

ROSHANGAR

روشنگر

ROSHAN UNDERGRADUATE PERSIAN STUDIES JOURNAL



VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

SPRING 2016

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

Roshangar Editorial Board

Student Members

Mitra Namiranian, Editor-in-Chief
*Persian Studies, International Development
and Conflict Management*

Joseph Ritch, Editor-in-Chief
Persian Studies, German Studies, Linguistics

Joshua Weaver, Editor-in-Chief
Persian Studies, French Studies, Linguistics

Matthew T. Hermance
Persian Studies, History

Homa Hajarian
English, Persian Studies

Mason A. Jean
History, Russian Studies

Emma Minnis
History

Mojan Najmabadi
Journalism

Jason M. Prior
Persian Studies, Linguistics

Faculty Advisors

Dr. Ida Meftahi
Roshan Institute for Persian Studies

Dr. Laretta Clough
School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

Roshangar: Roshan Undergraduate Persian Studies Journal
Issue 1, Spring
Published online 2 April 2016

With the support and guidance of the Roshan Institute for
Persian Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park

Contact

Email: Roshangar.UMD@gmail.com

Website: www.RoshangarUMD.com

Check out our blog!

Stay up to date with Roshangar, Persian
events in the D.C. Area, books reviews and
more at www.RoshangarUMD.com!



A Letter from the Editor

We are proud to present the first edition of *Roshangar: Roshan Undergraduate Persian Studies Journal*. The name *Roshangar* means "revelatory" or "one who produces knowledge," and it is with this intent that the journal was created. This journal serves as a platform for undergraduate students to present their research in the field of Persian Studies. This issue is available for free download online to ensure accessibility for students and non-students alike.

The articles included in this edition of *Roshangar* represent a wide range of scholarship in fields such as gender studies, politics, history, and cinema written by students from diverse backgrounds and universities around the world. After submission at the end of the Fall 2016 semester, these articles were reviewed and selected by the student board and the faculty advisors of *Roshangar* as exemplary pieces of undergraduate scholarship.

In addition to the *Roshangar* journal, the student board produces a blog dedicated to film and book reviews, event analyses, interviews with artists and academics, and other topics in the realm of Persian Studies. The website (www.roshangarumd.com) also features details about local Persian events as well as information about the journal and the student members of the board.

It is our hope that this journal, subsequent editions, and the companion blog help to encourage further appreciation of Persian culture and interdisciplinary research in the study of Persianate societies.

Please enjoy reading these articles and continue to follow *Roshangar* in its future publications!

Joseph Ritch
Editor-in-Chief

Foreword

As the faculty advisor for Roshangar, it gives me great pleasure to present to you the first issue of this publication dedicated to undergraduate research and scholarship.

Run fully by students, Roshangar provides a global platform for undergraduate students from around the world with academic interest in Iran and the Persian speaking world to present emerging and ongoing research, as well as responses to established scholarship on Iran. It is also a platform through which scholars and educators in the field of Iranian Studies learn about the topical and methodological interests of the future generation of scholars.

Here, at the University of Maryland, we are fortunate to be surrounded by undergraduate students such as our Roshangar team whose passion for Iranian history and culture fuels months of planning and work for the journal and its accompanying blog. As an educator in the field, I find it extremely fulfilling to work with this team to take Persian Studies beyond the classroom. I would like to express special thanks to Dr. Fatemeh Keshavarz, the director of Roshan Institute for Persian Studies, and Dr. Lauretta Clough, who graciously copyedited the journal. Others including Ms. Susan Moinfar, Ms. Samar Ali Ata and Dr. Nahal Akbari-Saneh have been tremendously generous with their time and support for this burgeoning effort.

Dr. Ida Meftahi
Faculty Advisor
Roshan Institute for Persian Studies

Table of Contents



Tehran, 1942-45: Accounts by Polish Refugees from the USSR	1
--	---

Stanisław Mrówka

Jagiellonian University of Cracow

Approaches to Diplomacy Through Culture: The Iran-America Relations Society	4
---	---

Matthew T. Hermane

University of Maryland, College Park

Iran's Azerbaijan Crisis: Great Power Politics & the Advent of the Cold War	9
---	---

Nicole Bayat Grajewski

The George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs

<i>Shi'rality</i> : The Avant-Garde in Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema	14
--	----

Joshua Weaver

University of Maryland, College Park

The Pahlavi Cap: A Comparative Analysis of Historical Writings on Reza Shah Pahlavi	19
---	----

Christopher J. Thurston

University of Maryland, College Park

Nativistic Sexual Modernity in Late Qajar Iran	24
--	----

Riaz Howey

New York University Abu Dhabi

Prescriptive Existence: Examining the Gender Binary in Iran and the United States	28
---	----

Ruedas, L.

University of Maryland, College Park

Tehran, 1942-45

Accounts by Polish Refugees from the USSR

Stanisław Mrówka
Jagiellonian University of Cracow

Abstract

This research paper, concerning the city of Tehran in 1942-1945, provides a fresh, multi-faceted look on this short period of its history, often associated only with its role as a safe haven for Polish refugees from the USSR and a place where allied commanders met in 1943 to decide on the course of the Second World War. Image of the city's social, economic, political, and religious complexity are provided through accounts of Poles who fled the USSR and arrived in Iran at the beginning of 1942. The sources examined for this paper offer a unique opportunity for discussion of observations made by Polish migrants from across the demographic spectrum, observations that call for increased scholarly attention to the social issues that marked the reality of 1940s Tehran. Their accounts cover multiple aspects of Tehran's social life, including many images of affluence, poverty, religious celebrations, and the struggle for the development of women rights.

In spite of the neutrality proclaimed by Iran's government in August 1941, allied forces quickly invaded Iran's territory. Removing Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1926-1941) from power, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi replaced his father as the new king in September 1941 (Sierakowska-Dyndo 88). The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics [USSR] occupied the northern and the UK the southern regions of the defenseless state (Sierakowska-Dyndo 88). Actions taken by the allied forces were intended to prevent the Third Reich's intelligence activities on Iranian soil and to provide protection for the oil-rich regions of Baku and Abadan. On January 29, 1942 a treaty between Iran, Great Britain, and the USSR was signed, stipulating that Iran was to maintain its independence and territories, but remain under military occupation until the end of war (Rdłutowski 123). Iran's role in the ongoing world conflict was extremely important. Allies wanted to use the Shah's country as the channel through which they would be able to transport military aid to the USSR (Sierakowska-Dyndo 89).

For this paper, memories recorded by Polish citizens such as Franciszek Machalski who was one of the first Polish orientalists; Andrzej Olszewski an officer of the Polish army; and Jerzy Krzysztoń, Irena Stankiewicz, Danuta Kamieniecka, and Jadwiga Howells, who as children arrived to Iran with other

Polish refugees, are examined and brought into context.

The war would have a devastating effect on Iran's economy. When the world conflict began, Iran maintained very strong economic relations with the Third Reich. In fact, Germany was Iran's main international partner in the process of the modernization of Iran's industry, and almost 40% of its exports were imported by Germany. Due to the outbreak of war, all economic ties between those countries were frozen, and the presence of German staff on Iranian soil started to shrink rapidly. Without educated specialists to operate the machinery bought from German producers, multiple companies faced setbacks. Allied forces monopolized Iranian railway and vehicular transportation, which crippled the ability to trade between distant regions of the country. The influx of foreign products and the devaluation of Iran's currency led to economic disequilibrium which devastatingly affected Iranian citizens (Sierakowska-Dyndo 89-91). Besides military occupation, the arrival of more than 100,000 Polish refugees between March 1942 and October 1943 (Kunert 20) also had a negative impact on Iran's economy. The refugees, fleeing difficult conditions in the Soviet Union, were in

terrible shape when they reached the Iranian border. Large numbers of them required immediate medical treatment, most of which was provided by the Red Cross, but a lack of resources meant that the help of the Iranian government was often needed as well (Sierakowska-Dyndo 94). All of these factors had a direct and destructive impact on Iran's capital city – Tehran.

In the 1940s, Tehran counted about 500,000 residents (Machalski 249). At first, Polish refugees were allured by the tidiness of its streets, the beauty of its mosques, and the splendor of its palaces and estates, all so different from the reality to which they had become accustomed in the USSR (Machalski 173). Art, wealth, and a penchant for both luxury and comfort were visible everywhere as the most important features of Persian houses (Machalski 289).

Unfortunately this first impression did not last long. Soon Tehran revealed another side to its foreign guests. Due to the very difficult economic situation in the countryside, scores of Iranian citizens started to arrive in Tehran. Soon the city was filled with emaciated people. The main arteries of Tehran were crowded with beggars clothed in rags who were suffering in utter poverty immediately outside the shops offering unimaginably expensive goods (Rdłutowski 152).

Those Iranians who were lucky enough to find employment had to work on truly terrible terms and in dangerous conditions. Linen factory workers, for example, had to work 10-12 hours a day. The remuneration of workers was also extremely low and dependent on gender and age. On average, men, women, and children under the age of 16 years were earning approximately 4 tomans a day (about 12 U.S. Cents in 1945). It is important to emphasize the fact that there were few defenders of workers' rights in 1940s Tehran. At that time, there were only 3 active trade unions which had only 15,000 members (Machalski 83).

Under these circumstances, there was strong economic and political division of the society, and common customs intensified such divisions. Many stark instances of social inequality are brought to light in the Polish memoirs. For example, the social division was seen clearly in the appearance of the Iranian soldiers. Men serving in lower corps of the army were clothed in old, worn out uniforms; sometimes they were even unable to afford decent footwear (Krzysztoń 177). At the same time, the children of wealthy and affluent members of society were automatically enlisted in the

higher corps in which they were respected and lavishly rewarded (Olszewski 37).

Social status in 1940s Tehran was mainly indicated by one's wealth, but gender also played an important role. In the eyes of Polish refugees, women in Iranian society did not participate in the public space, but due to Pahlavi's modernizing and secularizing policies and the inflow of European interpretations of equality and freedom in the 1940s, their status in Persian society started to change. Educated women were the first to demand change. They started to unveil their faces, wear make-up (Beaupre-Stankiewicz et al. 300), drive automobiles (Machalski 298) and demand monogamy. It is interesting to note that in 1940s, polygamy was frequent only among the lower, working classes (Olszewski 38). Women started to acknowledge and fight for their rights. On the 26th of June 1944, a mass women's rights meeting organized by The Women's Union took place in Tehran (Machalski 319). Participants demanded the emancipation of women and gender equality (Machalski 323). The conditions for working-class women were unsatisfactory. Many had to work in linen factories or provide escort services, which was becoming a growing market at the time.

Images of human suffering quickly became a part of Tehran's reality. This, coupled with a sense of broad injustice, became the main factors which led to rising levels of criminal activity and a heyday of prostitution. Once rare in Iran, prostitution rose in 1940s with the presence of the allied armed forces (Olszewski 29-30). Many women, including Polish refugees, had to prostitute themselves in order to make a living (Sinai). Soon Tehran and particularly its suburban regions became unsafe. Since they were often assaulted, allied soldiers were ordered not to enter suburban districts of the city (Olszewski 37). It is understandable that men, women and children who were bare footed, clothed in rags and begging to survive (Rdłutowski 142) were focusing their anger and hatred on foreigners who were indirectly but patently responsible for their situation. Poor Iranian social classes expressed their discontent by assaulting foreign soldiers, but they also organized multiple hostile demonstrations against the presence of Polish civilian refugees, which took place in front of Polish establishments in Tehran between 1942 and 1944 (Krzysztoń 91-96).

Even though 1940s Tehran was a city which did not take part in any direct military actions, it was

a battlefield for hearts and minds. Posters and tags supporting every side of the ongoing world conflict, such as the Communist hammer and sickle, Nazi Swastikas, or American white stars, were visible on the walls of alleys and buildings all over Iran's capital (Machalski 311). Dissatisfaction with the government and poverty was expressed mostly in the guise of demonstrations and riots which almost always started at the capital's bazaar (Machalski 195). Riots in Tehran followed a very brutal course. For instance, on December 8th, 1942, a riot broke out. As the result of that act of civil disobedience by Tehran's proletariat, 20 people lost their lives and about 700 were injured (Sierakowska-Dyndo 92). In order to deal with rapidly deteriorating conditions, the government of Tehran instituted a state of emergency on April 21st 1943. After that, all public gatherings and manifestations became illegal (Machalski 312).

Another example of clashes between Tehran's inhabitants in the 1940s can be found in descriptions of religious rituals. During Shiite mourning rituals, practiced with marches in which participants flagellate themselves (Machalski 260), the city was observed to be less crowded (Machalski 257). As expressed in the memories of Polish refugees, members of religious minorities, including the Jewish and Christian

communities, were often hesitant to come across one of these marches and thus tried to remain home (Machalski 260). According to a story recorded by Franciszek Machalski, during (then illegal) public commemorations of the martyrdom of Imam Husain in 1944, two Iranian police officers lost their lives in a failed attempt to disperse the marching mourners. Angered crowds retaliated against them, killing the patrolmen and carrying their bodies to a nearby mosque (Machalski 259). Public religious practices became a source of social division in 1940s Tehran, but despite attitudes towards non-Muslims (Machalski 252), followers of other faiths remained in Iran's capital city. 1940s Tehran was home to not only Christian churches and Jewish synagogues, but also Zoroastrian and Baha'i temples (Machalski 244-247).

This research paper describes a few aspects of Tehran's reality which my compatriots observed during their stay in Iran. I intentionally focused my work on economic and political issues of Tehran's society in order to counter the stereotype that it did not suffer from the war. Iran's capital should not only be seen as a safe haven for refugees and the place where the allied commanders were able to meet in October 1943, but also a complex society that was greatly affected by the war.



Works Cited

Beaupre-Stankiewicz, Irena, Danuta Waszczuk-Kamieniecka and Jadwiga Lewicka-Howells, *Isfahan, Miasto Polskich Dzieci (Isfahan, The City of Polish Children)*. Londyn: Koło Wychowanków Szkół Polskich Isfahan i Liban, 1988. 300.

Krzysztoń, Jerzy. *Krzyż Południa (The Cross of the South)*. Wrocław: Siedmioróg, 1997. 177.

Kunert, Andrzej. "General Anders' Army on its Way Across Three Continents." In *The Archive of Memory. The Fate of Poles and Iranians in The Second World War*. Ed. Sylwia Surdykowska. Warsaw: Faculty of Oriental Studies University in Warsaw, 2014. 20.

Machalski, Franciszek. *Wędrówki irańskie (Iranian Journeys)*. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1960. 249.

Olszewski, Andrzej. *Tropikalnym Szlakiem 2 Korpusu (On The Tropical Route of The 2nd Corps)*. Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1970. 37.

Rdłutowski, Konstanty. *Notatki z wygnania (The Notes from Exile)*. Warszawa, Wrocław: Biblioteka Zesłańca, 1996. 123.

Sierakowska-Dyndo, Jolanta. "Economic Situation in Iran at the Beginning of The 1940s. The Polish Refugees Context" In *The Archive of Memory. The Fate of Poles and Iranians in The Second World War*. Ed. Sylwia Surdykowska. Warsaw: Faculty of Oriental Studies Oriental in Warsaw, 2014. 88.

Sinai, Khosrow. "The Lost Requiem." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 7 Nov. 2013. Web. 1983.



Approaches to Diplomacy Through Culture: The Iran-America Relations Society

Matthew T. Hermane
University of Maryland

Abstract

This research paper assesses the role of the Iran-America Relations Society (*Anjuman-i iran-va-amrika*) during World War II and the beginning of the Cold War as the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union vied to strengthen their relationship with Iran through cultural diplomacy. Iran's strategically beneficial location and resources made it important to Allied forces during World War II, and afterward, as the Cold War broke out, Iran maintained its value. Each of the Allies established some form of the cultural society in order to build a bond with Iranian society and showcase the benefit of such a relationship. In 1943, the Iran-America Relations Society was established with the goal of promoting cultural exchange and expanding economic and educational ties between the two countries. The Society went about this business through lectures, tours, films, and publication. Of course, with the background of the Cold War and the previous half-century of foreign interference in Iran, the existence of such an organization can be met with skepticism. In order to develop an accurate sense of the nature of the Iran-America Relations Society, this paper analyzes the Society's founding documents and first-hand accounts authored by its members. In question is the Society's relationship with the U.S. government and autonomy in conducting its business. The composition of Society membership, the substance of its public activity, and reports by American members to the U.S. State Department suggest an Iran-America Relations Society free of foreign government influence that, in the end, may have fallen victim to political events occurring around it.

Background

Reza Shah Pahlavi's World War II Iran was highly sought-after real estate (Macris 97). Its location provided a strategic link between British-controlled territories to the west and the Soviet Union to the northeast. Reza Shah's failure to recognize the imprudence in expanding his relationship with Nazi Germany while Allied powers had substantial investment and interest in his country resulted in his removal from power. In 1941, the British, facing an Iranian military more prepared for domestic discord than foreign invasion, were easily able to force Reza Shah's abdication and place his son, Muhammad Reza, on the throne. With a young, inexperienced ruler in power, Iran became an instrument of Allied success; Winston Churchill would term it the "Bridge of Victory." An Allied victory in World War II would not mean peaceful equilibrium among the victors though, and they knew as much before the war even ended.

Iran became a competition ground for Allied influence. One way in which this rivalry manifested

itself was in the effort to create a bond with Iranian society through the exchange of culture. The result of this effort may have been the formation of cultural societies. Before long, there was an Anglo-Persian Institute (*anjuman-i iran-ingilis*), an Irano-Soviet Cultural Relations Society (*anjuman-i ravabit-i farhangi-i iran ba ittihad-i jamahir-i shawravi*), and an Iran-America Relations Society (IARS), each striving to develop cultural ties with Iran that would seep into the social, commercial, and educational arenas. This paper will examine the way in which the United States, a newcomer to Iranian affairs compared to its British and Soviet counterparts, approached the development of relations with Iran through the IARS. The Society's stated goals and missions will be discussed along with the organizational structure as presented in its establishing document. The activities undertaken by the Society will be explored in order to display just how achievement of these goals was approached. Finally, the Society's role in its formative World War II years

will be evaluated in order to determine the sincerity of its expressed purpose. In exploring these topics, archival reports written for the U.S. State Department from two prominent Americans working in Iran during the first years of the Society, Donald N. Wilber and T. Cuyler Young, will be analyzed. These individuals and their significance to Iranian-American affairs will be addressed in detail in order to make evident their purposes and biases, which will allow for closer evaluation of their correspondence.

Organization of the Iran-America Relations Society

The IARS was initially created in 1925, but Reza Shah's perpetual suspicion of foreign influence led to its dissolution in 1928 (Wilber 1). In 1943, with Muhammad Reza Shah as sovereign, the Society found its opportunity to reemerge and establish a headquarters in Tehran. Shortly into its first year of activity, society membership had already grown to 150 (Wilber 2). The Society's constitution assigned to it the following purposes:

1. To develop friendly relations between the nations of Iran and the United States ("Constitution" 1).
2. To inform each country of the social, scientific, literary, cultural, industrial, commercial, economic, and education life of the other through lectures, publications, and books ("Constitution" 2)
3. To develop relations between the peoples of the two countries in the aforementioned areas, to encourage suitable Iranian commerce in the United States, and to "introduce the arts and products of each country to the people of the other" ("Constitution" 2).
4. To encourage the investment of American capitalists in Iran, and help them obtain proper facilities; and to send competent Iranians to American in order to get acquainted with the American way of life ("Constitution" 3).
5. "To establish and maintain relations with societies formed in America on similar lines" ("Constitution" 3).
6. To encourage and assist Iranian students wishing to study in America, and vice versa ("Constitution" 3).

The constitution also included the caveat, "This society shall not, in any way, interfere in matters of politics or religion" ("Constitution" 3).

Upon invitation by two members, membership

was open to any Iranian or American, pending council approval ("Constitution" 4). The council itself was composed of ten members – a president, vice president, five advisory members, a treasurer, and two secretaries ("Constitution" 4). Election of the council took place during the Society's annual general meeting, held in the month of Urdibehisht (April-May), from among the founding members (defined as the first 30).. The American minister to Iran was named the Honorary President - a role that did not have any real responsibility other than a speaking engagement at the annual general meeting.

Of special significance to the IARS was the fact that it was member-funded and apparently free of any type of government influence. In contrast, the British were required to pour large sums of money into the Anglo-Persian Institute in order to garner public attention - even going as far as to purchase radio space in Tehran. This was largely due the overwhelmingly unpopular opinion and suspicion of British activity in Iran following years of economic and political interference. The Soviet Union's Irano-Soviet Cultural Relations Society was formed shortly after the Iran-America Relations Society and claimed independence from government influence despite being subsidized under the umbrella of the Soviet Department of Cultural Relations (Young 1).

Iran-America Relations Society Activity

The activities of the IARS can be placed into four categories: tours, lectures, films, and literature. American soldiers of the Persian Gulf Command, stationed in Tehran, were identified as a group that could both benefit from the Society and propagate the Society's message. The Society provided English-speaking members of the Society as tour guides for service members interested in various historical sites, which were augmented with lectures directed towards introducing Iranian culture. In a continued effort to reach out to the American military community in Tehran, Imperial Court Minister Husayn Ala hosted a garden party for eighty American officers in the summer of 1943 (Wilber 3).

There were also lectures for the general public, held at the Club of the National Bank of Iran, and followed by tea (Wilber 3). The lectures were typically



presented in English, with a Persian translation printed in Tehran's newspapers the following day (Wilber 3). These lectures were specific and covered an expansive range of topics. The majority of these lectures seem to have the goal of introducing American ways of living. If this seems like propaganda, it must be remembered that lectures presented to American audiences, such as those for soldiers previously discussed, were completely focused on the subject of Iran. One can only assume that lectures for the general public would have been for majority Iranian audiences, and would therefore have the purpose of educating them about something they would not have been familiar with. On the other hand, films shown at the Tehran Archaeological Museum, seem to run into a question of bias that cannot be justified and cannot be seen as anything other than WWII ally propaganda (Wilber 4).

Perhaps the most interesting activity undertaken by the IARS, and the one providing the most insight into its intentions, was its foray into literature. The Society's library was established through a donation from an unknown prominent Iranian of three hundred multi-language texts and American periodicals (Wilber 6). The library displays the Society's enthusiasm to legitimize itself as an academic as well as a socially engaged institution.. In addition to compiling literary works, the Society was also active in producing its own publications. One member, an Iranian lawyer with an interest in the life of the famed American politician and scientist Benjamin Franklin wrote a book about him of which 1,000 copies were printed (Wilber 7). The Society also had interest in creating a comprehensive volume about Iran in English for distribution in the United States and a similar book about the United States, in Persian, to distribute in Iran. The IARS's greatest achievement was the publication of its periodical *Iran and the U.S.A.* The magazine, first published in 1946, was printed in both English and Persian, and contained both English and Persian sections as well. It was expansive in its topics – it addressed updates on the Society's activities and organization, current events, cultural perspectives, history, engineering, and personal accounts.

Besides the main activities already discussed, it is worth mentioning the role the Society played in the promotion of student exchange programs. Twice every week, Dr. Asadullah Bizhan, professor of education at Tehran University, would meet with Iranian students interested in studying in the United States, and then

direct them toward the appropriate resources to do so (Young 1). In 1946 there were reportedly six to seven hundred Iranian students with all arrangements made to study in the United States (Young 1).

Analysis of the Iran-America Relations Society

Donald Wilber, in his 1943 report to the State Department regarding the Iran-America Relations Society described perfectly the situation of the Society and what the United States' attitude towards it should be:

If the proper decisions are taken and the necessary action taken, much positive good will result. The fact to remember is that the program is entirely in the hands of the Iranians themselves, and the best way to ensure their increased activity is to demonstrate the support and interest of the United States. The officers hope to make the Society a rallying place for the young and well-educated generation of Iranians where they will be informed of the problems of their own country. The approach will be to show that the United States has faced similar problems and to demonstrate what possible solutions may be found. This approach would make clear American interest in Iran and would be a much better way to strengthen our general fund of goodwill here than the approach of the Anglo-Persian Institute, which spreads information about England and the British Empire. (Wilber 8)

The point Wilber makes is that in its mission, organization, and pursuits, the Iran-America Relations Society was very much serving American interests in Iran on its own, and was very much moving towards achieving a friendly relationship between the two countries. The Society's challenge moving forward would be maintaining its trajectory without relying too much on outside assistance. The challenge for the United States would be to provide assistance to the Society in achieving its goals, when requested, without attaching any stipulations.

Of the ten members of the Society's first council, only two were American. This was important for the Society in that it needed to appear autonomous from foreign influence in order to remain legitimate in the eyes of Iranian society. The other notable aspect of its organization, its self-funding., also provided autonomy. However, this arrangement left it with little

room for growth. The Society sought assistance from the Iranian government in its expansion, which is permissible from a public relations standpoint because it was an organization located in Iran during a time when foreign sources were competing for influence in Iran. However, were American members of the Society, such as Wilber, to ask for too much assistance from the American government, any claim of autonomy would have been incredulous. The irony in this situation is Wilber, fully aware of these implications, asks the State Department for monetary assistance for every Society pursuit.

Despite the logistical conflicts in achieving their goals, the intention of the Society in their activities does seem to maintain the integrity of the mission outlined in the constitution. A strong effort was made to reach the American military community living in Tehran (not by choice, as is the nature of the military), educate them, and help them find interesting aspects of Iranian culture to embrace and take home with them. Likewise, promotion of both Iranian and American subjects in the literary field, by both Iranians and Americans, took place – culminating in the publication of *Iran and the U.S.A.* Both Iranians and Americans helped Iranian students find the means to study in the United States. The only area in which the integrity of the constitution must be questioned is its selection of wartime film propaganda.

This discussion would also not be complete without a fair representation of the authors of the sources used, regardless of whether they had any impact on the Society itself or not. The author of the main source used in this discussion, Donald N. Wilber, was the head of the Institute of Iranian Art and Archaeology and a founding member of the IARS. He is also known to have been an active operative of the Office of Strategic Services (the predecessor organization to the Central Intelligence Agency) during his membership in the IARS, although he may not have been during the writing of this report (Stettinius). Wilber played an integral role in the development of Operation TP-Ajax, the plot that resulted in the overthrow of Muhammad Musaddiq in 1953. He wrote a history of

the operation, which was published in *The New York Times* in 2000. T. Culyer Young, the State Department public relations attaché responsible for the second report used, was a CIA consultant later in his career, although it seems unlikely he had any affiliation with the OSS during the foundation of the Iran-America Relations Society (Silvergate 311). It does not seem, however, that either of these individuals had any impact on the daily operations or long-term projects of the Society. Wilber's report seems only to provide recommendations for the State Department approach toward the Society (one that advocates financial assistance void of political interference), and Young's report only endorses Wilber's recommendations.

Conclusion

The IARS, in stark comparison to its British and Soviet equivalents, was one lacking the encumbrance of state-sponsorship. This allowed it to grow quickly, and expand faster than it was financially able to. Through the primary sources studied in this discussion, American diplomats recognized the necessity to support the Society with a measure of restraint. As reported, the Society did achieve its goals in fostering an environment of cultural exchange and made great efforts towards encouraging education in Iran. From what can be gathered through the study of history, the positive strides made by the IARS fell victim to the U.S. policy of British support in the 1950s – one that was deemed ill-advised by the sources analyzed. While research is ongoing and examination of yet unread documents related to the IARS will undoubtedly provide new insights, a preliminary conclusion can be drawn, based on the discontinuation of *Iran and the U.S.A.* in 1950 and the small quantity of existing information related to it, despite its continuation the society began to lose support during the nationalist movement that began in the late 1940s. The Society, received positively during its first several years, would be met with skepticism, as all American-associated entities would, following the overthrow of Muhammad Musaddiq.



Works cited

Iran-America Relations Society. *Constitution of the Iran-America Relations Society*. Tehran. 1943.

Macris, Jeffrey R. "The Persian Gulf Theater In World War II." *Journal Of The Middle East & Africa* 1.1 (2010): 97-107. Academic Search Complete. Web. 12 Jan. 2016.

Silvergate, Harvey A. *Three Felonies a Day: How the Feds Target the Innocent*. New York: Encounter, 2009.

Stettinius, Edward R. Memo to the American Legation in Cairo. 11 February 1944. Box 5, Folder 840. RG 84 Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. National Archives of the United States, College Park, MD. 18 November 2015.

Wilber, Donald N. Letter to Robert Crane. 4 May 1944. Box 5, Folder 840. RG 84 Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. National Archives of the United States, College Park, MD. 18 November 2015.

Young, T. Culyer. Memo to the Secretary of State. 21 January 1946. Box 99, Folder 840. RG 84 Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. National Archives of the United States, College Park, MD. 16 November 2015.

Iran-America Relations Society, *Iran and the U.S.A.* [Tehran, Iran] Jul. 1947.

Iran's Azerbaijan Crisis: Great Power Politics & the Advent of the Cold War

Nicole Bayat Grajewski

The George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs

Abstract

This paper will examine the policies of the Soviet Union, the United States, and Iran during the Soviet invasion of Iranian Azerbaijan in 1946 to argue that oil, Great Power geopolitics, and Cold War insecurity shaped each state's respective policy. Drawing upon American, British, Soviet, and Iranian diplomatic correspondence as well as secondary sources, this paper will demonstrate that the Soviet Union's invasion of Iranian Azerbaijan marked the first Cold War crisis and set the context for subsequent competition among the Great Powers. The combination of Allied occupation and the appointment of a weak monarch thrust Iran into a state of political ferment where outside forces vied for power, which eventually culminated in the first major international crisis of the Cold War. While the Soviet Union and the United States both considered Iran a valuable strategic asset by virtue of its geography and resources, the Soviet Union particularly viewed Western presence as an existential security threat to its southern border and to its primary economic interest in Iran, oil. The imperative to balance Soviet influence in the region and protecting oil in the Persian Gulf compelled the United States and Iran to defend Iranian sovereignty through the United Nations Security Council.

The Soviet Union's invasion of Iranian Azerbaijan marked the first Cold War crisis and set the context for subsequent competition among the Great Powers. Iran's involvement demonstrated the country's ability to defend its sovereignty even when confronted by the world's superpowers. The motivations for actions taken by the Soviet Union and the U.S. during the Azerbaijan crisis varied, but in both cases were shaped by oil, strategic geopolitical influence, and emerging Cold War competition. While the Soviet Union and the U.S. both considered Iran a valuable strategic asset by virtue of its geography and resources, the Soviet Union particularly viewed Western presence as an existential security threat to its southern border and to its primary economic interest in Iran, oil (Clarke 2004, 558).

Through the occupation of northern Iran, demands for a stake in the exploitation of Iranian oil, and support for the communist Tudeh and the Azerbaijan Democratic Party ("ADP"), the Soviet government attempted to shift the balance of power in their favor. Reactions from the U.S. and Great Britain were based upon Soviet aggression and the strategic value of the region (Fatemi 22). Unlike the Soviet Union, whose interests lay primarily in northern Iran, Britain concentrated its

interests in the south of Iran where its oil holdings and ports along imperial trade and communication routes were located (Fawcett 2014 143). As a result of these concerns, Britain sought to persuade the U.S. to espouse an anti-Soviet policy to protect the fading empire's oil and colonial possessions.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Iran was a strategic objective in the Great Game between Tsarist Russia and the British Empire. In the 1907 Anglo-Russian treaty, the Empires shifted from vying for influence in Iran to striking an alliance that effectively divided Iran into two zones of influence (Sykes 410-412). With the collapse of the Tsarist regime and the advent of the Bolshevik government, the influence of the former Russian empire waned in Iran, while Great Britain proceeded to exploit Iranian petroleum and to influence Tehran's internal politics (Keylor 266). By 1921 the Soviet Union sought to strengthen its southern border and counter Great Britain's extra-regional hegemony in the Near East with the Iran-Soviet Friendship Treaty, which ensured Moscow's military protection of Iran (Treaty of Friendship 1921,



92-98). Forty years later, the Treaty of Friendship and fear of German invasion led to the military occupation of not only the Soviet Union but also the United Kingdom and the U.S. in Iran.

Motivated by the possibility of a German incursion in the Near East, the Allies occupied Iran, a move that laid the foundation for Soviet and Western contention in the months following the war. In August 1941, as Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, Allied military forces occupied Iran in order to defend strategic trade routes and military bases in the Persian Gulf. Speculation surrounding Reza Shah's pro-German tendencies prompted the Allies to pressure Reza Shah's abdication, replacing him with his young and inexperienced son Muhammed Reza (Azemi 45).

The 1942 Tripartite Treaty, signed by Iran, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, affirmed the Allies' commitment to withdraw from Iran six months following the war. Though the U.S. helped design the Tripartite Treaty, based on similar principles of the Atlantic Charter, President Franklin Roosevelt remained "reluctant to intervene in, or take responsibility for, the management of countries hitherto outside its sphere of influence" (Fawcett 1992 110). However, a year later the U.S. presence at the Tehran Conference compelled the Soviet Union and Great Britain to strengthen their commitment to preserving Iran's independence following the war.

In 1943, the Big Three met in Tehran, resulting in the agreement that solidified the presence of Soviet troops in northern Iran to protect its southern flank from German incursion. In addition, British, and subsequently, American troops would occupy the south of Iran to secure oil and arms supply routes to the Persian Gulf. According to U.S. Diplomatic correspondence, the agreement respected "the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Iran,...the forces of the Allied Powers shall be withdrawn from Iranian territory not later than six months after all hostilities between the Allied Powers and Germany and her associates have been suspended" (Fatemi 17-23). President Franklin Delano Roosevelt considered the Tehran Conference a means of decreasing the influence of the Soviet Union and Great Britain in Iran by compelling the Allies to agree on terms that ensured the territorial integrity of Iran (Henderson 360-371).

Despite the terms of the 1942 Tripartite Treaty, the Soviet Union refused to withdraw troops

from Iran following the war. Instead, the Soviet Union sought to augment its influence in Iran while solidifying oil concessions and fostering pro-Soviet separatist movements in Iran's northern provinces. Moscow's aim, consistent with its grand strategy, was to establish a permanent foothold in Iran and thereby counterbalance the predominance of Western interests rather than exporting communist ideology.

The Soviet Union considered Iran a strategic importance due to its shared borders, abundance of oil, and access to vital trade routes (NSC 5402 882). Before the war, Hitler and Molotov's negotiations proposed the delineation of spheres of influence to partition the colonial heritage of the British Empire and ensure the Soviet Union a stake in Iranian oil. A Nazi-Soviet draft of their agreement in 1940 indicated "that the area south of Batum and Baku in the general direction of the Persian Gulf is recognized as the center of aspirations of the Soviet Union" (Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941 257-259). While Hitler's invasion of Stalingrad in 1941 precluded the implementation of such an agreement, Moscow's desire for Iranian oil continued. To the Soviet Union, Iran's oil agreement with the United Kingdom, and potentially with the U.S., would threaten its interests and undermine its presence in the Middle East.

Iran's drive to expel Soviet influence was met with intense opposition from Moscow. When the Majlis, Iran's parliament, announced it would "postpone discussion on oil concessions to the period after the war," Iran's oil wealth became a source of increased friction (Sickler 43). As interpreted by the British Foreign Office, Soviet disappointment over oil concessions intensified the Politburo's calls for a propaganda campaign and shifted Soviet policy away from its former "passive obstructionism" to a far more activist policy explicitly linked to a demand for autonomy in Azerbaijan (British Foreign Office FO371/27154). Lavrentiy Pavlovich Beria, head of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, reported in August 1944 that "the British, and possibly the Americans, secretly work against a transfer of oil fields in northern Iran to the Soviet Union", which fed Stalin's paranoia (Dobbs 252). In 1945, despite the Majlis moratorium on oil concessions, a decree from the U.S.S.R. State Defense Committee demanded mandated a search for oil in northern Iran by the Azerbaijan Oil Association of the Narkomneft (310).

Communist ideology served as a vehicle

for achieving Soviet objectives. The Soviet Union exploited Iran's communist party, the Tudeh, as well as the Azerbaijan Democratic Party ("ADP") under the leadership of Mir Bagirov, head of the Communist Party in Soviet Azerbaijan (Hasanli 48). In both cases, "these parties and their accompanying ideologies were seen by Moscow as instruments for the pursuit of wider Soviet interests rather than revolutionary or Azeri ethno-nationalist policies" (Fawcett 2014 381). Moscow assisted and supported the ADP with the intention of advancing Soviet economic and strategic interests, rather than promoting an ideological struggle (Fawcett 2014 387).

A decree from the Politburo to Bagirov outlined the provisions necessary to organize a separatist movement in the Azerbaijani provinces of Northern Iran. On July 6, 1945, the CCCP gave the order to "begin preparatory work to form a national autonomous Azerbaijan district with broad powers within the Iranian state and simultaneously to develop separatist movements in the provinces" of northern Iran. The decree included the creation of "the Society for Cultural Relations between Iran and the Azerbaijan SSR to strengthen cultural and propaganda work" as well as a similar organization in Tabriz (Decree of the CC CPSU Politburo to Mir Bagirov CC Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan 1945 311-312). As a result, Tehran viewed Soviet tactics with increasing apprehension and began to seek international support.

Following the war, Iran's political system was in "a state of political ferment with multiple competing political groups and factions," which provided Iran's liberal politicians with an opportunity to pursue a constitutional monarchy. The Soviets perceived the prevailing political ferment as a beneficial pretext for capitalizing upon the instability and for seeking oil concessions from the government (Fawcett 2014 285). The British Ambassador to Iran, Wallace Murray, stressed to U.S. Secretary of State, James Byrnes, that the Soviet objectives of gaining control and establishing a pro-Soviet government in Iranian Azerbaijan threatened the two country's interests in the region (FRUS 1945 VIII 417-419). At the end of the war, Ambassador Murray urged that the U.S. adopt a more robust position on the issue since Soviet troops in Iran were no longer necessary to deter the Third Reich.

In the face of Great Power competition, Iran's political leaders asserted the country's presence as a

geopolitical force independent of foreign subversion. The primary Iranians involved in the Azerbaijan crisis included Ahmad Qavam, chief negotiator with the Soviet Union, Hassan Taqizadeh, Iranian Ambassador to Great Britain, and Hussein Ala, Iranian Ambassador to the U.S. as well as Muhammed Mosaddeq and Mozaffar Firouz, who introduced a "bill that forbade the negotiation of oil concessions without the consent of the Majlis" (Fawcett 2014 285). With the support of the U.S. and Great Britain, the Iranian government resisted Soviet pressures through the United Nations Security Council, in the first major appeal to the newly established institution. On January 30, 1946 the Security Council passed a resolution calling for bilateral negotiations between Iran and the Soviet Union. Although the language of the resolution was weak, it soon became clear to Stalin that he would have to reach an agreement in the face of international pressure.

In a letter to the United Nation's Secretary General, Ambassador Ala invoked Article 35 of the Charter of the United Nations to bring "to the attention of the Security Council a dispute between Iran and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security" (FRUS 1946 VII 268). Ala noted that contrary to Article V of the 1942 Tripartite Treaty and the provisions of the January 1946 Security Council Resolution, the Soviet Union maintained the presence of troops within Iranian territory and continued "to interfere in the internal affairs of Iran through the medium of Soviet agents, officials and armed forces" (FRUS 1946 VII 268). Ala called for "the immediate and just solution of this dispute by the Security Council," which he deemed integral "to the survival of the purposes and principles which the members of the United Nations have solemnly undertaken to respect" (FRUS 1946 VII 268).

A communiqué issued by George Kennan to the Soviets reaffirmed Ala's convictions, arguing that "the U.S., as a member of the United Nations...cannot remain indifferent" (US Department of State Bulletin 435). The imperative to contain Soviet expansionism and replace the fading British influence called for U.S. intervention. Truman recognized that negotiations, if left to the British or Russians, "no matter how drawn up or proposed, the plan would appear to Iran, and

doubtless to the world, as a thinly disguised cover for power politics and old-world imperialism”(FRUS 1945 VIII 524). The creation of the United Nations was deemed necessary for preserving self-determination and values for the Third World and the Azerbaijan crisis was its first test. Through the Security Council, the U.S., Great Britain, and Iran successfully forced the Soviet Union out of Iran. As a result, the Soviets had to give up its territorial and economic interests, and moreover, to accept U.S. power in Iran.

American insistence on upholding ideals of self-determination and sovereignty for all nations precipitated one of the first major Cold War crises. At the onset of the Soviet occupation, the U.S. feared that alienating the Soviet Union would jeopardize the United Nations (FRUS 1945 VIII 512-513). Initially, Washington advised against requests by the Iranian government in 1946 to present their case to the Security Council since the Soviet Union’s veto power in the Security Council could significantly undermine the United Nations’ ability to function as an instrument of conflict resolution (FRUS 1945 VIII 513). Even so, then Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson believed that a refusal would undermine “world confidence” in the United Nations as an effective forum for international reconciliation (Acheson 196). While the U.S. wanted to avoid a Great Power confrontation, the Truman Administration felt it had no choice but to support Iran against Soviet incursion through the United Nations Security Council.

The Security Council Resolution combined with the increasingly active involvement of the U.S. motivated the Soviet Union to negotiate with Ahmad Qavam, who Stalin perceived as a Soviet-leaning member of the Iranian government. In April of 1946, Prime Minister Ahmad Qavam reached an agreement with the Soviets to grant major oil concessions in return for a withdrawal of the Red Army in the north. If approved by the Majlis, the Soviets would receive 51% of the shares in the proposed joint oil company

for 25 years.

Stalin’s interest in the ADP diminished once he believed that the Soviet Union would receive oil concessions from Iran. Stalin’s letter to Ja’far Pishevari, the leader of Azerbaijan’s secessionist republic, justified Soviet withdrawal on the grounds that remaining in Iran would provide justification for the British and the Americans to station troops around the world (Stalin 8). Moreover, the Azerbaijan Crisis occurred at a point of heightened Soviet aggression in Eastern Europe, which the Soviet Union perceived as an area of greater political importance.

The Azerbaijan crisis was a major disappointment for the Soviet Union and a success for Iran’s territorial integrity. Firstly, the Shah and anti-Soviet forces in the Iranian government considered Qavam’s agreement with the Soviet Union an act of appeasement and successfully rallied against it. Secondly, the Azerbaijan crisis led to increased British and American involvement in the region. Thirdly, Soviet failure in Iranian Azerbaijan marked the its first defeat in the Cold War.

During the Azerbaijan crisis, the Soviet Union and the U.S. formulated policy based on oil, strategic geopolitical influence, and Cold War competition. The paramount concern of the U.S. and the United Kingdom was Iran’s susceptibility to Soviet expansion and the threat that it posed to economic, military, and political security interests. The Soviet Union shared similar views towards the West and used ideology to justify a secessionist movement in Iran. Though widely overlooked among the vast number of Cold War near-confrontations, the Azerbaijan crisis was the first significant case taken to the newly formed United Nations and revealed the deep distrust between the West and the Soviet Union. Moreover, Iranian politicians demonstrated their resolve to defend Iranian interests even when face with Great Power competition.



Works cited

Acheson, Dean. *Present at the Creation: My Years at the State department*. New York: W.W. Norton, Inc., 1969.

“Acting Secretary of State to the Chargé in Iran (Ward).” *Foreign Relations Of The U.S. (FRUS): Diplomatic Papers 1945 Volume VIII, The Near East And Africa. Vol. VIII*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1962.

“Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Iran (Murray).” *Foreign Relations Of The U.S. (FRUS): Diplomatic Papers 1945 Volume VIII, The Near East And Africa. Vol. VIII*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1962.

- "Ambassador in Iran (Morris) to the Secretary of State." *Foreign Relations Of The U.S. (FRUS): Diplomatic Papers 1945 Volume VIII, The Near East And Africa. Vol. VIII.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1962.
- "Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Iran (Murray)." *Foreign Relations Of The U.S. (FRUS): Diplomatic Papers 1945 Volume VIII, The Near East And Africa. Vol. VIII.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1962.
- "Ambassador Ala to UN Secretary General (Trygve Li)." *Foreign Relations Of The U.S. (FRUS): Diplomatic Papers 1946 Volume VII, The Near East And Africa. Vol. VII.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1962.
- Azimi, Fakhreddin. *The Quest for Democracy in Iran a Century of Struggle against Authoritarian Rule.* Cambridge. Harvard UP, 2008.
- "Decree of the USSR State Defense Committee No. 9168 SS Regarding Geological Prospecting Work for Oil in Northern Iran, June 21, 1945." Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), 2001.
- "Decree of the CC CPSU Politburo to Mir Bagirov CC Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, Measures to Organize a Separatist Movement in Southern Azerbaijan and Other Provinces of Northern Iran July 06, 1945." *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, 2001.
- Dobbs, Michael. *Six Months in 1945: FDR, Stalin, Churchill and Truman--from World War to Cold War.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012.
- Fatemi, Faramarz S. *The U.S.S.R. in Iran: The Background History of Russian and Anglo-American Conflict in Iran, Its Effects on Iranian Nationalism and the Fall of the Shah.* South Brunswick, NJ: A.S. Barnes, 1980.
- Fawcett, Louise. *Iran and the Cold War: The Azerbaijan Crisis of 1946.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.
- Fawcett, Louise. "Revisiting the Iranian Crisis of 1946: How Much More Do We Know?" *Iranian Studies* (2014): 379-99. Web.
- "FO371/27154 Bullard to Foreign Office September 1964." *British Foreign Office.* 1941.
- Hasanli, Jamil. *At the Dawn of the Cold War: The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946.* Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.
- Keylor, William R. *The Twentieth-century World: An International History.* 2nd ed. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.
- "Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941." *Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Office Department of State:* Washington, 1948.
- "Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Secretary of State" *Foreign Relations Of The U.S. (FRUS): Diplomatic Papers 1945 Volume VIII, The Near East And Africa. Vol. VIII.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1962.
- Sicker, Martin. *The Bear and the Lion: Soviet Imperialism and Iran.* New York: Praeger, 1988.
- Stalin, Joseph. "Joseph V. Stalin to Ja'far Pishevari, Leader of the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan May 8, 1946" published in *Working Paper no.15.* Cold War International History Project (CWIHP).
- Sykes, Percy. *A History of Persia.*, 3d ed. London: Macmillan and, Limited, 1930.
- "U.S. Department of State Bulletin, XIV." *U.S. Department of State.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O, 1946.
- "U.S. Policy Toward Iran NSC 5402." *Foreign Relations of the U.S. (FRUS): Diplomatic Papers 1952-1954. Vol. X.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1962.

Shi'rality

The Avant-Garde in Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema

Joshua Weaver
University of Maryland, College Park

Abstract

In this paper, I will examine the role of the avant-garde in Iranian film created after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. I will argue that Iranian cinematic avant-garde is a hybrid, a unique combination of Western avant-garde techniques and ideas with indigenous Persian images and motifs. The defining characteristic of the avant-garde in Iranian cinema is thus its Shi'rality, its combination of Persian poetry with the medium of film. The body of my paper will consist of case studies of three individual Iranian films that utilize various avant-garde techniques and draw inspiration from various avant-garde movements. Those films are *Hamoun*, *The Day I Became a Woman*, and *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night*. In examining these films, due to the constraints of time and length, I will focus primarily on individual scenes that best illustrate the concept of Shi'rality, the combination of Western avant-garde cinematic techniques and the Persian poetic imagery. Through these specific case studies, I will illustrate and explore this concept of Shi'rality, and demonstrate its defining role in Iranian cinema.

The avant-garde has a long and complex history in the world of Iranian art, including cinema. By avant-garde, I am attempting to use a catch-all term for all innovative or unorthodox art, regardless of movement or place. The defining feature of the avant-garde is experimentation, a departure from the traditional or mainstream artistic discourse or a homage to an alternative discourse created by the early avant-garde innovators. The avant-garde manifests itself in a number of different media, artists, and art movements, and is a more general term meant to capture anything that is experimental or unusual.

One of the principal movements or styles of avant-garde art is surrealism, which, broadly defined, focuses on unleashing the creative potential of unconscious mind through unusual or irrational juxtapositions (Barnes). In her doctoral dissertation presented at the University of Manchester entitled "The Reception of Surrealism in Iran", Aida Foroutan traces the history, development, and proliferation of surrealism in Iranian art. She argues fundamentally that from the very beginning, Iranian surrealism has been a hybrid, an amalgamation of Western Surrealism¹ and indigenous Iranian poetry. Although early Iranian

surrealists working in both literature and visual art drew inspiration from the techniques of European modern artists, they also grounded their creations in the traditional artistic discourse of Iran, in particular drawing from Sufi poetry (Foroutan).

In this paper, I would like to both expand and narrowly focus Foroutan's thesis. I would like to extend her argument about the hybrid nature of Iranian modern art beyond just surrealism to the Iranian avant-garde in general, as well as give this Iranian hybridity a name: *Shi'rality*. At the same time, I would like to focus this discussion of the nature of the Iranian avant-garde to films produced after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, and in particular three films: *Hamoun*, *The Day I Became a Woman*, and *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*. I will first present a brief summary of the relevant background history of both the avant-garde and cinema in Iran. I will then discuss at length the concept of *Shi'rality* and its nuances, and finally will examine how *Shi'rality* is manifest in the films mentioned above.

Both the avant-garde and the technology of film entered Iran as part of Iran's cultural encounter with Europe and the United States in the 20th century. The issue of the modernization (and "Westernization") of Iran is a complex and politically fraught one, and one

¹ The art movement formally defined in André Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto*

that is beyond the scope of this paper. I will therefore not delve into the details of that history here; it is just important to note that the Iranian avant-garde and Iranian cinema both exist in this cultural and historical context.

Before this cultural encounter, however, there was an ancient and rich culture, which included the Sufi poetic tradition. As interpreted by Aida Foroutan, many techniques and ideas of classical Sufi traditions can be found in Surrealism. She goes on to argue that the Sufi tradition represents a form of "proto-surrealism," a term she uses to describe the apparent similarities between Western Surrealism and Sufi poetry. Although this term may be problematic, the apparent similarities between the Sufi tradition and the Western Surrealist tradition are worth noting. For example, according to Foroutan, the concept of "subversion" that is key to Sufi poetry is also fundamental to surrealism, and operates in many of the same ways with many of the same consequences in both artistic domains. Additionally, Foroutan points out many conceptual similarities between Rumi and André Breton, specifically highlighting Rumi's concepts of "عشق" (love) and "انقلاب" (revolution), and comparing them directly with the text of the Surrealist Manifesto (Foroutan).

Surrealism was just one of many avant-garde art movements to emerge in Europe in the early 20th century (often inspired by contact with non-Western art), and consequently began to enter Iran at about the same time. The first examples of the avant-garde in Iranian art can be found in literature, particularly in the poetry of Nima Yushij, the inventor of *Shi'r-i naw* or modernist Persian poetry, and the works of Sadeh Hedayat, in particular his novel *Būf-i Kūr* (The Blind Owl). Sadeh Hedayat is particularly fascinating in the context of this paper because from the very beginning he combined European influences with the Persian literary tradition. Hedayat had extensive personal experience with European modern art, and likely wrote *Būf-i Kūr* as a student in Paris in the 1930s. In *Būf-i Kūr*, Hedayat obviously draws on European Surrealism and literary modernist techniques, but instead of just copying the European literature he was exposed to, he combined it with traditional Persian images, motifs, and concepts to create a truly hybrid work (Foroutan).

Just as the avant-garde penetrated Iranian literature in the early 20th century, so too did it

penetrate Iranian visual art in the mid 20th century. The first manifestation of the avant-garde in Iranian visual art was the *Khurūs-i Jangī* (Fighting Cock) art magazine. This loose collection of artists and intellectuals drew their inspiration both from European modernism but also from their own cultural tradition, and, although their movement was based on rebelling against the dominant artistic discourse in Iran, they did so within a solidly Persian context, using Persian images and motifs. Another pre-revolutionary example of hybridity in Iranian visual art is Bahman Mohasses, who combined Italian magical realism and surrealism with his Iranian background to create some of the most iconic Iranian art created before 1979 (Foroutan).

Since the Islamic Revolution, and the subsequent regime of strict censorship imposed by the new government, avant garde art in Iran has suffered somewhat, but largely continued to thrive as new restrictions have forced artists to become more creative and subtle in their expression. The avant-garde has come to permeate Iranian art, and even the new government's propagandists were quick to adapt and appropriate surrealist imagery in their pro-Palestinian murals, for example (Bombardier).

I would like to now to turn this paper towards the concept of *Shi'rality* that I mentioned earlier. I define *Shi'rality* as the central characteristic of Iranian avant-garde art, its unique hybridity between the Persian poetic tradition and Western techniques and media. The term *Shi'rality* itself perfectly demonstrates this mélange, this amalgamation, as *Shi'r* is the Persian word for poetry that I have adapted into English to highlight the unique combination of the Iranian and the Western one sees in the Iranian avant-garde. The Iranian avant-garde is thus unique, neither entirely indigenously Persian nor an imitation of the modern art of the West.

The concept of *Shi'rality* that I have put forward is grounded in the works of established scholars. In particular, Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, in his discussion of Abbas Kiarostami's film, argues that one of the defining features of his cinematic style is his combination of Persian poetry with film. According to Karimi-Hakkak, Kiarostami weaves classical Persian poetry into the fabric of his films in both their themes and their aesthetics. Karimi-Hakkak's ideas are cited and expanded even further in Khatereh Sheibani's *The Poetics of Iranian Cinema*. In this work, Sheibani argues



that after the Revolution of 1979, the image replaced traditional poetry as the main vehicle of Iranian art, yet this new world of images in its aesthetics and themes did not abandon the Iranian poetic tradition but rather continued it and transmogrified it, created a hybrid poetic cinema (Sheibani). This is very similar to my concept of *Shi'rality*, a hybridization of cinema with Persian poetry.

One of the key ideas of *Shi'rality* is although Iranian avant-garde film uses a Western invention and often pays homage to a variety of influences, it is grounded and embedded in a larger Persian cultural tradition, and draws its concepts, symbolism, and aesthetics from that tradition, in particular Sufi poetry and Persian calligraphy. *Shi'rality* is therefore bilingual; it draws from the conceptual and visual language of both avant-garde film and the Persian tradition to create a new hybrid language that permeates contemporary Iranian avant-garde film.

To explore the details, intricacies, and nuances of *Shi'rality*, I would like to examine scenes from three post-Revolutionary avant-garde Iranian films. The first of these films is *Hamoun*, released in 1990. It was directed by Dariush Mehrjui, who also directed pre-Revolutionary "Iranian New Wave" masterpiece *The Cow*. *Hamoun* draws heavily from the films of the legendary Italian director Federico Fellini, who influentially incorporated dreams, fantasy, and the surreal into many of his films.

Hamoun treats the story of the title character, Hamid Hamoun, who struggles to cope with his wife's demand for a divorce. The film opens, after the title credits, with a bizarre and surreal dream sequence in which Hamid is attacked by a colorfully dressed wedding party. Hamid awakes and takes a shower, ushering the viewer into reality. Throughout the film, the lines between dreams, hallucinations, and delusions and reality become more and more blurred, with dream sequences and surrealist juxtapositions of completely unrelated imagery becoming more and more integrated into the reality established by the film. The *Shi'rality* of this can be found in Sufi poetry, where love leads to madness. If the disintegration of the lines between reality and fantasy in this film represents Hamid's declining mental state, then the film follows a Sufi-like journey, in which Hamid's love for his wife who divorces him causes him to "go mad", to subvert the tradition delineation between reality and irreality. This madness ultimately drives Hamid to attempt suicide by

drowning himself in the sea. The sea is an image often employed in Classical Persian poetry, and is often used as a metaphor for larger existence.

Additionally, throughout the film, Hamid attempts to meet this idolized teacher Ali, perhaps representative of the Sufi concept of reuniting or joining with God. However, Hamid fails to meet Ali before his descent into madness and his suicide attempt. At the end of the film, after reuniting with all his relatives and friends in a dream-like sequence, Hamid is saved from drowning by a passing boat, possibly by his teacher, Ali. In the end, perhaps through his madness, Hamid has committed the ultimate act of self-abandonment, and having been liberated from his Self, can finally reunited with his teacher, Ali. This interpretation gels well with Sufism, in which the abandonment of the Self in the pursuit of unity with the Divine is key, and therefore highlights *Shi'rality* by melding traditional Persian Sufi concepts and imagery with Western filmmaking techniques. Even if we entertain other interpretations of the film's ending, the film still exemplifies *Shi'rality* because of its ambiguity, which is a crucial component of all poetry, including Persian poetry.

Another film that encapsulates the concept of *Shi'rality* is *The Day I Became a Woman* (*Ruzi Kah Zan Shudam*), directed by Marzieh Meshkini and released in 2000. It tells stories of three women at different stages of life: a young girl on the cusp of womanhood and therefore the hijab, a married cyclist whose husband will not let her compete in a bicycle race, and an old widow now free to buy everything she has always wanted. The defining theme of this film, and the theme that permeates and connects the three stories that comprise the film is the absurdity of the "Iranian" construction of womanhood, what a woman cannot do and what she must do. This absurdity is present in all the episodes of the film, although in different ways, some more subtle than others. For most of the film, the absurdity is realistic; it is not couched in the surreal and the film is not constructed along the lines of the avant-garde. The absurdity of womanhood is everyday and it is believable, and often expressed through excessive literalization, the act of taking metaphors and instantiating them literally, thus rendering them absurd. In the first story, the young girl on her ninth birthday becomes a woman, and therefore must stop playing with her male best friend and wear the chador. What is absurd about this episode is that the young girl's mother and grandmother set a deadline; at 12 noon sharp, the little girl will transform

into a woman and immediately assume all the responsibilities of womanhood. This idea of such an immediate transition from girlhood to womanhood is meant to be seen as absurd, as intentionally exaggerated to highlight the flaws of “Iranian” womanhood.

In the second episode, the absurdity is much more subtle. In it, a married woman, who enjoys cycling, is told by her husband (who rides his horse shirtless while she wears the full chadur), that if she does not stop cycling, he will divorce her. He even gets the other male elders and religious figures of the village involved to forcibly prevent his wife from riding her “devil’s mount”, and ultimately divorces her. To find the absurdity in this part, we must look at it from a Camusian perspective, that, much like is outlined in Camus’s *The Myth of Sisyphus* (originally published in French in 1942), Ahoo, the young married woman, struggles against society’s bounds even though that struggle is ultimately in vain. For her, it is better to insist on cycling and lose everything than submit to the inevitable, paralleling Camus’s idea of the absurd (Camus).

It is in the final episode of the film, and especially in the film’s ending that we see the melding of the absurd with the avant-garde, and the introduction of *Shi’rality*. This final episode depicts a widow, who, having been left a large sum of money, goes on a shopping spree for every material possession she has ever wanted. She is assisted by a group of young boys, and she tied strings around her fingers so that she does not forget anything. There is some absurdity in this, and it is presented as such in the film, but it is not until the film’s final scenes the absurdity becomes fully manifest through the avant-garde and the surreal.

Upon buying everything she wanted, the widow has the boys set all her possessions up on the beach as if they were in a wall-less, roof-less house. Visually, this image is stunning, juxtaposing the natural beauty of the sea and Iran’s southern coast with the meticulous arrangement of objects into a quotidian set up. At this moment, the film enters the realm of the avant-garde, with this surreal image of a structureless house on the beach. The widow then floats out to sea to an awaiting ship while the other two protagonists look on, thus ending the film. Beyond the surrealist imagery, there are many ambiguities in this final section of the film, creating the sense of

Shi’rality. Fundamental to Shi’raity is the ambiguity of interpretation, the lack of one to one correspondence between visual imagery and meaning. Perhaps this last scene represents death, in which the old widow casts off the shackles of womanhood that have been placed on her for her entire life, and is finally free to exercise her own absolute freedom. Perhaps all three female characters are really the same woman at different stages in her life, and each of their respective rebellions against the patriarchal constraints placed upon them leads to the moment of actualization at the end. The film is purposely ambiguous, which demonstrates its *Shi’rality*.

In Iranian-American director Ana Lily Amirpour’s film *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*, one finds a radically different kind of *Shi’rality*, a combination of a completely different style of Western avant-garde and a completely different set of Persian visual and poetic aesthetics. *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*, self-styled as an “Iranian Vampire Spaghetti Western”, combines the avant-garde of such American directors with Quentin Tarantino, David Fincher, and David Lynch with *Shi’r-i naw* and the aesthetics of contemporary Persian poetry, perhaps most notably the work of Forough Farrokhzad. The film, fundamentally, is about an Iranian woman vampire who attacks men who hurt women.

Aesthetically, this film beautifully encapsulates *Shi’rality* in the hybridization of Western popular film with Persian imagery. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is the main character’s chadur. Within the context of the film, this traditional Persian garment becomes the vampire’s black cloak, and this piece of cloth becomes a symbol of feminine empowerment. Another major aesthetic point of the film is the use of black and white. The entire film is shot without color, and in its shot composition recalls not only Western film noir, but also classics of Iranian film, particular Forough Farrokhzad’s *The House is Black*. Moreover, much of imagery and the tone of the film also recalls Forough’s poetry. In particular, there is this one scene in the film where the vampire, in her own bedroom with its walls covered in posters, puts on a record and dances sensually to the music, which is from the Iranian rock band Kiosk². However, the director consciously

2 Iranian rock music (and other non-traditional genres of Iranian music) are another great example of *Shi’rality* and hybridity in Iranian art.



subverts the “male gaze” one would expect in such a scene, empowering the female protagonist through her freedom of expression. The aesthetics and tone of this entire scene, as well as a similar scene in which the protagonist dances with her potential lovers and ambiguously either kisses or bites him, recalled for me the general mood and tone created by such Forough Farrokhzad poems as *Sin* and *Another Birth*. This *Shi’rality*, although radically distinct from the form of *Shi’rality* seen in *Hamoun*, for example, still represents this unique hybrid of the Iranian and Western that can be found throughout the Iranian avant-garde.

As is evidenced by the three films discussed briefly above, and countless other Iranian films not

mentioned, the central defining characteristic of the avant-garde in Iranian cinema, and Iranian art in general, is its *Shi’rality*, its hybridization of the Persian and cinematic techniques to create something completely unique, distinct from either of its sources. This *Shi’rality* is based often in the aesthetics and conceptions of Persian poetry, hence the *Shi’r*, and combines the Persian poetic tradition with, in the case of film, a medium with its own tradition and techniques. *Shi’rality* is expressed in different ways in different films, but the unique hybrid nature of the avant-garde in Iranian cinema permeates almost every film produced in Iran.



Works cited

Barnes, Rachel. *The 20th-Century Art Book*. London: Phaidon, 2001.

Bombardier, Alice. "Iranian Mural Painting: New Trends." Ed. Annabelle Sreberny and Massoumeh Torfeh. *Cultural Revolution in Iran: Contemporary Popular Culture in the Islamic Republic*. London: I.B. Taurus, 2016. 217-29.

Foroutan, Aida. "The Reception of Surrealism in Iran." Diss. U of Manchester, 2012.

Hamoun. Dir. Dariush Mehrjui. 1990. DVD.

The Day I Became a Woman. Dir. Marzieh Meshkini. Olive Films, 2000. DVD.

A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night. Dir. Ana Lily Amirpour. VICE Films, 2014. *Netflix*. Web. 6 Dec. 2015.

Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus, and Other Essays*. New York: Vintage, 1955.

Sheibani, Khatereh. *The Poetics of Iranian Cinema: Aesthetics, Modernity and Film after the Revolution*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011.

The Pahlavi Cap

A Comparative Analysis of Historical Writings on Reza Shah Pahlavi

Christopher J. Thurston
University of Maryland, College Park

Abstract

This piece examines how historians have depicted two of the less laudable moments of Reza Shah Pahlavi's regime. The 1933-34 Anglo-Iran Oil Agreement and the 1935 Mashhad Massacre will be used as focus points for four prominent Iranian historians and their subsequent narratives; Ervand Abrahamian, Nikki R. Keddie, Cyrus Ghani and Muhammad Gholi Majd. Literature published by various authors reflects their contemporary environment but also their explicit and implicit interests. As such, when the account of Reza Shah's forced abdication is constructed, specific themes will surface that can be both parallel and divergent from similar pieces on Reza Shah. When assessing the development of The Islamic Republic, an account of the Pahlavi era is not only essential but should be considered mandatory in evaluating Iranian views on themselves, others, their history, international experiences, etc. Therefore it is my hope to analyze historical literature regarding the legacy of Reza Shah in order to gauge how that material constructs its narrative and thus determine what memory historians have created for Reza Shah.

One cannot dispute that Reza Khan Pahlavi (1878-1944) had an almost ubiquitous impact on Twentieth century Iran's culture, economy, and political structure. Rising to executive power in 1921 with the aid of the British, followed by supplanting the Qajar monarch and crowning himself in 1925, the Pahlavi era entrenched itself under the pretense of modernizing Iran and minimizing foreign influence (Abrahamian 64, 65). Indeed, newly titled Reza Shah was the leader responsible for many of Iran's contemporary characteristics. In 1934, the country officially became known as Iran internationally instead of Persia (Abrahamian 86). Reza Shah was responsible for the first successful efforts to limit social restrictions on women. Additionally, the Shah's government made strides to expand the efficiency and authority of the state, bolstered the military, and industrialization of the developing economy. Indeed, several historians have mentioned the monarch's prominent role in promoting these state-building efforts. Yet, despite the developments which accelerated during Reza Shah's reign (1925-1941), there exist many examples of dubious leadership with little regard to impacts across social strata or prudent decision making at the policy level. In fact, many examples of such lackluster governance mirror examples which would cripple the reign of Reza Shah's son and heir, Muhammad Reza Shah and lead to

the 1978-79 Revolution and the dissolution of the Pahlavi dynasty. Notably, both Pahlavi's capitulated to foreign pressure in their respective oil disputes (the 1933-34 concession and the 1951-53 nationalization crisis), and both were mired in violent clashes between authorities and protestors (1935 Mashhad Massacre versus; 1978 Black Friday).

Given these parallels, this researcher is left to investigate a comparison of historiographical narratives concerning Reza Shah in order to see how historians have arrived at neutral conclusions, such as "The new state attracted a mixed reception. For some...it brought law and order...and modern amenities...For others, it brought oppression, corruption, taxation" (while depicting Reza Shah) versus accusatory conclusions: "One should never underestimate the role of stupidity in history" (Abrahamian 91, 158) (while describing Muhammad Reza Shah's *Ittila'at* editorial from 1978. The editorial was a state sponsored article which likened opposition clerics, such as Ayatollah Khomeini, to "black reactionaries" seeking to subvert the Resurgent Party's progress. The release of the editorial exacerbated public and government relations on the eve of the Islamic Revolution).

Iranian historiography has expanded greatly in the twenty-first century. Yet historians have noted room for improvement. Historian Muhammad Tavakoli-Targhi in his monograph, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Nationalist Historiography*, mentioned that "Iranian modernity came to be viewed as a product of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution or by the establishment of the "enlightened" Pahlavi dynasty" (Tavakoli-Targhi 143). The claim asserts that historiography has associated developments, under the frequently ambiguous term "modernity" with the Pahlavi regime. Thus, this article hopes to demonstrate that through a comparison of events during Reza Shah's reign (which closely mirror those undertaken by his successor), as depicted by several popular historians, have minimized the first Pahlavi's role in dividing the various levels of society, therefore shielding Reza Shah from a legacy of poor leadership (reserved for his son) and enhancing his legacy as a modernizer.

The events which will be analyzed are the 1934 Anglo-Iranian oil concession and the 1935 Mashhad incident. The accounts of and the historians which will be compared and contrasted were drawn from Ervand Abrahamian's *A Modern History of Iran* (2008), Nikki R. Keddie's *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of the Revolution* (2003), Cyrus Ghani's *Iran and the Rise of Reza Shah: From Qajar Collapse to Pahlavi Power* (1998), and Muhammad Gholi Majd's *Great Britain and Reza Shah: The Plunder of Iran, 1921-1941* (2001). Each of these historians has focused on Reza Shah's modernization legacy (Abrahamian 72; Ghani 407; Keddie 107), with the exception of Majd, who indicts the Shah's injustice as an "agent of Britain" (Majd 2). The comparisons will focus on the nature of analysis offered by the historian; what their various claims indicate about the legacy these historians have afforded Reza Shah. The essay is also concerned with comparisons in source material used by the historians. Do these historians draw from multiple sources such as British, American, Iranian sources or a combination of primary material? Do historians provide evidence for their claims? And finally, how has the narrative of these events, enhanced or challenged Tavakoli-Targhi's claim that the Pahlavi's have been granted the mantle of modernizers?

In 1932, Reza Shah dissolved the 1901 D'Arcy Concession. Following 1929 and the world economic crisis, Iran was reeling financially (Keddie 101, 98).

New revenues, ideally from oil output, would be useful in mitigating the crisis and future development policies. This combined with Reza Shah's claim that he was as a ruler who could handle foreign capitalists was part of the context for the Shah's government to engage in negotiations for a new oil agreement between Iran and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) (another contributing factor was the termination of the gold standard by Great Britain and Britain's naval blockade) (World Bank 10). Ervand Abrahamian's presentation and discussion of the 1933-34 oil agreement is relatively brief. According to Abrahamian, the 1934 concession created distrust between Reza Shah and his opposition: "distrust intensified in 1933-34 when the shah signed a new agreement with [AIOC]. In return for a measly 4 percent increase in royalties, the shah extended the oil concession all the way to 1993" (Abrahamian 96). The historian allocated two sentences to compliment the above passage (although there are hints to the concession in other areas of the monograph) (Abrahamian 75). He includes no source material for the terms he presented. While Abrahamian devotes an entire chapter of his monograph to the "iron fist of Reza Shah", when describing events related to the Shah's downfall the audience is given a hasty representation of the oil concession, with little of the available contextualization. Abrahamian does allude to Reza Shah's shortcomings and debatable policies throughout the chapter, but his omission of a serious discussion of the negotiation, in which so many parties were involved and which so many parties have commented on (the British, the Americans, The World Bank and even participating Iranian officials, like Timourdash) minimizes this event's relevance to the Reza Shah legacy. Furthermore, as part of the greater narrative, this minimalist discussion of the 1933-34 Anglo-Iranian oil agreement, juxtaposed with the statistical aura surrounding Abrahamian's depiction of Reza Shah's state building efforts lends credence to the concept that even this 2008 piece of historiography may be viewed in the modernization light alluded to by Tavakoli-Targhi.

In comparison, consider Nikki Keddie's description of the oil agreement:

"There was a major dispute over the terms of the oil concession, but this did not end with any real loss to AIOC...British threats and Reza Shah's fear of internal revolts were among the factors bringing Reza Shah to accept a

revised concession in 1933, which did not significantly improve Iran's control or royalties. The concession's area was reduced but its termination was changed from 1961 to 1993... Great Britain continued to reap huge profits and pay low royalties." (Keddie 101)

Keddie provides a greater examination of the circumstances surrounding the agreement and notes that "Reza Shah chafed under British influence." Indeed both Abrahamian and Keddie point to the major clause that extended AOIC's operating rights until 1993. Yet, Keddie's description offers far more context. She alludes to negotiation difficulties, the seditious behavior of AOIC in supporting revolts in Khuzistan. However, the readership is again provided with little reference material. Conversely, Keddie does offer references when discussing Reza Shah's contributions to women's rights under the Civil Code, economic expansion via foreign trade, and funding increases for education development (Keddie 92, 97, 99). She presents criticism of Reza Shah throughout her analysis but concludes "On balance, Reza Shah adopted a path of centralized control that might have been in part unavoidable for a government that wished to modernize a society with so many divisive centers of power" (Keddie 103). Again, as with Abrahamian, Keddie's major conclusion of Reza Shah's legacy was one of a modernizer despite several admissions of the Shah's shortcomings, such as the brutality associated with the unveiling process (Keddie 100). Thus, given a relatively brief account of the 1933-34 oil concession (no allusion to the labor law clause dispute, or British naval presence in response to 1932 annulment) (World Bank 13) with no source material, and Keddie's aforementioned conclusion of the Shah's regime, it seems reasonable to associate this piece of historiography with the modernization theme.

The presentation of the 1934-34 Anglo-Iranian Oil Agreement and major themes in Abrahamian and Keddie's discussion of Reza Shah presented these historians in a relatively objective light. Indeed their overall conclusions emphasized the Shah's state building, but both historians reserved loaded language in much of their analysis. Conversely, Cyrus Ghani and Muhammad Gholi Majd take explicit and opposing views of the Shah's legacy. Ghani relates his opinion of Reza Shah: "Reza Shah's foremost objective was the creation of a modern state... Reza Shah was straight-laced, taciturn and a moralist" (Ghani 397, 402). While

Majd takes a very different opinion of the former Shah, "We are beginning to understand the dreadful events of 1921-41: all liberties were suppressed... the population was terrorized, the tribes (one-fourth of the population) were brutalized, Parliament was turned into a rubberstamp and the country was plundered" (Majd 10).

These historians provide the material for a comparison of the 1935 Mashhad incident. Cyrus Ghani's only mention of Mashhad in the 1930s, as it pertained to Reza Shah, was the following quote "In 1934, the millenary celebration of the poet Ferdowsi was held in Mashhad, close to his place of birth attended by leading Western scholars" (400). Ghani discussed Reza Shah's regime up to the monarch's deposition in 1941. The historian indicated the Shah was a flawed man yet Ghani could not muster any analysis of the regime's most explicit clash with society; the 1935 Mashhad Massacre when more than 100 people were killed near the Imam Reza Shrine in July. However, Ervand Abrahamian provides some basic context: "Conflict with the clerical opposition...did not come to a head until 1935- and even then it was confined to Mashed. Reza Shah provoked the crisis with a series of controversial acts [ex. New dress code, banned street processions for Muharram]...The predictable backlash came in 1935" (Abrahamian 93, 94). Unlike Cyrus Ghani, and a lesser extent Ervand Abrahamian, historian Muhammad Gholi Majd devoted a chapter to the Mashhad incident in his monograph, *Great Britain and Reza Shah*. Majd, drew much of his source material from American dispatches and communiqués, such as ambassador William H. Hornibrook's commentary. The major differences between Majd's depiction of Mashhad and Abrahamian's depiction is the locus of opposition sources and in-depth presentation of evidence. Abrahamian indicated the backlash was confined to Mashhad, yet Majd's account offered evidence to challenge this claim. A dispatch from J. Rives Childs in April 1935, which is presented in Majd's text for the reader, stated that disturbances in the month of April were reported in Kermanshah, Babol, Mashhad, Qom, Kerman and Yazd (Majd 210). Given that the Shah had implemented radical reforms in a Shi'i society without prior *fatwa* supporting these reforms, it is difficult to imagine protests from

clerics and religious cohorts of society being confined to Mashhad. Indeed, through Majd's depiction one is offered many examples of primary material, and those offered concerning the crisis in 1935 are helpful to the reader. Furthermore, the comparison between Abrahamian and Majd demonstrates how different sources and their subsequent use can create different narratives.

Both historians included a plethora of sources in each of their monographs, many of which overlapped. However, Majd relied overtly on American documentation while Abrahamian preeminently relied on British commentary. Each historian referenced pertinent Iranian sources as well. However, despite similar reference material Majd and Abrahamian, as well as Keddie and Ghani, have constructed different legacies of Reza Shah by the manner in which each author portrayed their evidence. For example, Abrahamian offered the following quote from a British diplomat on Mashhad's consequences: "The Shah, in destroying the powers of the Mullahs, has forgotten Napoleon's adage that the chief purpose of religion is to prevent the poor from murdering the rich" (Abrahamian 94). Here a British comment reprimands the actions of Reza Shah based on the premise that Shah made a poor political decision as opposed to a decision which resulted in the death of at least 100 of his citizens. Thus while Abrahamian affords evidence which demonstrated criticism of the Shah, it is within the framework of a growing-pain of a modern leader, a mistake that can occur. Note the connotation of "murdering the rich," which did not occur in the massacre, yet is considered the real concern for letting the massacre and opposition ferment. However, an entirely different perspective is created by Majd's evidence via Hornibrook who claimed:

"five hundred regulars were rushed from a nearby town and it was this body of troops that later turned the machine guns on the Shrine and finally dispersed the mob...it resulted in frightful loss of life...police and soldiers were

numbered among the killed...but for the most part they were civilians." (Majd 216, 217)

This portrayal focused on the loss of the life which was the outcome of machine gun fire on the crowd. By refraining from a lofty political comparison Hornibrook's testimony centered the discussion to the actual event which is consistent with Majd's view that Reza Shah's reign was mired by devious events. The construction of divergent narratives, as the preceding passages demonstrate, is based on the selection and use of evidence even if scholars share many elements in their bibliographies and notations.

In conclusion, a comparative analysis of accounts concerned with two major events of Reza Shah's rule demonstrated the nature of disparate perspectives taken by four historians. Ervand Abrahamian and Nikki Keddie retained greater objectivity in their accounts, but their limited discussion of these events relative to discussions of Reza Shah's modernization efforts obscures the Shah's complete legacy. Cyrus Ghani had little in the way of critical evidence of the Shah, and his depiction of both the 1933-34 concession and the 1935 massacre leave the reader wanting. Alternatively, Muhammad Gholi Majd took a polemically anti-Shah stance in his narrative, exhausting American sources which challenge the ambivalence of British sources. The dissemination of Iranian historiography faces several obstacles. First, Iran's history of censorship has resulted in several major purges of critical literature. Second, Iran's narrative in the twentieth century involved numerous vested interests, royal, domestic and foreign, how these entities portrayed their analysis of real-time events is layered with their explicit and implicit agendas and thus can impede comprehensive data. Third, as Tavakoli-Targhi alluded to, the competition and combination of the first two obstacles could lead to a bordered or rigid construction of history (Tavakoli-Targhi 142), potentially ignoring forces and agents which would assist in a fluid and comprehensive view of Iranian history.



Works Cited

- Abrahamian, Ervand. *A Modern History of Iran*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Elm, Mostafa. *Oil, Power, and Principle: Iran's Oil Nationalization and Its Aftermath*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992.
- Ghani, Cyrus. *Iran and the Rise of Reza Shah: From Qajar Collapse to Pahlavi Rule*. New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1998.
- Hornibrook, Dispatch 512. "Mashad Riots." July 21, 1935. College Park: *National Archives*: G-2 Geographic File for Iran, Record Group 165, Box 1659/File 2700.
- Keddie, Nikki R. *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Majd, Muhammad Gholi. *Great Britain & Reza Shah: The Plunder of Iran, 1921-1941*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2001.
- Tavakoli-Targhi, Muhamad. *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Nationalist Historiography*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- World Bank. "Iran – Nationalization of the Iranian Oil Industry," under *Documents and Reports*. Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1952. http://drum.lib.umd.edu/bitstream/handle/1903/12022/Bingaman_sessionid=E7BA18F8E5A9921C9E822B474AE4E666?sequence=1 (accessed October 13, 2015).

Nativistic Sexual Modernity in Late Qajar Iran

Riaz Howey
New York University Abu Dhabi

Abstract

This brief essay charts several Iranian and Western authors who discuss sex and gender relations during the late Nineteenth- and early Twentieth-Century. All sought to achieve their ends within a particular framework of European liberalism, an ideological base rich in potential for multiple interpretations, including anti-imperial resistance. This work points to the centrality of sex and gender to early Iranian nationalism as an invitation and springboard to further research on the social context surrounding the late Qajar Dynasty.

The history of modernity and European imperialism in Iran is comparable to that of much of the rest of the colonised world, but it provides a unique case owing to its complex and specific history. As citizens of a weak state surrounded and in some ways divided up by colonial powers, Iranian elites were exposed to modernity as a measure of cultural progress and enlightenment linked to an economic and military status. Travel in Europe by elites, many made wealthy through favours to European governments, and the strong presence of European diplomatic and business interests in Iran, facilitated the spread of ideas that portrayed European rationality and modernity as synonymous with progress and emancipation. These ideas found parallel expression in secular and religious movements seeking change in the prevailing status quo of absolute monarchy, increasing colonial exploitation, and rigid religious norms. Largely in opposition to Qajar authority and often suppressed or ignored by foreign powers wishing to keep a pliant government under their control, groups with an interest in modern forms of government, society, and religion pushed for political and social reform.

Becoming modern was a broad project, but one that, as in many other experiences of imperialism around the world, centered around the reforming of everyday life—including, sex. While later in Iranian history this would take the form of policies and debates regarding male and female dress, the role of women in the public sphere, or the ‘weststruckness’ of ‘non-Islamic’ gender relations, the end of the Qajar era saw sexual modernity and the emancipation of women

used as a normative crutch by both members of the royal court and reformist, anti-imperial groups. Not only were sex and family central to the ideologies of modernising groups and the political legitimacy of the state, but they were again focused on in the criticism of “weststruckness” and progress as a racist concept that in part fueled the ideological warfare of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. This essay will focus on the modern discourse on sex in Iran through the end of the Qajar era.

The Qajar Dynasty (1794-1921), weakened by huge military and territorial losses to Russians in the North and famine, fell under the influence of foreign powers. It only survived the fate of extended occupation by a European nation through playing off the Russian and British Empires against each other through much of the Nineteenth-Century and much of the early Twentieth. Still, the ‘sovereignty’ monitored and protected by the diplomatic and military forces of Britain and Russia, as in the case of the Persian Cossack Brigade, quickly fell into a debt trap, to include the financing of lavish trips to Europe and of course the salaries and servicing of various European legations. The economic and political foothold of Imperialist powers grew with the business dealings of their citizens, as in the case of the Reuter Concession in which “For paltry sums which would not suffice even to maintain the Imperial Court, Naser ed-Din [Shah] did not hesitate to sell the future of generations of his subjects” (Kazemzadeh 108). During this time various modernist groups such as constitutionalists, Shaykhis, Babis and other Iranian religious reform movements,

Jews, and feminists appeared. While the exact demands or changes sought were rarely either united or constant, as the power structures around these groups changed — as they were assisted or hindered by Shi'a clergy, foreigners, merchants, tribal groups, military etc. — by the end of the Qajar Dynasty and the coup d'état of Reza Pahlavi Shah (1921), Iran found itself firmly on the path of Western-style modernisation, often inspired by the example of Turkey and Egypt.

Sex, gender, and orientalist ideas were often at the center of the problems of modernity. At least within the tradition of classical liberalism born of the British colonial experience—Locke, Mill and many Western European social and moral philosophers were largely concerned and influenced by the problems of colonialism—'despotic' and arbitrary rule, evinced by the bondage of the woman, the oriental chattel, through the stagnant traditions of her mouldering and, through natural selection, retiring civilisation, is the natural target of reform and rejuvenation. Iranian feminist groups, organised in initially clandestine *anjumans* — a term from ancient Persian literature for a space of consultation, and the primary organ of democracy, for men, under the short-lived constitutional monarchy — worked to achieve liberal modernity in gender relations. Education for girls, healthcare, employment opportunities, and representation for women, as well as changes to marital relations, were often organised privately through networks of *anjumans*, as were the numbers of female protestors who joined their male counterparts in demanding that the democratic *Majlis* not yield to the demands of Imperial Russia. Former Treasurer-General of Persia, the U.S. American William Morgan Shuster, in his firsthand and rather enthusiastic account of working for the newly constitutional Iranian Government, *The Strangling of Persia* (1912), describes "the so-called chattels of the Oriental lords of creation ... the most progressive, if not the most radical, [women] in the world" (Shuster 191). At what is perhaps the climax of his account,

In his reception-hall they confronted [the president], and lest he and his colleagues should doubt their meaning, these cloistered Persian mothers, wives and daughters exhibited threateningly their revolvers, tore aside their veils, and confessed their decision to kill their own husbands and sons, and leave behind their

own dead bodies, if the deputies wavered in their duty to uphold the liberty and dignity of the Persian people and nation.

Though the Medjlis was destroyed by a coup d'état executed by Russian hirelings a week or two later, it passed out of being, stainless of having sold its country's birthright. (Shuster 198)

That such internalised reform and triumphant sexual liberalism was thought to strike at the root of a society's decay is clear in Shuster's writing. While the main activities of modern feminist organisations in Iran often focussed around economic and political themes, Western accounts such as Shuster's emphasize the veiled and oppressed nature of an Iranian womanhood wishing to be freed from the arbitrary rule of the oriental lord. While the *chador* may hide a weapon — here, a revolver, or, in the case of the U.S. Minister in Iran S. G. W. Benjamin's account, the freedom of mobility or power to disclose sexual interest outside of the home — unveiling is seen as the primary symbol of a progressing culture.

The first famous example of an unveiling in Iran is at the 1848 Babi Conference of Badašt, where the early followers of the imprisoned messianic figure the Bab (the gate) had gathered to resolve differences between conservative and liberal factions of the religion. The poet and prominent Babi leader Qorrat-al-'Ayn (1814-1852), titled Tahereh (the pure), removed her face-covering while making the point that Babi law was not merely a reformation but an abrogation of Shari'a law for its followers. This action constitutes a sort of religious modernity and a statement of the gender relations under Babism which saw itself at the cutting edge of history (Milani 86). One of the men present was said to have slit his throat and left, and many Babis abandoned the religion, which thereafter moved towards its liberal modern camp.

While the effect of foreign ideas and influences should not be discounted in the slightest, early examples such as that of Tahereh or the later clandestine feminist political societies provide evidence that much of modernist Iranian discourse on sex was internalised, portrayed as nativistic and carried out indigenously. This is in contradistinction to situations in which the pluralistic and almost grassroots modern societies



founded by wealthy urban women, such as the one discussed below, were coopted by the Pahlavi regime into a state-instituted modernisation project where one official body would educate the bonded women of Iran towards Western modernity — the slowly introduced but forcefully applied removal of non-Western head-coverings, except, notably, for prostitutes, being the first policy thereof (Chehabi).

An example of the indigeneity of these movements is given by the publication of *Ma'ayeb al-Rejal* (*Faults of Men*, 1894) by Bibi Khanoom Esterabadi, an influential member of court all-female literary and political spaces, in response to the anonymously published and widely circulated advice manual *Ta'dib al-Niswan* (1871), presumably written by a Western-educated court prince. Esterabadi, who founded the first school for girls in the modern history of Iran, attacks the author for his misogyny, but also for the hypocritical view that the women of Iran are less progressed than those of Europe, while denying those same women the social rights women enjoyed in Europe. While still fundamentally modern and tied to the notion that European gender norms are more progressive, Esterabadi's misandrist text shows that some Iranian feminists perceived the double-standard of the European civilising-modernising mission and saw arguments within the frame of modern sexual discourse as effective in their political project. In the view of Esterabadi, Westerners or Western-educated or influenced men find they can justify intercession or imperialism based on the need to reform and civilise women, but this same imperialism renders women incapable of progress. For Esterabadi, many of the modern European-influenced sexual reforms such as those in marriage law have been but a change of names to a system of female exploitation— which, due to real circumstances, the nativistic modern project wishes to change.

A connection between modern discourse on sex and nationalism is present through much of the

writings of female authors in the late Qajar period. The work of Janet Afary in analysing the origins of feminism in Iran reveals that the Constitutional Revolution and the organisation of the *anjumans* created feminism as a movement, and that the separation of the history of either is impossible. “Indeed, we see women addressing issues of the nation *and* women's issues, often in one and the same article. ... [A] number of women often felt that the nascent nationalist movement needed to develop a feminist dimension if it were to lead to the development of the whole nation” (Afary 82).

Indeed, sexual modernity falls at the heart of what modernity means in the Iranian context: the social and individual norms that should be adopted to emulate the astounding economic and military feats supposedly thereby achieved by industrialised European powers, the rejuvenation of a population under threat. Iranian resistance to or internalisation of these norms took place largely, though by no means entirely, within the framework of modernity. The paradoxical disapproval of any country that does not adapt to these norms and the concurrent denial of economic, social, or political agency to actually achieve even this faulty Western model would later be fiercely attacked by the Islamic Republic of Iran and its ideological predecessors such as the Western-educated and often Marxist lay theologians who laid the foundations of a Shi'a revolutionary doctrine. In this later evolution of modernity, a desire for martyrdom, like reformed sexual relations, would play the role of rejuvenator of the nation (See Ali Shari'ati on *Shahadat*). During the Qajar Dynasty, however, forms of indigenous modernity connected the ability of Iranians to achieve modernity *themselves* with the need to expel the old restraining institutions: outdated religious law for the Babis and the overwhelming European influence on government for the constitutionalists and feminists.



Works Cited

- Kazemzadeh, Firuz. *Russia and Britain in Persia: Imperialist Ambitions in Qajar Iran*, London, New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd. 2013.
- Shuster, W. Morgan. *The Strangling of Persia; a Story of the European Diplomacy and Oriental Intrigue hat Resulted in the Denationalization of Twelve Million Muhammedans, a Personal Narrative*. New York: Century, 1912.
- Milani, Farzaneh. *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*. Syracuse. New York: Syracuse University Press. 1992.
- Chehabi, Houchang E.. "Staging this emperor's new clothes: dress codes and nation-building under Reza Shah". *Iranian Studies*. 26:3, 209-233. 1993
- Bibi Khanum Esterabadi. "Ma'āyeb al-rejāl: dar pāsok ba ta'dīb al-neswān". ed. Afsaneh Najmabadi, New York, 1992; tr. Hasan Javadi and Willem Floor in *The Education of Women and the Vices of Men: Two Qajar Tracts*, Syracuse, N.Y. 2010.
- Afary, Janet. "On the Origins of Feminism in Ealy 20th-Century Iran". *Journal of Women's History*. Indiana University Press. Fall, 2000.
- Tāliqānī, Mahmūd, Murtazā Mutahhari, 'Alī Shari'atī, Mehdi Abedi, and Gary Legenhausen. *Jihād and Shahādat: Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam*. Institute for Research and Islamic Studies. Houston, TX, U.S.A. 1986.



Prescriptive Existence

Examining the Gender Binary in Iran and the United States

Ruedas, L
University of Maryland, College Park

Abstract

This paper utilizes contemporary discourse from queer theory to compare and analyze the experiences of sex workers and queer individuals in the United States and Iran. Through this, it is argued that attributing physical features to specific genders is a violent and uneducated method of gendering that stems from a European-imposed understanding of gender.¹

Abstract added by editor

The attribution of certain qualities to specific genders, as though they are innate, is an unfortunately common trope. Men are often described as strong providers, while women are described as pure housekeepers. In comparatively progressive discussion, individuals will justifiably claim these generalizations to be inaccurate. Yet within these same progressive circles, physical features are still commonly essentialized to specific genders. This practice is rampant throughout gender discourse, and as this paper will show, it is as inaccurate and violent as the former generalization. The essentialization of physical features is a baseless and uninformed method of gendering; cultural mores of presentation, specifically along gender lines, are the product of hetero-patriarchal white supremacy. This claim is substantiated by the shift in consensus on desirable features in Iran, America, and Europe. Specific evidence can be found in the drastic changes that occur as a result of travel between Europe and Iran, making note of the imperial European aggression towards perceived manifestations of gender variance in traditional Iranian behaviors. Ultimately, it will be argued that the deconstruction of the European-imposed gender binary is necessary to create a safe community for individuals of all genders.

Examination of trends in beauty standards, as they relate to gender, will be accomplished through analysis of the disappearance of the male object of affection in Iran and its relation to the presence and

lived experiences of sex workers and queer individuals in both Iran and the United States. The paper will discuss the ways in which colonial binary relates to occupation, specifically in the sector of sex work.

Reference made to queerness in multiple expressions is done with the understanding that imperialist binary is responsible for this demarcation; that is, the behaviors were not decidedly queer until European influence asserted they were so. Additionally, an acknowledgment of relative position must be made. That is, this paper is written through the lens of White American experience. Therefore, the understanding of gender with which this essay is written is defined by this admittedly acute scope. Terms that are used to describe various queer and trans expressions are from the canon of dialogues in the English language. The use of these terms to describe individuals whose identities and expressions exist outside this scope, specifically Iranian people, is not done to homogenize experiences but to speak about these expressions in a familiar way. The commonality, however, is that European influence has universally relegated these expressions to queerness, changing the standard of beauty directly along the axes of gender and violently impacting the lives of individuals within this spectrum. Lastly, specific acknowledgment should be made to Afsaneh Najmabadi and, in particular, her *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-sex Desire in Contemporary Iran*. This work was absolutely critical to the research necessary for this essay.

Before the late Qajar period, young men, often situated alongside young women or other young men, were the subjects of myriad artworks. These young men participate in what Afsaneh Najmabadi describes as an “outward invitational gaze,” an appearance that codes the subjects of the work as available and desirable in near-equal capacities. A typical subject was “always a very young man, without a beard or mustache, at most with a hint of newly emerging down” (“Transing and Transpassing” 30). Examination of photographic material would suggest that these features were popularly considered sexually desirable at one point in Iran.

The individual in (1) exhibits the physical markers of beauty typically ascribed to these male objects of affection. According to the Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies (IICHS), the image from which (1) is cropped depicts two “prostitute women.” Such a label implies that (assumed) female sex workers emulated male-ascribed traits. This implication invites an interesting comparison; Iranian prostitutes through the Qajar period (1789-1925) would enhance male-ascribed features in order to make themselves desirable to clients, while transgender individuals in the 21st century are often forced into sex work due to violent cultural narratives.

American transgender individuals, most notably trans women, engage in sex work at a disproportionately high rate. According to the National Trans Discrimination survey, transgender individuals are 11 times more likely to participate in sex work than cisgender women (Grant, Mottet, and Tanis 7). This is not an idiosyncrasy of the United States; studies in Iran point to “transsexuals” being “at risk of prostitution” (Ardebili, Khoo, Bidokhti, and Mehrabi). To suggest that this heightened engagement in sex work is somehow inherent to trans-ness is to deny cultural narratives surrounding trans identities. Up until its most recent iteration, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) contained an entry on “Gender Identity Disorder,” language that was also used in the first Iranian national symposium on transexuality (Najmabadi, *Professing selves*). This language indicates a toxic sentiment present within the global scientific community: the notion that transgender individuals are suffering from a psychological disorder (as opposed to the expression of an individual identity that does not correspond with the assignment of the gender binary). This perception of the transgender



(1) "Two Women": <http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/1261A93.html>

population has had, and continues to have, a violent effect on the community and its members. The transgender unemployment rate in the United States is nearly double the national average, with over a quarter of these job losses being directly related to the individual's gender (Grant, Mottet, Tannis). Additionally, in both Iran and the United States, transgender sex workers are statistically more likely to be HIV positive (Operario, Soma, and Underhill; Ardebili, Khoo, Bidokhti, and Mehrabi).

It is easy to point to specific *fatwas* (Islamic commands) pertaining to trans persons in Iran and claim that it is a nation that is accepting of transgender expressions. This seemingly generous environment is, unfortunately, a façade. Iranian policymakers see Sexual Reassignment Surgery (SRS) as a “solution for the problem” of Gender Identity Disorder (Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 18). This “solution” is built on the assumption that GID is a legitimate diagnosis, an assumption that denies the validity of trans expressions and positions trans people as disordered. The cost of SRS, coupled with genital essentialization, creates a classist bar of entry into “legitimate” trans-ness; SRS is an expensive procedure and the government subsidies cover only a fraction of the cost (Najmabadi, “Nineteenth Century Transformations” 183). This fixation on SRS perpetuates the idea that

all trans experiences have a distinct endpoint: the opposite binary gender (and corresponding genitals). Many trans people in the United States view transness as an ontological process that spans a lifetime, a sentiment echoed by Iranian trans persons who live in what Najmabadi refers to as “terms of ambiguity.” Iran is far from unique in its approach to SRS; American culture similarly views SRS as the “end point” of transgender existences. Though much violence is still enacted on trans people, Iranian culture seems to be comparatively more accepting of these individuals after their surgeries. This is unfortunately not the case in America, where violence is a constant threat looming over the heads of pre-op, post-op, and non-op trans persons.

The dismal situation that transgender individuals face near-globally in the 21st century is the product of an equally global force: European heteropatriarchal white-supremacist imperialism. Iranian people have eliminated myriad aspects of socialization and culture, specifically those perceived as homosexual, due to European slander. Travelogues across the centuries condemned Iranian men’s attraction to young men, at points referring to it as pederasty (Najmabadi, “Nineteenth Centure Transformations”). By the late Qajar period, depictions of young male objects of affection were nearly eliminated from the artistic canon as were expressions of sexual interest in young men. European attitudes toward relationships and activities, deemed queer by their standards, caused Iranians to begin this process of erasure (Najmabadi, “Nineteenth Centure Transformations”).

Given this history the gender of individuals in historic photographs must be seen through a new lens. Gendering, ultimately, requires consent, and a culture determined to eliminate its queer-perceived facets, given the historical treatment of art-subjects, is unlikely to heed this principle. The subject of (2) is described as a woman, but is photographed in an ambiguous location. The subject is unveiled and not referred to as a prostitute. This information, coupled with the erasure of non-binary and trans expressions strips this individual of their identity. The viewer is left only with “Young woman dressed as a man,” which is unfortunately lacking in depth, which leads to an important issue in thinking on trans people. The assumption that all queer-presented individuals are, in fact, queer is a problematic praxis. It is important to recognize the effect that the imperial nature of gender binary has on the past and present lives of individuals,



(2) “Woman with Men's Clothing”: <http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/1261A155.html>

however, and this can be accomplished through perpetuation of the notion that these people could have potentially been queer.

In addition to the gender binary, European cultural imperialism installed euro-centrist beauty standards. A notable effect of this installation would be the “consolidated feminization of beauty” (Najmabadi, “Transing and Transpassing” 41). In order to enforce the heteronormative binary, male-ascribed features were removed from the canon of beautiful features. Features that individuals like the subject in (3) once attempted to accentuate were now considered unappealing. Physical properties once considered beautiful, like light moustaches and heavy brows, were exiled from the realm of beauty.

The effects of euro-centrist beauty standards have had violent effects on both cisgender women and femme trans individuals, both historically and in the 21st century. They generally prescribe slim, pale, and near-hairless appearances for women. These features, specifically the latter, are typically quite hard to achieve for transgender women and femme-presenting non-binary individuals alike. Moreover, the large, rugged, hairy image of manhood is hard to achieve for transgender men and masculine-presenting non-binary individuals. Because of the strict nature of the

European imperial gender binary, trans people are expected, by society as a whole, to meticulously alter their appearance in an effort to “pass” as the gender opposite their assigned gender within the binary. This is affirmed in certain forms of entertainment, such as drag shows and television, where the objective is for a male-assigned individual to try to achieve female standards of beauty. It is not to say that queering one's appearance in the entertainment sector is reserved only for cisgender individuals; there are many transgender persons involved in drag shows and other forms of entertainment. It is critical to note, however, that there is a distinct difference between those who are transgender queering their appearance for the sake of their identity and those who participate in the act for fun. This distinction must be made in order to give substantial and appropriate weight to the quandary of presentation faced by transgender individuals. This dichotomy is present historically in Iran as well; Najmabadi's *Professed Selves* makes reference to tensions between trans individuals and *zanpush* performers, young male performers who would dress in femme clothing for their act.



(3) “Two Women and a Man”: <http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/1261A109.html>

The effects of European imperialism span the globe and have lasted to the present day. One of

its keystones, the gender binary, is still taken to be innate. Through examination of Iran and its cultural shifts after interacting with the strict European model of the gender binary, it is clear that the markers of beauty, and, by extension, gender, prescribed by the European standard are not innate. This binary, which enacts violent othering on transgender people, forces them into precarious, life-threatening situations on a daily basis, as evidenced by the rate of transgender individuals facing homelessness, stigmatized sex work, and HIV. It is clear, given the dangerous and oppressive situation faced by transgender individuals in Iran and the United States, that a deconstruction of this binary is necessary in order to create an environment that is safe for all people.



Works Cited

- Ardebili, M. Eftekhari, S. Shayesteh Khoo, N. Moshtagh Bidokhti, and F. Mehrabi. "T11-O-04 The Relations of Sexuality, Sex Addiction and AIDS Anxiety in Homosexual and Transsexuals in Iran." *Sexologies* 17 (2008): S156.
- Grant, Jaime, Lisa Mottet, and Justin Tanis. *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*. National Center for Transgender Equality, 2011.
- Najmabadi, Afsaneh, "Nineteenth Century Transformations," in *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005)
- . *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-sex Desire in Contemporary Iran*. Duke University Press, 2013.
- . "Transing And Transpassing Across Sex-Gender Walls In Iran." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 36.3 (2008): 23-42.
- Operario, Don, Toho Soma, and Kristen Underhill. "Sex Work and HIV Status Among Transgender Women." *JAIDS Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes* 48.1 (2008): 97-103.



Roshangar Undergraduate Research Submissions

Roshangar: Undergraduate Persian Studies Journal will be accepting submissions for the second volume until Friday, May 20th, 2016.

Requirements for Submission:

- Title page with name of author(s) and Institution
- 250 word abstract
- 1,500 - 2,500 words in English
- Electronically editable version of paper
- works cited in MLA format

Submissions and questions can be sent to the Roshangar Editorial Team: Roshangar.UMD@gmail.com

Acknowledgements

Copy editing by Dr. Laretta Clough

Journal design by Joseph Ritch

Front and back cover design by Mitra Namiranian

Front page photograph: Lalezar Avenue postcard captured in 1910-1920

Back page photograph: University of Maryland College Park's Calvert Hall captured in 1930s

Roshangar logo design by Amaal Yazdi

Thank you for taking time to read and enjoy the first edition of the Roshangar. Please continue to follow our work, and contact us with comments, questions, and suggestions at www.roshangarUMD.com



The Roshangar Editorial Team would like to give special thanks to the Roshan Institute for Persian Studies at the University of Maryland. It was only with their support and guidance that the journal came to be. Roshan is a wonderful supporter of arts, culture and education.

<http://sllc.umd.edu/persian>

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND COLLEGE PARK

