, cleanliness, and pollution.\textsuperscript{76}

Writers for the league’s magazine composed short pieces for women about hygiene and germ theory as well. Mothers, the journal argued, could celebrate medical advances such as the development of vaccinations that cured or lessened the side effects of childhood diseases such as diphtheria. In fact, mothers had an obligation to become informed about available drugs that physicians could administer to help sick children recover from potentially life-threatening illnesses.\textsuperscript{77}

Muhtaram Iskandari’s untimely death on 26 July 1924 (23 Dhul-hijja 1342 AH) at the age of twenty-nine was reported by a colleague, Nur al-Huda Manganah Nurani, as a tragedy for Iranian women. Despite suffering from chronic ailments, Iskandari had devoted herself to women's causes, including the establishment of an industrial school.\textsuperscript{78} Another contemporary, Sadiqah Dawlatabadi, commemorated Iskandari by encouraging Iranian women to continue Iskandari's activism and to organize schools, conferences, and charitable associations for the needy and unemployed.\textsuperscript{79} After Iskandari's death, Mastureh Afshar assumed editorship of the league's newspaper, and the league continued functioning until 1932.\textsuperscript{80}

As Iran faced separatist impulses among its tribes, state-endorsed education strove to domesticate the homeland by scripting a homogenous ideology that instilled love of homeland (\textit{hubb-i vatan}).\textsuperscript{81} The authoritarian nature of patriotic education fit in well with maternalist objectives that emphasized social hierarchy through the family.\textsuperscript{82} Some writers remained sanguine about women's advancement. Others perpetuated the cult of domesticity in arguing for women's secular education. In 1924, the Persian journal \textit{Farangistan}, which was published in Berlin, printed a column on the education of women (\textit{tarbiyat-i zan}). It stated that in Iran whenever women were mentioned, the image of a weak and mentally unsound creature appeared before one's eyes. In actuality, such a picture would elicit derision in Iran of the
1920s. While women were not necessarily incapacitated, they were, however, dissimilar from men. According to this writer, because men and women had different physical and emotional characteristics, they had to be educated in different ways. Women needed to concern themselves with the tasks of the home and seek professions that took into account their particular physical and emotional makeup. In Europe men became involved in “hard labor,” such as working in mines, while women became writers, nurses, and the like. 

Presumably, in Iran the division of labor needed to mimic these same lines.

In 1925, another journal, Farhang, reflected on the position of women in society, arguing that had school doors been open to women as they had been to men, the female population would have benefited equally from this access to education. It further stressed that the nation’s progress and prosperity depended on the education of its women. However, the article pointed out that Iran’s current schools, with their incomplete educational agendas and meager budgets, were inadequate for the critical task of intellectually nurturing youth. Instead, learned women had to participate vigorously in promoting female education through the establishment of associations. Other steps that could be taken to improve women’s status in society included the founding of journals geared to women, the publication and translation of books that highlighted women’s past accomplishments, and the production of theatrical performances with instructive value.

One of these women’s magazines, Payk-i Sa’dat-i Nisvan, founded by Rawshanak Naw’dust in Gilan, made patriotic motherhood and education a frequent subject of discussion. This journal, reflecting a socialist perspective, received assistance from the Iranian Cultural Society, which affiliated itself with Soviet politics. Many of the themes and activities it took up, however, resembled those of women working outside a socialist framework. For instance, in its first issue it celebrated motherhood and the role of pregnant women as progenitors of society, as had earlier women’s journals. As Naw’dust glowingly remarked, “What expression is prouder than that of a pregnant mother’s?” Pregnant women, she
claimed, let it be known with their eyes that they were the ones who nurtured human populations. Unlike other contemporary writers, Naw’dust did not consider marriage a natural and preordained human act, but rather an artificial one.

Promoting some of her socialist beliefs, Naw’dust took up the cause of the working class and the rural women in the northern Iranian province of Gilan who labored under difficult conditions in the rice fields. She urged “open-minded and active” women to pay attention to the needs of diligent rural women and to lead them to the path of education and enlightenment. Rural women “who live in darkness, away from education,” earned so little from their labors that they might fall to prostitution if they were deprived of two days’ worth of work, she warned. Naw’dust contended that “the only steps taken for improving the situation of Iranian women have been pursued by enlightened women from the middle class,” including teachers and students. By contrast, upper-class women concerned themselves with superficial and cosmetic improvements in the lives of Iranian women. She criticized women who were unaffiliated with various benevolent societies and who pursued “feminist” ideals individually. As Naw’dust explained, “Many individual women who are not connected with associations have ‘feminist’ beliefs and view the question of women’s freedom...apart from national interests, while others...regard all men without exception as their enemies.” This passage includes one of the earliest overt uses, if not the first, of the term feminism in a Persian newspaper. Feminism, Naw’dust believed, could not be practiced in social isolation or in exclusion from national interests. In her view, the Iranian women's movement was bound with the ideals of patriotic womanhood, despite her affinity for the working classes. As she wrote in the second issue of her journal: “Honorable women...if you raise patriotic children, know for certain that [you] have remedied all the hardships of Iran. If I were in your place, the first word that I would teach my child would be ‘Iran.’” Motherhood became entwined with patriotism.
In 1926, Ittila’at provided statistics for elementary schools throughout Iran. These figures showed the wide range of variation in the availability of schools to women. While Azerbaijan had several foreign schools for girls, Khuzistan was reported as having none. That same year, a preliminary report prepared for the Rockefeller Foundation found that “the greater part of the population is illiterate. There are small schools in most of the villages where children are taught to read and write.” The same report maintained that the “latest available figures from the Ministry of Public Instruction show that in 1924 there were in the country 252 Government schools, 229 National schools, 108 Private schools, 87 Foreign schools, 240 Religious schools (Mosques), and 1,026 ‘Maktab’ schools, or a total of 1,942 establishments. Of the above, 1,796 were for boys, and 146 for girls.” In other words, investment in education for boys was ten times greater than that for girls, at least based on the number of schools. In addition, the government schools “provide education to 73,534 boys, 17,485 girls and 4,979 students in religion.” Moreover, many buildings used as schools were ordinary houses that could not accommodate large numbers of students. While there were eight secondary schools for boys, only one existed for girls. This disparity offers one explanation for the high rate of illiteracy among women. It also explains the ardent desire of activists to expand educational opportunities for women.

The culture of early education impeded the pursuit of knowledge beyond the elementary level since many Iranian children often quit school in order to join the workforce: “As a rule, the children do not remain long at school as they start to work at a very early age.” Adelaide Kibbe, a physician working in Mashhad, similarly noted the presence of children in the labor force: “Little children, and skillful workers they are, too, work all day long in a rug factory for not enough food, no school or sunshine or play.” Child labor existed not only in the carpet industry, but also in other urban and rural sectors. In addition, the architecture of schools was not designed expressly for educational purposes. Even in the capital itself, “schools are not buildings especially designed as schools. They are, for the most part, ordinary dwelling-houses which have been hired by the Ministry, as a rule, the rooms
are not large enough for the number of pupils and there is over-crowding.”

What role, if any, did Islam have in women's education and the cultural feminism of the early twentieth century? Before the inauguration of the Pahlavi regime in 1926, two schoolbooks published for use in girls' schools made only oblique references to Islam, and schoolgirls conversing are depicted in chadors (full-body coverings). Aside from these incidental references, the available schoolbooks for girls from the late Qajar and early Pahlavi eras did not discuss Islam in a meaningful way. However, the guidelines in 1924 for girls' elementary schools included courses on the Qur'an and on religion that taught the basics of prayer (namaz) and obedience to God and his Prophet. Other regulations aimed to uphold the modesty of girls through proper attire by emphasizing that schoolgirls should wear dark colors (gray, black, brown, or navy) and long-sleeved shirts that did not open in the front.

The Ministry of Culture reported that in 1918–19, 244 elementary and middle schools existed in Iran. More than 24,000 students were enrolled at these schools, with girls accounting for just over 1,800. Girls made up nearly 8 percent of all students enrolled in the country. Although statistics on women's schooling are not uniformly available on an annual basis, in 1928, Payk-i Sa'adat-i Nisvan published an overview of the educational facilities for women in Iran's northern province of Gilan, noting that within five years, the number of women's schools had increased, as had the number of women attending those schools. The formal—that is, state-endorsed —education of women in schools or other nationalist institutions would become critical to mobilizing a segment of the female population, quite often a privileged one. Educational indoctrination inculcated through the study of manners or ethics (akhlAQ) as well as the pursuit of physical fitness would promote dynamism and vigor in the modern Iranian. Citizens healthy in mind and spirit could best serve the nation.

While the state could not entirely control people's habits at home, it could advocate certain values, including hygiene and
sports, through its schools. In order for exercise to become more than just a passing fad, it had to be made a part of every Iranian's daily life. In other words, a culture of health, fitness, and athleticism had to be forged. One article created an antecedent for Iranians' purported penchant for sports by pointing out that sports historically had been a prominent feature of the great civilizations of the Greeks and the Romans, as well as the glorified society of pre-Islamic Iran. In those cultures, too, physical exercise was considered a “regular activity” in people's lives. In 1925–26, the Iran Bethel School for girls, run by American Presbyterians, reported that physical education had become more common and comprehensive and that from “the sixth class up a hygiene text-book was used in connection with the gym classes.”

The Bethel School's gradual appeal to upper-class Muslim Iranians families showed the ways in which the Western curriculum had infiltrated women's education.

In 1927, a law passed making physical fitness a requirement in schools and introducing sports in the daily life of the Iranian youth. The law stipulated that physical exercise would become mandatory in all new schools and that except for holidays exercise would form a regular part of the school regimen. A charter for the Pish Ahangi (Boy Scouts) of Iran was also established as a way of promoting “virtuous behavior” and to ingrain the culture of fitness and health throughout the country. It was followed by a Girl Scouts organization. As Sa'id Nafisi, a well-known scholar and university professor, remarked in reflecting on the creation of the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and the establishment of athletic facilities in Iran: “The stronger, the more powerful, and the healthier the human body is, the more a person will advance in his work, and [thus] his mind will be healthier...and his aptitude greater for the acquisition of knowledge.”

Nafisi regarded scouting as an effective way to promote physical and spiritual fitness in the interest of forging a more industrious and powerful citizenry.

Sport became intimately associated with Iran's youth culture of the 1930s, in which physical fitness was considered a by-product of a hygienic lifestyle. For women, too, exercise
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Schoolbooks mandated by the Education Department (Vizarat-i Ma'arif) played a part in defining the ideals of patriotic womanhood. Many of these texts circumscribed women's activity to the domestic sphere but then strove to make domesticity a patriotic commodity. The comportment of women, whether inside or outside the home, became a feature of modern education, and this behavioral emphasis in female education was carried out under the rubric of akhlaq, or manners. An analysis of the content of women's textbooks also reveals the trend toward secularism in women's education and the gradual effacement of Islam from women's textbooks.

Descriptions of women's character often depicted ideal types—the “kind mother” or the “obedient daughter”—as recognizable paradigms. Women's nature predisposed them to “gentleness, “empathy,” “honesty,” and “sincerity,” and a woman achieved happiness once she became “the queen of her husband's heart and the head of the household” (malakah-i dil-i shawhar va ra'isah-i khanah). Even manhood (tukhm-i mardi) depended on the influence of the woman within the family. A harmonious family life depended on the proper comportment of both women and men. At times, men needed to be “brave, strong, warlike,” while on other occasions they profited from being “humble, forgiving, and kind.” For men, too, gender roles and male ideals fluctuated and became rewritten as experiences of family life changed. Yet it was often difficult for both women and men to conform to these ideal types in their daily lives.

Badr al-Muluk Bamdad, a secular educator and social activist, composed two noteworthy textbooks used in girls’ schools. In 1931, Bamdad published the second edition of a textbook on akhlaq, or manners, which conformed to the program of instruction of the Ministry of Education for the third year in women's middle schools. The topics discussed in 1931 complemented the teachings of the Qajar era. It continued much of the emphasis placed on women's proper comportment...
in society, but reflections abounded on personal codes of conduct. In particular, rationality, bodily exercise, willpower, industriousness, and accountability for one’s actions were lauded as salutary virtues. Bamdad also stressed cleanliness as the “best mode of avoiding illness.” As she explained, “Before all else we require bodily health.... What joy or fruits can a life that is lived in the cradle of misery and illness bring?” Mothers and housewives could make personal hygiene a part of their daily living skills, in addition to their children learning it at school.

Women who promoted disorderly behavior in the household (bi nazmi) were admonished, for “not until the little familial governments (hukumat’ha-yi kuchak-i khanavadagi) are in order will the state agencies become orderly.” In other words, orderliness and organization in administrative settings began in a well-regulated home and family. Women’s domestic responsibilities still ranked high among their patriotic duties, particularly as women seemed predisposed by their “nature” to form a family. As Bamdad explained, “It is for this reason that the program of the girls’ schools has been organized in such a way as to prepare them for managing the home. For reading and writing alone would produce people who would not be of use to the family or to the nation.” Still, Bamdad included a section called “Work” in her textbook, in which she stated that “choosing a profession is one of the most important matters of life,” an indication that employment outside the home was gradually becoming more desirable for Iranian women.

Sadiqah Dawlatabadi, a contemporary of Bamdad’s, also endorsed women's work. Writing in 1932, she observed that Iranian women were benefiting from their newfound independence to work in stores and reap the rewards of their labors. She enjoined working women to pioneer other businesses and to expand the professional opportunities of women beyond the fields of education and government, where jobs remained limited. Women were suited not just to fields such as midwifery, teaching, medicine, and secretarial work, but could also launch stores and businesses. Sewing, too, offered self-sufficiency by giving women the skills to create
useful and attractive outfits themselves, without having to rely on tailors. Economic self-sufficiency and financial independence became key messages of Iranian feminists.¹¹⁹ Traditional female crafts such as weaving and knitting retained their appeal as skills fit for Iranian ladies. Such industriousness not only displayed the talents and self-sufficiency of the modern Iranian woman, but it also brought about economic profits through the increased sale of yarn.¹²⁰

The field of journalism offered upper-class women additional opportunities to pursue social activism and to promote the cause of women. The government cited women's increased participation in journalism as a successful indicator of the women's movement.¹²¹ In 1932, writer and activist Zandukht Shirazi founded a periodical entitled Dukhtaran-i Iran (The Daughters of Iran). In its pages, she expressed gratitude to those who were supporting her endeavor, connecting the life of the periodical not only with herself but with Iranian women and girls more generally.¹²² But as one of the male writers of Dukhtaran-i Iran observed, female journalism appeared rather short-lived. While every now and then a few women would successfully launch a magazine, the periodical would instigate controversy and then be phased out. Isma’il Javid, the writer of this essay and an acquaintance of Kazemzadeh Iranshahr, who published an eponymous Persian journal in Germany, averred that the movement toward women's independence suffered from the absence of unity among women and the distance of women from one another.¹²³ By distance, he was presumably referring to their seclusion in the home. Women of the pen, on the other hand, could serve their cause by inviting other women to join in a “national unity of Iranian women” (vahdat-i milli-yi zanan-i Iran) through their prose and publications.

Although women had pioneered associations and even political groups prior to this time, the power of the word, as Javid observed, might broaden the scope of women's involvement and possibly lessen the pervasive presence of patriarchy. This subtle shift had already led to the expansion of cultural associations geared toward women across various Iranian cities and devolved the responsibility of empowerment
to women themselves. But more could be done to involve women. The underlying theme of women's intellectual independence spoke to a somewhat understated element in the secular women's movement of the early Pahlavi era. Male intellectuals such as journalists, doctors, and policy makers had scripted much of the official discourse of the women's movement in the early Pahlavi era, whether it concerned reproductive politics, education, or unveiling. Ironically, as Javid himself noted, “the young girls of Iran must endeavor somewhat in their education and ethical growth to achieve a measure of independence of thought...and no longer need the approval of men.”

The Pahlavi state, however, often determined the aims of secular female education. Badr al-Muluk Bamdad, for instance, composed another textbook for use in women's schools, entitled *Home Management*, a text to be used primarily in high schools for women. In 1931, the book was already in its seventh printing. That an educated, patriotic woman—and not a man—had authored this work did little to change the philosophy of female education. In fact, the “science” of housekeeping and household management had only grown more refined. This continuity is not surprising given that state endorsement was necessary for the publication and dissemination of such schoolbooks.

Citing the 'ulama, *Home Management* claimed that “it is only through creating orderly families that one can produce strong societies and ethnic groups.” Housekeeping contributed positively to the creation of a vibrant national community and thus was considered “the prerequisite for the prosperity of the nation.” Because of its perceived role in forging an orderly, obedient family and society, home management was elevated to an academic discipline and “science,” about which, like other sciences, “great scholars” had written voluminous tracts. Since the nineteenth century, Iranian intellectuals had heralded the virtues of science, and the elevation of housekeeping to a science increased the import and urgency of the subject in women's schools. By labeling housekeeping a science, Iranian schoolteachers and thinkers also seemed to suggest that the creation of an obedient, orderly society had a
scientific formula intimately linked to the home and family. If such values could be enforced at the familial level, then the Iranian nation would finally become the orderly, harmonious society to which many patriots aspired. In an ideal household, women succeeded in curtailing strife and disobedience. Instead, they promoted the ideals of hierarchy and obedience, cleanliness and culture. These values could be uniformly inculcated through the educational system and its media of instruction: schoolbooks and mothers.

Anticipating criticism from certain quarters, Home Management acknowledged that in the past some women had managed to run their households effectively without school instruction. The text, however, justified the teaching of home management as an attempt to disseminate the experience of knowledgeable housewives to their unseasoned counterparts, since the mistakes of poor household management could not easily be undone. Home Management covered subjects as diverse as child rearing and table manners, even including a picture that showed the proper arrangement of utensils on a dining room table. Bamdad aimed to canonize housewifery and patriotic womanhood through such carefully scripted educational texts. Mothers’ instruction would produce diligent, patriotic male citizens in the service of the homeland and deferential female companions in the service of patriotic men. Iranian women and society thus became domesticated through the educational system in an effort to secure patriarchy and patriotism.

In 1936, Hajar Tarbiyat, a modernist educator, gave a speech before the Society for Women at which she unequivocally remarked: “The current conditions of today's world necessitate that women must be skillful, vigilant, learned and must know everything in addition to being able to succeed at administering their home and nurturing their child, which is one of their natural duties.” The expectations and demands of modern Iranian women had become more ambitious and comprehensive, in part because the aims and content of women's education had broadened considerably. Formal schooling and academic training, despite the rigid guidelines promulgated by the state, not only recast the culture of
domesticity in modern Iran but also introduced additional venues of industry that complemented women's traditional responsibilities. While reinforcing the importance of their domestic roles, Iranian society allowed women eventually to expand their roles through increased access to educational opportunities, changes in the curriculum, and professional involvement in civic life. Women did not really break out of the cult of domesticity, but they did venture beyond it. Women eventually founded a wide array of associations and sociopolitical networks that would broaden their involvement and decision making in civic matters.\(^{131}\)

Patriarchy continued influencing the language and emphasis of the women's movement, particularly among male writers and activists who inspired and supported female literacy.\(^ {132}\) This trend persisted in part because of the time-honored belief that women actually fared well under patriarchy and that their material well-being depended upon the men in their lives: their fathers, husbands, and sons. Early Iranian feminists, however, broke the myth of benevolent patriarchy. For this reason female activists such as Zandukht Shirazi, Rawshanak Naw’dust, and Sadiqah Dawlatabadi lauded women’s efforts to pursue careers outside the home, a concept reinforced in the curricula of girls’ schools.

By 1929 women at the high school level studied academic subjects other than household management, such as mathematics, history, geography, physics, and foreign languages, and prepared for becoming instructors themselves. While the curriculum embraced domesticity, it included instruction in many other fields, a process that gradually prepared a growing number of women for assuming new occupations. In 1937, for instance, in girls’ middle schools, the subjects of household management (\textit{tadbir-i manzil}), child care (\textit{bachihdari}), and sewing (\textit{khayyati}) were only three among the seventeen classes that women were required to take in a three-year course of study. In total, more class time was allotted to the combined study of Persian, history and geography, foreign language, mathematics, and science than to stereotypically female courses such as sewing.\(^ {133}\) Here one witnesses a gradual shift in the women’s movement from the
emphasis on patriotic *motherhood* to that of patriotic *womanhood*. Women would no longer be judged exclusively through motherhood, but rather through literacy, education, fitness, and professions outside of homemaking.

By 1936, women also gained the possibility of pursuing higher education at the University of Tehran, established in 1934, and twelve female students became the first women to enroll there.\textsuperscript{134} That same year, the Ministry of Interior reported that 58,600 girls were enrolled in elementary and traditional schools, and approximately 2,000 women were employed as teachers. Girls attending middle schools numbered over 3,400. Numerous women also attended industrial schools as well as institutes of fine arts and fashion.\textsuperscript{135} Even if these figures are somewhat exaggerated, when analyzed along with other accounts, they suggest that educational opportunities for women had grown at an unprecedented pace during the interwar years. An analysis conducted by the daily newspaper *Ittila’at* showed that in 1922, only 180 girls attended a grade school, whereas by 1937, more than 3,000 girls had completed an elementary education.\textsuperscript{136}

Not only had the number of schools for women increased, but the range of educational facilities had broadened as well. In January 1935, the British Legation in Iran acknowledged that “progress must be recorded” on the subject of education. As the counselor at the legation, V. A. L. Mallet, observed, “I was interested to see children from the black tent dwellers in the Lar Valley plodding several miles to school in another tent ‘village’ last summer. The standard is probably low enough, but the number of at least partial literates in the next generation will be several hundredfold that of the present adult literate population.”\textsuperscript{137} Rural communities would gain better access to education with the creation of the Literacy Corps (Sipah-i Danish) in 1963.\textsuperscript{138}

In addition, charitable institutions emerged to nurture and school orphans. In 1938 the Arts School and Orphanage of Shahpur opened its doors. At the start the orphanage housed 130 girls and 70 boys. By 1959, the numbers had jumped to 200 girls and 120 boys. Funds for its operation came directly
from a waqf, or Islamic charitable endowment, entrusted to the king. The children received training in the arts and had the opportunity to take a range of classes. Girls could enroll in classes for cooking, sewing, home economics, and music. They could also train to become a physician's assistant. Children received certificates for the completion of their training.\textsuperscript{139} Charitable work not only fulfilled the social and religious obligations of royal patrons but also helped to win them public support and approbation.

The expansion of schools and the emphasis on public education extended to adults as well as children. In January 1939, based on a press report, the number of adults attending classes had increased to over 100,000, indicating that the courses “are steadily growing in popularity.” Moreover, the adults came from diverse backgrounds\textsuperscript{(p.145)} and included “peasants, masons, labourers, bath attendants, butchers, chauffeurs, waiters,” and the like.\textsuperscript{140}

By 1942, Sadiqah Dawlatabadi, a tireless advocate of women's rights, had given the journal she first began editing in 1921 a specific mission—“to educate the mother” (\textit{tarbiyat-i madar}).\textsuperscript{141} While Dawlatabadi made motherhood a serious topic of discussion, she also carved a literary space within her journal for exploring differences of opinion about the women's movement. Dawlatabadi passionately defended the activities of the Society for Women against its detractors such as political activist Maryam Firuz, even as she recognized some of the limitations and cultural excesses of the Reza Shah era.\textsuperscript{142} Patriotic motherhood perhaps unintentionally opened up other career vistas and political possibilities for Iranian women. Although the demands of domesticity persisted, many women succeeded in exploring a world outside of the home. If initially female education strove to mold efficient house managers and spouses, it eventually extended beyond those parameters to forge a literate and diversely skilled professional female citizenry.\textsuperscript{143}

In 1944, Queen Fawzia, the shah's first wife, addressed Iranian women in a recently founded magazine, \textit{Alam-i Zanan}. The queen maintained that women's most significant social responsibility was “raising upright children for the
country.” Although echoing such clichés, the magazine went on to feature Iranian women who had moved far beyond their identities as mothers. The first issue included a biography of Dr. Shams al-Muluk Musahab, the first Iranian woman to earn her doctorate in Persian literature and a future senator. Musahab’s academic career mirrored the shifts that had taken place in women’s education. As a youngster, she had received her primary education at home from her mother. Eventually she attended various girls’ schools and was invited to pursue her doctorate in Persian literature. An accomplished writer, Musahab served as principal of Parvin High School, supported by the state, and worked actively with the Women’s Party (Hizb-i Zanan), established in 1943. Although committed to women’s education, Dr. Musahab did not shirk her familial obligations in pursuit of her career. On the contrary, she considered her domestic life of primary concern, a virtue Musahab claimed to have inherited from her mother. For Musahab, domesticity went hand in hand with literacy and education.
Women from different ends of the political spectrum worked to enhance educational opportunities for girls in Iran even as they embraced motherhood. While the subjects of female education and motherhood had widespread support, consensus could not easily be reached on the veil. Nowhere would women's unity and patriotism be tested more severely than in the state's decision to impose the unveiling of Iranian women. This controversy would cause a sharp divide among the different classes of Iranians.

Notes:

(1.) Habl al-Matin, Tehran, No. 103, 19 Rajab 1325/29 August 1907, 1.

(2.) Nijat, No. 22, 19 Ramadan 1327/5 October 1909, 4.


(5.) Khan-i Khanan, “Risalah-i dar siyasat,” 1897, Manuscript at the National Library, #RF 385, 75–76. I am in the process of editing this manuscript for publication.


(7.) *Ittila’*, No. 20, 19 January 1904, 8.

(8.) PHS, RG 91, Box 1, “Tehran Station, 1910–1911.” The newspaper *Danish* also reported the opening of a school for orphan girls. *Danish*, No. 4, 22 Shavval 1328/27 October 1910, 2.

(9.) *Danish*, No. 4, 22 Shavval 1328/26 October 1910, 2. (I refer to the copies of *Danish* published by the National Library of Iran.) *Ruh al-Quds* also reports the opening of a school for orphans in Bujnurd. *Ruh al-Quds*, No. 10, 6 Ramadan 1325/14 October 1907, 4.

(10.) *Khayr al-Kalam*, second year, No. 21, 6 Dhul-hijja 1327/19 December 1909, 4.

(12.) PHS, RG 91, Box 1, “Report, 1911-1912,” 1.

(13.) Ibid.


(15.) For some statistics on women’s schools in 1912-13, see *Shikufah*, second year, No. 20, 1 Safar 1332/1913, 3-4. See also Najmabadi, “Crafting an Educated Housewife in Iran,” 107-11.

(16.) *Ruh al-Quds*, No. 25, 4 May 1908, 2. The article notes that European teachers at the Dar al-Funun were getting paid, while the Iranian instructors were not.

(17.) *Junub*, No. 22, 25 May 1911, 6.

(18.) Huma Rizvani, *Lavayih-i Aqa Shaykh Fazl Allah Nuri* (Tehran: Nashr-i Tarihk-i Iran, 1983), 28. Other religious scholars, however, such as Mirza Hadi Dawlatabadi, father of Sadiqih Dawlatabadi, endorsed the founding of girls’ schools, and female members of their family became activists in the cause of women’s education. Najmabadi, “Crafting an Educated Housewife,” 123 n. 103.


(24.) For accounts of the constitutional revolution that have significantly informed Western accounts of the subject, see Ahmad Kasravi, Tarikh-i Inqilab-i Mashrutiyat (Tehran: Intisharat-i Amir Kabir, 1984), and Mehdi Malizadeh, Tarikh-i Inqilab-i Mashrutiyat-i Iran (Tehran: ’Ilmi, 1984). Other accounts have been written by Abrahamian, Afary, Bayat, Ettehadieh, Keddie, Najmabadi, and Sedghi.


(27.) Kashani-Sabet, “Frontier Fictions,” ch. 6. The content of many schoolbooks used in women's schools in the 1920s is a focus of this chapter. Unfortunately, it is often overlooked in studies of women's education and nationalism in Iran despite the value of the schoolbooks themselves. I must also take this opportunity to correct an error that appears in the text: Muhtarim Iskandari's name is misidentified as Muhtaram Ikhtisari on 183. I have no reasonable explanation for this oversight other than to attribute it to human error.

(28.) For discussions of the nation as a motherland, see Afsaneh Najmabadi, “The Erotic Vatan [Homeland] as Beloved and Mother: To Love, to Possess, and to Protect,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 39, 3 (1997): 442–67. For related discussions, see Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, “The Frontier Phenomenon: Perceptions of the Land in Iranian Nationalism,” Critique 38, 3 (1997): 19–38. For one reference to mothers and patriotism, see Shikufah, third year, No. 19, 4 Dhul-hijja 1333/1915, 2–3. Also, Shikufah, fourth year, No. 5, 3 Jumada al-Avval 1334/1916. There are numerous other references to patriotism in Shikufah as well, though it is significant to point out that Danish placed less emphasis on this issue.

(30.) *Tarbiyat*, No. 75, 11 April 1898, 300, for reports of a measles epidemic killing children.

(31.) *Hadid*, no. 13, 25 Rajab 1323/25 September 1905, 6. On the same page, this article notes further that knowing that lack of sanitation causes disease is important, since such ignorance breeds epidemics: “In India there is always plague, [whereas] the English, who maintain sanitary habits, do not become victims [of this disease].” Therefore, women had to be equipped with such knowledge to help limit the spread of disease in their family and in their nation.


(33.) This point has been eloquently argued and supported in a study by Camron Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman: Gender, State Policy, and Popular Culture, 1865–1946* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2002).

(34.) *Danish*, No. 1, 10 Ramadan 1328/14 September 1910, 2. Several editions of *Danish* and *Shikufah*, another women's journal that began publication in 1912, have been edited in Iran. See *Shikufah bih Inzimam-i Danish: Nakhustin Nashriyah'hayah Zanan-i Iran* (Tehran: Kitabkhana-yi Milli-yi Jumhuri-yi Islami-yi Iran, 1377/1999). In some instances, my references to these journals refer to original copies.

(35.) *Danish*, No. 6, 7 Dhul-qa'da 1328/9 November 1910, 3.

(36.) *Amuzgar*, No. 14, 10 Ramadan 1329/4 September 1911, 4.

(37.) *Amuzgar*, No. 14, 10 Ramadan 1329/4 September 1911, 4.

(38.) *Junub*, No. 16, 11 April 1911, 4.

(39.) *Shikufah*, fourth year, No. 1, 1 Safar 1334/8 December 1915, 3–4.

(40.) These ideas would be institutionalized through the textbooks published and used in the late Qajar period. See
Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions*, ch. 6, for more on this issue and for detailed discussions of the textbooks.

(41.) *Shikufah*, No. 8, 13 Jumada al-Avval 1333/29 March 1915, 2.

(42.) This point has not been lost on the Islamic Republic of Iran, either, which has allowed republication of many issues of these journals.


(44.) *Shikufah*, second year, No. 22, 5 Rabi’ al-Avval 1332/1 February 1914, 3–4.

(45.) Mirza Sayyid Muhammad Qummi, *Ta’limat-i Muduniyah* (Tehran: Shams, 1330/1912), 34. According to its title page, this textbook was approved and written according to the “program and instructions” of the Education Ministry.


(49.) Bamdad, *From Darkness into Light*, 56.

(50.) *Sitarah-i Iran*, No. 27, 23 September 1923, 4. In 1924, the newspaper *Vatan* reported the existence of what appears to be a small private school for girls in Tehran, *Vatan*, 6 November 1924, 4. Mirza Yusuf Khan Mua'dib a al-Mulk Richard had founded the Ecole Franco-Persane during the
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constitutinal period. Richard's mother was an Iranian and his father was a Frenchman employed at the Dar al-Funun. Bamdad, From Darkness into Light, 52.


(54.) Muzakirat-i Majlis, fourth Majlis, 16 Safar 1340/18 October 1921, 172–80.

(55.) Nahid, no. 3, 26 April 1921, 1. This is a general essay on the moral corruption of Iranian society, entitled “Fisad-i muhit,” in which women's illiteracy is considered a contributing factor to this general condition.

(56.) Majallah-i Nisvan-i Vatankhvah, Nos. 5–6, 1924, 19.

(57.) Ibid., 18–20.

(58.) One notable dissenter from the Qajar period was Mirza Malkum Khan, who frequently talked about nineteenth-century Iran's backwardness vis-à-vis the civilized world.

(59.) Bahar, second year, No. 7, Rajab 1340/1922, 430.

(60.) Ibid., 431.

(61.) Jahan-i Zanan, No. 2, 4 March 1921, 32–35.

(62.) Jahan-i Zanan, No. 1, February 1921, 7.
(63.) Ibid., 8.

(64.) Jahan-i Zanan, No. 5, 1921, 108.

(65.) Jahan-i Zanan, No. 3, 4, April 1921, 68.

(66.) Ibid., 69.

(67.) Kashani-Sabet, Frontier Fictions, ch. 6.

(68.) Jahan-i Zanan, first year, No. 1, 4 February 1921, 5–6. For a complementary essay on similar subjects, see Majallah-i Nisvan-i Vatankhvhah, No. 2, 1923, 11–13.


(71.) Sazman-i Asnad-i Milli-yi Iran, Interior Ministry, Report on Women's Movement (nihzat-i banuvan), 290/5-194-4, 5 April 1936. This report provides a history of the women's movement since 1921. Iskandari is credited with being the first woman to advocate women's renewal.

(72.) Majallah-i Nisvan-i Vatankhvhah, No. 1, 1923, 4–7. For similar arguments, see Jahan-i Zanan, No. 2, 1921, 1–4.

(73.) Majallah-i Nisvan-i Vatankhvhah, No. 2, 1923, 7.

(74.) Shikufah, No. 21, 6 Muharram 1334/14 November 1915, 1–2; Shikufah, No. 1, 6 Muharram 1333/24 November 1914, 2–3.

(75.) Ahmad Sa'adat, Rahnima-yih Sa'adat (Tehran, 1923), 97.

(76.) Vizarat Ma'arif, 172.

(77.) Majallah-i Nisvan-i Vatankhvhah, No. 1, 1923, 21–22.

(78.) Majallah-i Nisvan-i Vatankhvhah, Nos. 5–6, 1924, 2–4. For an interview with Nur al-Huda Manganah, in which she discusses the founding of the league and women's activism
during this era, see *Ittila’at*, “Siy va do Sal Nabard-i Tarikhi-yi Zanan-i Iran,” 17 Day 1346/7 January 1968, 14.

(79.) *Majallah-i Nisvan-i Vatankhva*, Nos. 7–8, 1924, 41–43.


(82.) *Majallah-i Nisvan-i Vatankhva*, for example, discusses these ideas, No. 1, 1302/1923, 21–22.

(83.) *Namah-i Farangistan*, No. 3, 1 July 1924, 110–12.


(85.) Ibid., 156–59.

(86.) For background information, see Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 90–101.

(87.) Ibid., 97.


(89.) *Payk-i Sa’adat-i Nisvan*, Nos. 4–5, 1928, 98–100.

(90.) *Payk-i Sa’adat-i Nisvan*, No. 2, January 1928, 42.

(91.) “Ihsa’iyah-i madaris-i Iran,” *Ittila’at*, Murdad 1305/1926.

(92.) Rockefeller Archive Center, RF, RG1.1, Series 77, Box 1, “Preliminary Report on Medical Education in Persia,” 16.

(93.) Ibid., 16.

(94.) Ibid., 17.

(95.) Ibid., 17–18.

(96.) Ibid., 17.

(97.) PHS, Fifteenth Annual Report of the American Christian Hospital, 35.


(100.) Dawlat-i 'Illyiah-i Iran, Vizarat-i Ma'arif, Salnamah-i Ahsa'iyah, 1307–1308 (1929), 168.

(101.) Ibid., 143.

(102.) Muhammad Hijazi, Mihan-i Ma (Tehran: Intisharat-i Vizarat-i Farhang, 1338/1959), 285.

(103.) Payk-i Sa'adat-i Nisvan, No. 6, Shahrivar 1307/August 1928, 166.


(107.) Vizarat-i Ma'arif va Awqaf va Sana'i-yi Mustazrafa: Ihsa'iyah-i Ma'arif va Madaris(1307–1308) (Tehran: Matba'a-yi Rawshana'i, n.d.), 27.


(112.) Dukhtaran-i Iran, No. 3, May–June 1932, 15.

(113.) Ibid., 16.

(114.) Akhlaq literature has been discussed in my work Frontier Fictions, ch. 6, and in Najmabadi, “Crafting an Educated Housewife in Iran.” From my reading of the akhlaq texts from the late Qajar period, I have rendered the term akhlaq into English as “manners” because of their heavy behavioral stress and their emphasis on feminine virtues. While Najmabadi has referred to them as ethics books, my sources were concerned less with ethics in the Aristotelian sense and more with the proper modes of social behavior for young Iranian women.

(115.) Bamdad, Akhlaq, 8.

(116.) Ibid., 32.

(117.) Ibid., 43.

(118.) Ibid., 41.

(119.) Dukhtaran-i Iran, No. 3, May–June 1932, 23.

(120.) “Bafandigi, bihtarin sargarmi-yih banuvan,” Ittila’at, 14 Bahman 1317/February 1939, 10.

(121.) Sazman-i Asnad-i Milli-yi Iran, Interior Ministry, Report on Women’s Movement (nihzat-i banuvan), 290/5-194-4, 5 April 1936.

(122.) Dukhtaran-i Iran, No. 3, May–June 1932, 6.

(123.) Ibid., 10–11.
(124.) Ibid., 12.


(126.) Ibid., 1.

(127.) Ibid., 3-4.

(128.) Ibid., 177-90.

(129.) See Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions*, ch. 6, for more on the role of education in Iranian nationalism and in domesticking the homeland.

(130.) *Ta'lim va Tarbiyat*, sixth year, No. 12, Isfand 1315/February-March 1937, 864.

(131.) *Salnamah-i Zanan-i Iran*, 100. Contrast views on “cult of domesticity” with Najabadi, “Crafting an Educated Housewife.”


(133.) *Ta'lim va Tarbiyat*, seventh year, No. 8, 1937.

(134.) Bamdad, *From Darkness into Light*, 98.

(135.) Sazman-i Asnad-i Milli-yi Iran, Interior Ministry, Report on Women's Movement (*nihzat-i banuvan*), 290/5-194-5, 5 April 1936. No figures were cited for girls attending specialty schools.

(136.) “Nihzat-i Banuvan-i Iran az sal-i 1301 shuru’ shud,” *Ittila’at*, 7 January 1968, 7. *Ittila’at* based this analysis on an article it had published decades earlier in Day 1316/January 1937 that compared statistics on female school enrollment.


(139.) Hijazi, *Mihan-i Ma*, 226.

(140.) *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 28:373.

(141.) *Zaban-i Zanan*, No. 1, December 1942, cover.

(142.) *Zaban-i Zanan*, No. 3, June 1945, 17–21.

(143.) For related discussions of this issue, see Najmabadi, “Crafting an Educated Housewife in Iran.”

(144.) *Alam-i Zanan*, No. 1, Tir 1323/June–July 1944, No. 1. For Musahab’s biography, see the same issue, 13.

(145.) Ibid., 13.
Defrocking the Nation

Unveiling and the Politics of Dress

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DOI:10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780195308860.003.0008

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter examines the politics of clothing in Iran. The choice of attire—to veil or not to veil, to wear or eschew the tie—not only reflected consumer interests and popular tastes but also revealed political proclivities. A citizen's outfit expressed either social conformity or political dissent. In 1936, Reza Shah decreed the mandatory unveiling of women as part of the women's renewal project, which alienated the religious classes and many women accustomed to veiling. However, it also provided a blueprint for the Islamic Republic of Iran to enforce its unique dress codes for women and men decades later.

Keywords: Iranian women, Iran, unveiling, veil, Muslim women, clothing, dress codes
From travelogues to memoirs, historical literature teems with absorbing accounts of Islamic women and the veil. The harem and the practice of seclusion undoubtedly have something to do with this fascination. Veiling, dictated by law and tradition, consumes contemporary societies beyond the boundaries of Iran. This curiosity makes sense from a historian's vantage point since Iranian women have twice become subjected to contradictory legal injunctions on veiling, and no study of Iranian women would be considered complete without a mention of veiling.

In Iran, clothing became a barometer of politics. The controversy over dress—the decision to veil or not to veil, the choice to wear or eschew the tie—expressed more than just a personal preference. The choice of attire not only reflected consumer interests and popular tastes but also revealed political proclivities.1 State intervention in fashion signaled an attempt to impose uniformity and control upon the individual. A citizen's outfit expressed either social conformity or political dissent.

Western visitors to Iran in the nineteenth century described Iranian society through descriptions of women's and men's attire. Tastes in attire exposed social mores and affected the public interactions of women and men. It is perhaps helpful to re-create—however imperfectly—the public appearance of Iranian women as gleaned from various travelogues and images. In 1807, a traveler to Iran, Edward Scott Waring, reported that Persian women typically did not "encumber themselves with many clothes.... A Peerahun and a pair of Zeer Jamus is the whole of the dress; the trowsers [sic] are made of thick velvet, and their shift either of muslin, silk, or gauze."2 Waring reported that many Iranians he encountered were typically "too poor to be fashionable," though variations in the color of their robes denoted differences in class and employment. Merchants, for example, did not wear "scarlet or crimson cloths." Although by some accounts silk clothing was prohibited, "they avoid this by mixing a very little cotton with them."3 When Persian women left the home, they concealed their faces and covered their bodies with a "cloak, which descends from the head to their
feet." That Persian women concealed their faces and bodies fascinated male observers, some of whom dwelled on the inferior and benighted social codes mandated against women by Islam. Persian society remained far from perfect in its treatment of women, but this inequity reflected not just local traditions but also a prevalent pattern of patriarchy in the nineteenth century.

Clothing embodied local customs and represented social distinctions between rural and urban communities, as well as gender. Justin Perkins, an American missionary who spent eight years in northwestern Iran, commented on the meanings of headdress among the different classes of people in Azerbaijan. As Perkins explained, “The Seyeds are the reputed lineal descendants of the Prophet.... They are distinguished by a green or blue turban. Only the religious orders wear a turban. The other classes, from the king (except on state occasions) down to the beggar, wear the black conical cap.”

Not only did clothing set the religious man apart from the layman, it also indicated social station. As another Western writer remarked in 1828, “The dress of women of lower class has a rather dismal effect: it is commonly of a very dark colour.” Even the foreign observer perceived differences in class and culture through dress.

Contacts with Europe influenced the sartorial taste of Iranians and reflected modern sensibilities, some of which were replicated in the shah's harem. In his memoirs, the courtier Abdollah Mostofi observed that women's “fashions were always set by the ladies of the court. It began with the princesses and on to the wives of the aristocracy and eventually everyone. That was how women began to shorten their dresses.” Mostowfi marked the year (1882–83) in which “the young fashionable ladies' dresses hiked from ankle-length to knee length,” following the shah's return from his trip to Europe. Another courtier, Dust Ali Khan, Muayyir al-Mamalik, noted that women of the harem set fashion norms for other Iranian ladies. The shah's fascination with ballet costumes is also commented upon in a Western account by Eustache de Lorey, a member of the French Legation in Tehran. According to de Lorey, the shah “bought a quantity of
ballet-girl costumes, and on his arrival in Teheran had all his harem dressed like operatic fairies.“\textsuperscript{12} The shah's fascination may appear frivolous, but it also revealed changing consumer tastes and a predilection for Western attire among certain classes of Iranian society.

Qajar reformers urged consumers to wear outfits made from locally produced fabrics. Although many Iranian domestic products could scarcely compete with Western goods on the international market in the nineteenth century, locally crafted shawls and carpets received the attention of Western consumers. Writing in 1840, Justin Perkins remarked: “It is surprising with what skill the Persians manufacture some articles, with the simplest utensils. I have seen shawls valued at a thousand dollars apiece, and carpets very far superior to those of Turkey.”\textsuperscript{13} Writers encouraged the use of locally produced clothing to promote Iranian industry and goods (\textit{ravaj-i amti ‘ah-i Iran}) and self-sufficiency particularly in an era when Iran began relying upon Europe in commerce and trade. One reformer, Malik al-Muvarrikhin, believed that Iran produced all the shawls, fur, and taffeta needed to clothe its inhabitants.\textsuperscript{14} In 1903, the shah forbade the purchase of shawls from Kashmir for his royal wardrobe and instead supported the use of locally crafted shawls from Kerman.\textsuperscript{15} Activists of the constitutional era expressed their patriotism by endorsing Iranian manufactured goods, though some advised a judicious policy that would not deprive Iran of necessary imports.\textsuperscript{16} Female pioneers such as Muhtaram Iskandari organized conferences and gatherings to promote the use of Iranian-made goods among Iranian women and to dissuade women from buying foreign luxury items.\textsuperscript{17}

Iranians expressed some of their ambivalence about change and modernity through the politics of dress. Qajar reformers remained at odds over the role of religion in Iran, an unresolved issue that precipitated a civil war in 1908. The victory of the constitutionalists a year later did not bring an end to these tensions, which replicated themselves in the politics of dress. In 1916, one observer had this to say about looks: “Beards, turbans, canes, and shaved heads in all places and in every instance do not result in piety and
He then went on to make a similar observation about politics: “Ties and bow ties do not bring political understanding and diplomatic knowledge.” In short, appearances could be deceiving. The outward manifestation of virtue as embodied in turbans or beards did not necessarily induce pious behavior. Much to this observer’s dismay, however, Iranian society was preoccupied with outward appearance. To many, beards conveyed manliness and piety, bow ties a predilection for the Western, secular, and modern. For all its superficiality, outward appearance became a preoccupation for Iranians. As women and men became consumers of fashion, their changing taste in attire reflected the growing divide between secularism and religion. Veiling became part of this tug-of-war between the native and foreign, the traditional and modern.

In 1899, the Egyptian intellectual Qasim Amin published *The Liberation of Women*, in which among other matters he advocated changes in the veiling and seclusion of women. A partial translation of Amin’s work appeared in Persian only a year later. Like other Muslims in the Middle East, many Iranians grappled with the practice of veiling. In 1914, Maryam Muzayyin al-Saltanah made a vigorous argument touting the veil as a necessary barrier against moral depravity and degeneracy. In an essay entitled “The Philosophy of Veiling,” she observed: “Everyone knows that unveiling causes the free interaction of men and women, and the ills resulting from this interaction...cannot be denied. As we can see, in Europe, where the veil has been removed and there is the free interaction of men and women, there is not a single family that has not encountered great problems.” She used religion, tradition, and even Firdawsi’s poetry to make a case for the veil, lamenting that bit by bit this “old state law” (*qanun-i qadimah-i mamlikati*) was being eroded in Iran. She had a point. The veil was becoming increasingly less popular among certain cadres of Iranians—a process that gained momentum in other Middle Eastern societies as well.

Iranian men also engaged in this debate. In 1925, one gentleman asked: “What does hijab mean? It means hiding Muslim women in a black sack, which air and light can in no
way penetrate.” Aside from challenging religious injunctions in favor of the veil, this male writer volunteered nationalistic arguments against it: “Hijab kills the family, and since the family is the basis of nationalism and patriotism...we will be deprived of these blessings.” And finally, this writer maintained that from an economic vantage point, “hijab causes poverty in the country. [For w]omen are deprived of all business.” Such economic hardships, in turn increased the occurrence of prostitution. These views, however, were not widespread. The question of women and veiling would instigate further debate, particularly since the decision to make unveiling a state policy was a novel concept.

In 1927, a journal with an Islamic bent, Dabistan, argued against unveiling and enjoined women to uphold their Islamic and familial duties while pursuing education. Unveiling, regarded as an imitative Western custom, did not necessarily have to be an element of women's cultural enlightenment; rather, veiling could be reflective of women's purity and honor, even amidst the emergent modernist mores of the nation.

After his coronation in 1926, Reza Shah and his coterie of reformers initiated several policies intended to transform the national culture. The question was no longer “Who is the Iranian?” but rather “Who is the modern Iranian?” This was not a question left to the ordinary citizen to answer. Rather than invent this persona from naught, the architects of Reza Shah’s nationalist policies forged the modern Iranian through “renewal” (tajaddud)—that is, the remaking of every Iranian, whether man or woman. It is no surprise, then, that such a process required cosmetic changes, as well as intellectual indoctrination. In other words, the modern Iranian literally had to embody this message of renewal, a distinction that set apart the modernist debates of the Pahlavi era from those of the Qajar period. While Qajar thinkers had broached the theme of modernity, they had lacked the power to make it a state policy that concerned the private and public facets of the citizen's life.

Women with different political inclinations also voiced their opinions on veiling, though at times obliquely. Citing an
interview with Queen Sorayya of the Afghan royal family, Rawshanak Naw’dust, editor of the women’s journal Payk-i Sa’adat-i Nisvan, addressed the historical significance of the veil, arguing that it had become associated with seclusion through a gradual process. Naw’dust quoted the queen as asserting that in the early community of Islam women actively performed their social and religious obligations alongside men. Veiling, however, had posed an obstacle to women’s education and advancement in the modern societies of the East. Queen Sorayya described veiling as a “tribal custom slowly linked to religion.” The veil was intended to bring about social decency and was not intended as a social threat or restriction.

In March 1928, the Persian queen traveled to Qum to take part in the events marking the Persian New Year. Apparently, while in the mosque “she inadvertently exposed her face during the service.” As a result, “she was severely admonished by the officiating mullah who proceeded to denounce the tendencies of modern Persian women to depart from the traditional customs of the Islamic faith.” The crowd of people then protested against the queen. Once word reached the shah about this spontaneous demonstration, he went to the mosque in Qum and “entered its portals without removing his boots.” This act was considered sacrilegious and a breach of Islamic tradition, since shoes and boots were regarded as soiled objects that polluted the mosque. When he found the mullah who had reprimanded the queen, he administered “corporal punishment to him.” As reported by American foreign service officer J. Rives Childs, the shah took this “occasion for striking most effectively at the prestige of the clergy...From that time on, throughout 1928, one reform after another, touching the vested interests and the prejudices of the mullahs, was introduced with scant regard for their susceptibilities.”

In the summer of 1928, the government loosened restrictions and “made possible the admission of Moslem women to cinemas, restaurants and other public places, granted them the right to speak to men in the streets, to ride with men in
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carriages (with the top down), and, more important than all, authorized police protection for those Moslem women who might choose to appear unveiled in public." The arrest of the popular religious scholar Sayyid Hasan Mudarris did little to assuage the disgruntlement of the ‘ulama and only fueled their tacit disapproval of the shah and his policies.

In 1928, amidst this uncertainty, the government took a portentous step toward launching its renewal project by passing a law outlining the proper dress code for its male citizens. Although Islam does not dictate headgear for men, many Iranian men customarily wore hats in public. Iranian men were enjoined to wear “Pahlavi hats” (although the style of hat would later be remodeled), jackets, shirts, and pants. Moreover, the Pahlavi hats were not to contain any “distinguishing marks” or to be in “off-putting colors.”

Religious scholars and students were exempted from this law if they could provide necessary documentation verifying their vocation. Those who did not abide by this directive faced punishment in the form of either fines or incarceration. The state, rather than the individual, decided what was modern and appropriate even in something as personal as someone’s daily attire. While socially enforced dress codes expressing ethnic, social, professional, and gender status had existed previously, only under the Pahlavi state was dress nationally legislated and enforced. As in other arenas, European mores influenced modern Iranian sartorial choices. Such legislation, while defining the modern Iranian male citizen, suppressed individual choice. The individual became a medium for the implementation of social and cultural policy and could not assert himself or diverge from the norm through the use of conspicuous and suggestive signs, colors, or fashions, for such differentiation might breed subversion. Perhaps most important to the official nationalist project, other individual distinctions such as ethnicity or religion would also be effaced through uniform clothing, since at least in their outward appearance most Iranian men, regardless of geographic or linguistic ties, looked like they had something in common.
In 1931, the shah decreed that employees of various ministries “put on homespun clothing.” The government planned to purchase clothing for minor employees. This law amended an earlier measure passed by the Majlis in 1922. To meet the demand, “woolen mills are operated on rather a large scale at Ispahan while much woolen cloth is woven by hand looms at Yezd.” To set an example, Reza Shah appeared “in a homespun uniform.”

Although the legislation aimed to promote the local economy, it created unintended difficulties. An editorial in a Persian newspaper, Kushesh, found that the order “has given the profiteering craftsmen a chance to charge exorbitant prices for home-made commodities and clothes.”

An inadequate supply of cloth and the dearth of textile factories made it difficult for government employees to fulfill this decree.

Women, too, had to be made modern, and in May 1935, the Society for Women (Kanun-i Banuvan) was founded to “renew” the Iranian woman. One of Reza Shah’s daughters, Shams Pahlavi, presided over the Society for Women in an honorary capacity, since, as exemplars of the state, the members of the royal family were to embody its message of renewal as well.

The modernized Iranian woman, who was charged to become both patriotic mother and skilled professional, would not project an image of progress if dressed in the traditionalist garb of the veil.

A government memorandum assessed the women's movement in Iran through the range of activities undertaken by the society during its first year of existence. These activities included the establishment of classes for illiterate women, encouragement of women in the pursuit of physical fitness and exercise, hygiene, the arts, and the hosting of public lectures. The Society for Women offered other venues for the expression of patriotic womanhood, as endorsed by the nationalist program of the state. Patriotic women aspired not just to motherhood and basic literacy but also to physical exercise and charitable work.

In 1936, patriotic womanhood would be expressed through the removal of the veil. According to Badr al-Muluk Bamdad, one of the members of the Executive Committee of the Society for
Women, “One of the center's main purposes was to promote abandonment of the veil…. The women who joined the center began to persuade their relatives one [by] one by one to drop the black shroud, and the lectures emboldened other ladies to do likewise.”

Social pressure existed in certain circles that impelled some middle- and upper-class women to conform to the state's vision of patriotic womanhood.

Some outside observers remained concerned about the shah's plans to proceed with unveiling. William Hornibrook, appointed U.S. minister to Iran in 1933, reported on these social developments with a keen eye and, as it turned out, with justifiable worries about the systematic disempowerment of the religious classes in Iran. In several dispatches, Hornibrook expressed ambivalence about the shah's assault upon the religious classes. As he averred, “No innovation inaugurated during the reign of Reza Shah has caused the same feeling of unrest and uncertainty, or the same feeling of open resentment to the present regime as the proposal for the unveiling of Moslem women.”

He went on to say “with certainty” that the ‘ulama classes and “the great majority of Moslems are enraged” at the proposed change. Hornibrook compared the unveiling program with the replacement of the Pahlavi hat by another type of hat, noting that many Iranians of the upper and middle classes accepted these changes, whereas members of the lower classes were being intimidated into accepting them.

Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, the British minister in Tehran, put it another way. “Articles of clothing,” he averred, “have in recent years become more and more typical of political movements. In Europe the shirt is an essential item in many modern creeds. In Asia the hat has played a no less conspicuous part…. In Persia renaissance has equally had its hat, if not its head.” Writing in 1935, Knatchbull-Hugessen was referring to the replacement of the Pahlavi hat just days earlier. But the politics of dress was becoming an increasingly volatile discourse in Iran.

Mashhad, a religious city and the burial site of Imam Reza (the eighth Imam of Twelver Shi’ism), became the center of religious protests months before the decree for unveiling.
became law. Demonstrations at the Gawharshad Mosque in July 1935, which resulted in several deaths, illustrated the popular resistance to the unveiling issue.\textsuperscript{45} The uprising had apparently been instigated by Shaykh Buhlul, a man with a history of disturbance and intrigue against the regime. It was believed that Buhlul “harangued his congregation into a frenzy” at the mosque.\textsuperscript{46} British sources noted that Buhlul “ascended the ‘Manbar’ (pulpit) and proceeded to make an inflammatory address” in which he “roundly abused” the shah and his local supporters. Subsequently, people took to the streets and allegedly cried, “Hussain protect us from this Shah!”\textsuperscript{47} During this interval Syrian, Egyptian, and Turkish newspapers reported a “plot to kill the Shah and overthrow the Government,” reflecting popular discontentment with the regime’s social policies.\textsuperscript{48}

Some prophesied that the rioting marked the end of the Pahlavi dynasty since “the dome of the Shrine was damaged by the fire of the soldiers, who in order to terrify the insurgents, first fired into the air.”\textsuperscript{49} Regardless, opposition to “changing the hat and chaddur was sufficiently strong for people to lay down their lives rather than submit to the reforms.”\textsuperscript{50} Perhaps, the rioting hardened the shah, who planned on moving ahead with unveiling, undeterred by the public resistance to it. In October 1935, during a private gathering at Golestan Palace he made his intentions known.\textsuperscript{51} Outside of Mashhad, the shah’s social reforms met with little popularity. In Kermanshah, men and women “looked upon with great disfavour” his plans for unveiling.\textsuperscript{52}

To complete the women’s renewal project, Reza Shah decreed the mandatory unveiling of women in 1936. Although there was widespread resistance to the unveiling law, poets such as Mohammad Taqi Bahar, Malik al-Shu’ara, and Parvin I’tisami welcomed the change.\textsuperscript{53} Yet clothing was at best a poor national adhesive. The dress code regulations for women of the Reza Shah regime would not only alienate the religious classes and many women accustomed to veiling, but they were also short-lived, as they ceased to be enforced after Reza Shah’s 1941 abdication.\textsuperscript{54} Furthermore, despite their limited success as national policy, they provided a blueprint for the
Islamic Republic of Iran to enforce its unique dress codes for women and men decades later.

Historical assessments of unveiling in Iran suggest that Reza Shah may have gotten the idea to prohibit the veil from Ataturk. This argument has even been put forth by one of the archival centers of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which several years ago published a collection of documents concerning the decision to ban the veil. As stated in the introduction to that volume, Reza Shah’s “trip to Turkey nurtured this inclination [to remove the veil].”\(^\text{55}\) The reference here is to a historic trip that Reza Shah made to Turkey in June 1934—a journey that lasted several weeks.\(^\text{56}\) However, documents from the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs do not support such a theory. In an official report chronicling the specifics of this trip, there is little to suggest that Reza Shah was emboldened to push for the mandatory unveiling of women because of Ataturk’s policies. According to this report, in meetings between Ataturk and Reza Shah frontier disputes were resolved, and the desire to form what became the Sa’d Abad Pact (1937) was broached. There is no mention of social policies or discussions that may have influenced Reza Shah to go ahead with the decision to ban the veil.\(^\text{57}\) That said, it cannot be denied that Reza Shah admired Ataturk’s modernizing policies. In a note thanking Ataturk for his hospitality, he remarked: “It was with complete pleasure that I witnessed the enormous progress of the nation of my friendly neighbor, which was accomplished with complete speed in a short period of time under the patriotic guidance of its august leader.”\(^\text{58}\) This admiration, however, did not necessarily mean that Ataturk encouraged Reza Shah to proceed with outlawing the veil, particularly since Iran, not Turkey, was the first country to impose such legislation.

\(^{(p.157)}\) On 7 January 1936, when the unveiling decree was officially promulgated, there was much public celebration in official circles. In an upbeat speech before female instructors in Tehran, the shah affirmed: “You women must regard this day as a big day and use the opportunities that you have for advancing the country…. My sisters and daughters, now that you have entered society…know that your duty is to work for your homeland.”\(^\text{59}\) Patriotic womanhood would thus become
inextricably linked to the state's policy of unveiling. Patriotic women also had an obligation to participate in the workforce, even if they could not easily enter certain professions. Although their domestic roles as mothers and nurturers of the next generation of Iranian patriots persisted, it was now accompanied by other explicit patriotic responsibilities.

Various official memoranda highlighted the public's positive reaction to this law. A formal report written ten days after the unveiling decree stated that the women's movement and the removal of the veil “was greeted quickly with complete eagerness by the general population of the country...whether by official authorities, ministries, or private individuals, celebrations and festivities are taking place everyday across the country.”60 Official celebrations and functions enabled the wives of government personnel to appear in public unveiled and thus show support for this change not only as patriotic women but also as law-abiding citizens.61

Nearly a week after the pronouncement of unveiling in January 1936, the British minister in Tehran, Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, wrote, “[After] Meshed, the pace was deliberately slowed down.... There will certainly be underground hostility on the part of the elder generation and the strongly religious element.” This prediction turned out to be accurate.62 Less than a month after the circulation of the decree, another British report found that in the provinces the government exerted pressure to force the unveiling of women publicly:

At Hamadan, for instance, droshky drivers and crossing sweepers have been compelled by the police to parade their womenfolk unveiled. At Shiraz, Sultan Rakhshani, the Rais-i Malieh and a capable official, has been suspended because his wife attended, wearing the chaddar, an official reception given for the Minister of Finance. At Kerman, the Governor-General is said to be showing tact and patience in the face of general ill-will roused by the campaign, and from Bushire passive resistance is reported to what is regarded as a sacrilegious change.63
Enforcement of the law became difficult, but the state devised creative methods to put the unveiling decree into effect. The police identified particular streets “to be out of bounds to veiled women.” Service providers such as “cab drivers, restaurant proprietors, bath keepers, and even chemists” were barred from serving “women who wear the veil.” The public hardly embraced this quintessential symbol of the women's renewal movement. Even some state officials sympathized with the resistance, although they lacked the authority to modify social policy. In Tabriz, the government specifically targeted members of the ‘ulama to attend a state function with their wives, unveiled, by sending out “written invitations marked ‘compulsory.’” Attempts to enlist the participation of the ‘ulama, albeit coercively, in the realization of the unveiling project underscored the state's recognition of the need to win religious support for its social policies.

Some members of the religious classes opted for arrest rather than succumbing to state pressure. In Khoi, for instance, “it is rumoured that a seyyid [a person claiming descent from the Prophet Muhammad] prominent...in resisting the orders to unveil, was arrested, shaved and sent home wearing a European hat, and that he was found dead in bed on the following morning.” The ‘ulama especially rejected the dramatic shift in cultural practices forcibly brought on by the unveiling decree, lamenting “the rape of Islamic tradition”; the state's inability to acknowledge a place for Islam, even a limited one, in its cultural policies only polarized the opposition, led principally by the ‘ulama. The erosion of Islam from public life would be further evidenced three years later when the king apparently “set up a special commission of experts to investigate the possibility of distilling alcohol from the surplus rice crops of Mazanderan and Gilan.”

Later in 1936, the religious mourning rituals of ‘Ashura, commemorating the death of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson and the third Shi'i imam, Husayn ibn ‘Ali, tested the regime's unveiling policy. Anticipating dissent, the municipal police had taken “appropriate precautions” to defuse antigovernment protests, according to one report in Isfahan. Women wearing veils were banned from entering rowzeh.
khanis, or public mourning events. In addition, preachers were expected to recite their sermons calmly, to avoid inciting the public. The same report indicated that veiled women were no longer spotted on the main avenues. It was anticipated that after the municipal authorities distributed appropriate clothing to the destitute, veiled women would no longer be frequenting the side streets and alleyways, either.\footnote{68}

Despite the regime’s regulatory mechanisms, many women found a way to defy its norms of modernity and patriotic womanhood. The remaking of Iranian women—or \textit{tajaddud-i nisvan}, as the state preferred to call it—and the recasting of patriotic womanhood would not come about without significant resistance and dissent. In 1938, for instance, one provincial document indicated that “in the division of women’s renewal, in the past year much significant progress has been made,” pointing out further that “every day in each area the municipal authorities and security forces fiercely struggle and overcome the negative actions of the ‘worshipers of the old’ \textit{[kuhnih parastan]}.”\footnote{69} This report indicated that despite top-down measures to enforce the legislation, two years later the state faced serious resistance against the law from various quarters.

In Damavand, more than a year after the promulgation of the unveiling decree, an official testified that “four women with chadors had come outside in the evening.” The head of the local security forces had confronted them and subsequently confiscated and burned their chadors. At a public celebration in Reza’iyah all the women except for the wives of three officials appeared with long white headgear. The telegram reporting the event stated that because of the lack of enthusiasm of the people in charge, the “renewal of women” (\textit{tajaddud-i nisvan}) had not progressed in this area.\footnote{70} Notices from other regions of the country, such as Kashan, Khorasan, and Kerman, mentioned the use of headgear by urban and rural women.\footnote{71}

Regional informational sessions were set up to educate women on the proper modes of dress and behavior. A report from Damavand in 1937 indicated that in a girls’ elementary school, local women and men were invited to attend a gathering at
which “the necessary points regarding the acquisition of attire and social interactions” was conveyed, and “two pictures were taken of those who were present.”

Careful records such of photographs were kept of those openly participating in the women’s renewal movement, as the state strove to recognize individuals who supported its programs. According to an Interior Ministry report from Isfahan in 1937, progress was being made in terms of feminine fashions, particularly given that “the inhabitants of Isfahan had been drowning in the sea of superstition” prior to that time. This same source indicated that young female students and other young women in general upheld their duties to the renewal movement (vaza‘if-i tajaddud khahi), but that “older women do not leave their homes” so that they would not appear unveiled in public. Moreover, the official making this statement noted that in the countryside, “where from the beginning there was no veil,” the situation has stayed the same.

Given the impact of religious tradition and generational preferences, the unveiling of women necessitated a gradual and carefully orchestrated agenda for its execution. Older women were disinclined to participate willingly in the unveiling project, whereas younger women seemed more malleable.

The state planned public celebrations on the second anniversary of the unveiling decree to mark the occasion. The day’s festivities included athletic presentations at the Amjadiyih Arena, which served to link the newly fashionable culture of physical fitness with the women's cause. The Society for Women invited various dignitaries to an “elegant” gathering. Representatives of the Society for Women remarked that in addition to encouraging physical fitness, its membership had reached out to destitute women by providing them access to educational and medical facilities. Finally, a play in three acts, appropriately titled Why Won't You Get a Wife? (Chira Zan Nemigirid?), was performed, no doubt to encourage familial relations and to promote marriage among Iranian youth, reflecting nationalists’ desire to increase the country’s population and to reduce the social ills of venereal disease.

Poor women faced additional hardships in trying to comply with the new regulations of dress. The cost of living steadily increased, and the “disappearance of the chaddur and
the obligation to wear European dress hats” placed financial burdens on Iranian families.  

Attire was only one facet of the regime’s “renewal” project. The citizen’s body itself became a corner of nationalist topography, stirring debate and spurring the rise of supporting institutions. Bodily “renewal” of the modern Iranian would be incomplete without a concomitant transformation of the citizen’s mind. Intellectual indoctrination occurred in schools through the publication of carefully crafted texts, and an institution was formed expressly for this purpose toward the end of Reza Shah’s reign. On January 2, 1939, almost three years after the promulgation of the unveiling law, the Organization for the Cultivation of Thought (Sazman-i Parvarish-i Afkar) was created to herald the virtues of the women’s renewal movement, among other goals. As stated in its bylaws, the Organization for the Cultivation of Thought would sponsor regular lectures on approved topics. These talks included, but were not limited to, women’s issues. Fairly careful records were kept regarding the number of speeches held in various parts of the country, as well as the number of attendees. Between 1939 and 1940, there were numerous well-attended gatherings. 

The themes addressed at these sessions concerned the importance of forming a family, child care, household management, and women’s duties in society—clearly topics intended primarily for the modern patriotic woman—as well as less gender-specific events on national unity, the necessity of sports, and industriousness. The archetypal modern Iranian woman, though unveiled, could escape neither the cult of domesticity nor the burdens of patriotic womanhood. Despite the institutional measures that had been taken to educate women about their rights and their role in the regime’s “renewal” or modernity movement, social limitations and politics undermined women’s control over their lives.

The founding of girls’ schools and the expansion of women’s curricula offered new possibilities of learning and professional development for certain women, especially urban and upper-class women. It did so not by obliterating the traditional markers of female identity as mother and wife but rather by
fully embracing them. Women's education developed within the context of patriarchy to support the modernizing objectives of the men in politics who were crafting their vision of the nation. Nowhere does this distinction appear as pointedly as in the decision to force the unveiling of Iranian women. Barely giving lip service to Islam, the state introduced multiple cultural reforms intended to ingrain secularism. For many, the unveiling decree contradicted the message of virtue and morality implicit in discussions of ethics and the “proper” Iranian wife, who, despite the propaganda of the renewal movement, was still subjected to Islamic tradition in her private and public comportment.

The ‘ulama took up the cause of women and veiling after Reza Shah was ousted from Iran with the encouragement of the Allied powers. In 1944, under the leadership of Grand Ayatollah Tabataba’i Qumi (d. 1947), religious groups pressed for giving women the right to wear the veil without penalty, and the government acceded to this demand.\(^\text{79}\) The unveiling decree had created widespread malaise not only among the religious classes but even among some secular women. Its impact was assessed that same year by Nayyir Sa’idi who would eventually go on to serve as a delegate for the Nuvin Party in the twenty-second Majlis.\(^\text{80}\) She had witnessed a revealing incident on Istanbul Avenue in Tehran involving some foreign soldiers. Apparently in jest, the officers had barred a woman wearing a chador from crossing the street. The veiled woman, exasperated, finally removed her chador and, although exposing an unkempt appearance, managed to cross. Just then, another woman, unveiled and dressed in a neat outfit, appeared, and the soldiers graciously let her through without incident. As Sa’idi commented: “Yes, dear ladies! The importance of the seventeenth of Dey—the festival of our freedom—lies not only in the fact that outfits changed, but also that women’s characters and spirits became transformed. Women freed themselves from slavery [\textit{bardegi}] and considered themselves worthy of serving their nation…. Unfortunately, some women have not understood the meaning of freedom and have confused freedom with taking off veils and donning feathered hats…. These are not the women of whom we are proud…. Those women are ones who are
devoted mothers, thoughtful spouses, and productive members of society; they exercise, read books, participate in charitable activities, and raise capable children. Feminists such as Nayyir Sa‘idi subscribed to the ideal types that they imparted to other Iranian women. Whether women’s freedom to participate fully in Iranian society ought to have been linked expressly with unveiling remains an unresolved matter. The legacy of this radical reform elicited contradictory opinions even after the state agreed to relax enforcement of unveiling.

What impact did the ideology of “renewal” have on women and the politics of gender in Iran? The reforms of the Reza Shah era undoubtedly left an imprint on Iranian women and society. By 1941, when Reza Shah was forced out of office, the appearance of Iranian women in the media and in state-sponsored events looked markedly different. From hairstyle to attire, the Iranian woman looked more Western and less like her counterparts at the turn of the century. Women and men interacted regularly in public arenas. Women could take pleasure in lavishing attention on their looks within acceptable social norms. Boys and girls could occupy certain public spaces together, even
though the mixing of sexes did not always produce salutary results. In 1944, Nayyir Sa‘idi reported that many girls had stopped attending the School for Beaux Arts (Hunaristan-i Ziba), established in 1932, when it became coeducational after the unveiling decree.\textsuperscript{83}

Many women felt alienated by such reforms and opted not to participate in the renewal movement. Writing in 1953, more than a decade after the deposition of Reza Shah, Najmeh Najafi remarked, “Some new rich who have taken on Western ways very rapidly allow their women to meet in public places and to drink tea and other things, to play cards, to shop in the Westernized stores. But in the old conservative families men will not allow their wives and daughters such liberties.”\textsuperscript{84} The battle between tradition and modernity continued. Perhaps the most enduring legacy of the renewal movement was not its emphasis on women’s secular education and health but rather its expansion of choices for modern Iranian women. Women’s capacity to imagine new roles for themselves eventually enabled them to stride into untrodden public spaces and to discover identities beyond their reproductive selves.

Notes:

(1.) My discussion of the politics of dress in this chapter has been informed by Victoria de Grazia, “Introduction,” in \textit{The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical}

(2.) Edward Scott Waring, A Tour to Sheeraz, by the Route of Kazroon and Feerozabad (1807), 61.

(3.) Ibid., 57.

(4.) Ibid., 62.


(6.) Homa Hoodfar, “The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women,” in Women, Gender, Religion: Troubling Categories and Transforming Knowledge, ed. Elizabeth Anne Castelli and Rosamond C. Rodman (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 427. As Hoodfar has argued, “Both Muslim oriental and Christian occidental women were thought to be in need of male protection and intellectually and biologically destined for the domestic domain.”

(7.) Justin Perkins, A Residence of Eight Years in Persia, Among the Nestorians, with Notices of the Muhammedans (Andover: Allen, Morrill and Wardwell, 1843), 152.


(10.) Ibid.


(15.) *Iran-i Sultani*, No. 7, 16 June 1903, 1.

(16.) *Subh-i Sadiq*, No. 37, 20 May 1907, 1; *Nida-yi Vatan*, No. 40, 2 July 1907, 3.

(17.) *Majallah-i Nisvan-i Vatankhvah*, Nos. 5–6, 1924, 3, 40-44.

(18.) *Jarchi-yi Millat*, No. 16, 6 Dhul-qa’da 1335/24 August 1917, 1.

(19.) Ibid.


(23.) *Shikufah*, second year, No. 24, 5 Rabi’ al-Thani 1332/2 March 1914, 3.


(27.) *Dabistan*, No. 9, 26 Safar 1346/24 August 1927, 385–89.


(30.) J. Rives Childs, “The March of Modernism in Persia,” Enclosure No. 1 to Despatch of 18 October 1934 from Legation at Tehran, 8, RG 59.

(31.) Ibid., 9.


(33.) J. Rives Childs “The March of Modernism in Persia,” Enclosure No. 1 to Despatch of 18 October 1934 from Legation at Tehran, 9, RG 59. For arrest of Mudarris, see ibid., 10.


(36.) Chehabi, “Staging the Emperor's New Clothes," 225. In this article Chehabi has translated the dress code law into English.

(37.) RG 59, U.S. Confidential Department of State, No. 384, Charles C. Hart to Secretary of State, 19 February 1931, 1–2.

(38.) U.S. Confidential Department of State, RG 59, No. 451, Charles C. Hart to Secretary of State, 18 March 1931, 2.


(40.) National Archives, Tehran, Foreign Ministry Files, 2910001495, 20 Day 1315/10 January 1937.


(42.) RG 59, No. 503, Hornibrook to Department of State, 9 July 1935, 1.

(43.) This passage is cited in full in Mohammad Gholi Majd, Great Britain and Reza Shah: The Plunder of Iran (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 212–13. For additional discussion of the Gawharshad incident based upon these and other U.S. diplomatic documents, see Camron Amin, The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman, 85–90.


(48.) Ibid., 27:396.

(49.) RG 59, U.S. Department of State, “Memorandum,” Enclosure No. 1 from the Legation at Tehran, 21 July 1935, 1.

(50.) Ibid., 2.


(52.) Bourne and Watt, eds., *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 27:404.


(54.) Vahid, *Qiyam-e Gawharshad*.


(57.) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tehran, “Guzarishi dar barayih-i musafarat-i A’la Hazrat Reza Shah Kabir bih Turkiyyah,” 1313/1934—Carton 20. A translation of the official program of the king’s visit did not contain any information on

(58.) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tehran, Note to Ataturk, 1313/1934—Carton 20.

(59.) National Archives, Tehran, Prime Ministry Files, 2910001495, 20 Day 1314/11 January 1936, 2.

(60.) Ibid.

(61.) National Archives, Tehran, Prime Ministry Files, 2910001495, 27 Day 1314/1936 discusses one such occasion at which the wives of various government officials were present.

(62.) Dated 11 January 1936, in Bourne and Watt, eds., British Documents on Foreign Affairs 28:45. Knatchbull-Hugessen further speculated that “one of the causes of the fall of the late Prime Minister, M. Feroughi, is thought to have been his opposition to the rapidity with which the Shah proposed to press on the unveiling.”

(63.) Dated 7 February 1936, in Bourne and Watt, eds., British Documents on Foreign Affairs, 28:56.

(64.) Dated 22 February 1936, in Bourne and Watt, eds., British Documents on Foreign Affairs, 28:64.


(66.) Bourne and Watt, eds., British Documents on Foreign Affairs, 28:61.

(67.) Ibid., 28:426.

(68.) Iran, National Archives, Prime Ministry Files, File 103013/9692, 18 Farvardin 1315/7 April 1937.

(69.) National Archives, Tehran, Prime Ministry Files, 103013/9950, 24 Farvardin 1317/1938, 3.

(70.) National Archives, Tehran, Ministry of Post and Telegraph, Bahman 1316/1938.


(73.) National Archives, Tehran, Isfahan Records, 2910001495, 4 Bahman 1315/1937.

(74.) Iran, National Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 19 Day 1316/9 January 1938, Weekly Report, 1. For more on the subject of marriage, hygiene, venereal disease, and population concerns, see Kashani-Sabet, “The Politics of Reproduction.”


(76.) National Archives, Tehran, Ministry of Culture, 2910002573, 12 Day 1317/2 January 1939.


(78.) National Archives, Tehran, Prime Ministry Files, 108011/3268, “Fihrist-i Mawzu'hayih Sukhanraniha.”


(82.) In the same issue of *Banu*, No. 2, December 1944/January 1945, 11–12, 28–29, another writer, Abul Qasim Azad Maragha’i, wrote about his support for the unveiling movement and recounted the resistance the idea of unveiling had originally encountered in the 1920s.
(83.) Banu, No. 1, Azar 1323/November–December 1944, 29-31. The article is also revealing in its discussion of the condition of the School of Beaux Arts. Sa’idi noted that students often had to provide their own supplies. While schools had proliferated in Iran, the conditions of schools sometimes raised questions about their management and efficacy, as in this instance.