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## Moments of Strength: Iranian Women's Rights and the 1979 Revolution

Caroline M. Brooks  
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Moments of Strength:  
Iranian Women's Rights and the 1979 Revolution

Caroline M Brooks  
2008 History Honors Thesis

Signature Page:

Primary Reader: John P. Turner\_\_\_\_\_

Secondary Reader: Jason Opal\_\_\_\_\_

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

An Iranian women's movement failed to materialize in the twentieth century. While women in Iran played important and essential roles in political and social movements, they never united with a single voice calling for women's rights. Thus the activities of activist women were scattered through the decades of Iranian history, while their roles shifted and their goals evolved but they were involved. Women's rights occupied moments.

One of the most important moments for women in Iranian history came with their participation in the 1979 Revolution against the Shah. Mohammad Reza Shah was a complex ruler, embracing modernity and Westernization while also repressing democracy and free speech within Iran. He took a special interest in women and their rights, making some important reforms to the laws in favor of women. Why would Iranian women choose to overthrow this ruler who seemingly gave them more than others before or after him? This important question is the center of my research. In order to understand why women in 1977 until 1979 would protest, fight, and call out for the end of the Pahlavi era of modernization, one must understand how women perceived their place in society and politics as well as how they attained said position.

The previous moments of women's activism in Iran informed the activism of women in the 1979 Revolution. Such moments of protest and strength included the Constitutional Revolution, education reforms, and the drafting of the Family Protection Law of 1967 and 1975. Iranian women were not a wholly oppressed group either before or after 1979. Their activism is informed by the Western women's movements but they are in reaction to local disagreements and needs. The West, for Iran, comes to occupy a position as both something which judges and something which the Iranian state attempts to emulate. Though Iran was never colonized, it was influenced by the West and how the West perceived Persia and Islam.

In chapter two, Early Western Feminism and the Roots of Iranian Women's Rights, I explore the historical background of the modern Iranian woman. Women in Iran were in contact with Western women and were influenced by the specific feminism brought by these foreigners. Western feminism created a context in which Iranian women vocalized certain desires for further rights. This was especially true with education. The way in which women in Iran spoke of education was the same way in which Western women spoke of it. It is difficult to separate Iranian feminism from the Western feminism brought by European travelers to Persia. The opinion and standard of the West would continue to be a heavy influence on Iran.

Iran's Constitutional Revolution, the subject of chapter three, explores women's role in one of the most important events in modern Iranian history before the 1979 Revolution. This was an important moment for women because of the political strength shown, yet little changed for them politically. Though women successfully protested for a constitution and parliament (*majles*), they were not granted suffrage. In this important movement, Iran was following a very western ideal but despite this, their women did not make the same gains as Western women during similar revolutions. The inequality of political power between the genders was perpetuated by the same *majles* that Iranian women helped to put in place. Iranian women continued to find themselves with inferior rights when compared to those of their western counterparts. Though there was a positive consequence of the revolution; Iranian women found a voice and expressed it through publishing and meetings. This was the first time in which women articulated themselves consciously as women and not just as citizens.

The fourth chapter, The Rise of Reza Shah and the Co-optation of Women's Activism, takes the women's movement that was building after the Constitutional Revolution into its more suppressed stages. Reza Shah Pahlavi recognized the political power to be gained from using

women. The Pahlavi dynasty was very focused on westernizing Iran and women were part of this project. Though a women's movement was partially formed after the Constitutional Revolution, it was in its infant stage and did not possess a cohesive structure or message. Reza Shah was more direct in his communication and was able to take hold of the women's movement and use it towards his own ends, promoting as part of his westernization program education and veil reforms. This was when women truly became pawns of the state, used for their symbolic meaning rather than appreciated for their individual voices and demands.

The use of women by the Pahlavi state continued into era of Mohammad Reza Shah, as explored through chapter five. The new Shah saw the potential power of women and was more willing to use this resource to enhance his power than his father had been before this. Mohammad Reza Shah furthered reforms in women's name by adding women's suffrage and new divorce and marriage laws. Though these reforms impacted the place of some women, the effects were not widespread and did more to enhance the Shah's power than to promote the position of women. Once again, women were used by the state to help gain power for the Shah as well as take away power from the clergy. In many respects appearances were more important than reality to the regime. Western standards and judgments were important and used as the yard stick against which to measure Iran's modernity.

One of the main concerns of the West and thus the Pahlavi regime was the wearing of the veil by Iranian women. As discussed in chapter six, *Iranian Women and the Often Misunderstood Veil*, to those outside of the Islamic faith, the veil represented backwardness, oppression, exoticism, and sensuality. The Pahlavis internalized this Western imperialist view and thus sought to eradicate this visual representation of Iran's non-Western status. Thus with the unveiling decree in 1936 by Reza Shah, Iranian women were 'freed' of the veil. The Shah's

concern was not with the freedom of women but of how they were viewed by the West. The status of women was assessed by foreigners by their dress and the veil was seen as demarcating Iranian women as those living in harems. Yet when the Revolution took place and Khomeini gained power, his view was no less superficial of the veil. In order to prove to the West that Iran was now an Islamic Republic, he reinstated the veiling of women. The shifting definitions of the veil in Iran had more to do with the power of those in charge and the opinion of the West than it did with Islam and women's rights. That so much of scholarship is focused on women and the veil only perpetuates this view that Iranian women are symbols of Iran's status due to their aesthetic symbolism.

In the final chapter, *Women and the Revolution- an Uneasy Alliance*, the political power of women is divided and used by the revolutionary factions. Instead of revolutionary women uniting as women and using this collective power to gain more rights and freedoms, women are incorporated into the different political factions opposing the Shah. The overthrow of the Shah and his westernizing program by women is often problematic for the western observer to understand but in regards to women, the Shah was not truly different from Ayatollah Khomeini. Both leaders used women as a means to gain power and prestige and most importantly to project an image to those outside Iran.

Each important moment in women's activism in Iran was followed by disappointment. Women were used by those in power, the Pahlavis and later Khomeini, in order to retain and enhance their positions. When reforms were made concerning women and their position in Iran's society, the main beneficiary was the state rather than women. The positions of women before and after 1979 were not very different except that the meaning of the veil changed. A women's

movement never occurred despite their important contribution to Iran's political and social history. This is due to the fact that women never rebelled as women or united as women for any significant period of time. Thus they did not utilize their collective power in order to make gains for Iranian women as a whole.

Women, throughout modern Persian history, were used as symbols of the status of Iran. Thus women were often affected by the movements of the state and society rather than acting as leaders in order to steer the perception of women. Despite the important moments in which activist Iranian women fought, protested and reformed, they never attained a unity and thus a strength in order to continually influence the direction of the Iranian state or society.

## Chapter 2: Early Western Feminism and the Roots of Iranian Women's Rights

Iranian women were integral to the political and social movements of Persia long before the 1979 Revolution. Women's historical activism provided a context and a history on which the large changes of the Pahlavi and Khomeini eras were built because of previous female support and visibility. Focus on the veil by western analyses of the situation of Iranian women, tended to ignore the actions and powers of the female population both in politics and in society. In order to understand the participation of women in the 1979 Revolution, one must grasp the importance of female activism throughout the twentieth century in Persia as well as the influence of the western women's movement.

Even before 1900, Persian women were not without power and influence. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the daughter of Shah Tahmasp, Pari Khan Khanum, held sway over the royal court as well as her father. During the final years of Tahmasp's reign, Pari Khan Khanum was the power behind the throne and installed her brother, Ismail II, as Shah after the death of their father. Her influence and power were important during the short reign of her brother. It is rumored that Pari Khan Khanum was responsible for the mysterious death of Ismail II after he embarked on a violent torrent, killing most of his relatives.<sup>1</sup> Pari Khan Khanum for almost a year was the leader of Persia. Her gender did not concern the country. In fact, her death was the result of a murder by another powerful and rival female, Mahd-I Ulya the wife of Muhammad Khudabanda, who

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<sup>1</sup> Shohreh Gholsorkhi, "Ismail II and Mirza Makhdum Sharifi: An Interlude in Safavid History," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26 (1994). p 478

then installed her blind husband as Shah.<sup>2</sup> Outside of the royal family, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, another woman helped to legitimize and promote the Babi movement. Poet and religious scholar; Qurrat al-Ain, the daughter of a prominent member of the *ulama* influenced the Babi movement and gave the development a definitive feminist sensibility and socially-just consciousness. Her involvement with the Babi movement in part led to greater female involvement and social justice.<sup>3</sup> The Babi movement and revolt eventually become the Bahai faith, the second largest religious minority in Iran.

After the rise of Reza Shah there was a more explicit women's movement. The demands of women focused on education. In some ways, one can view the women's movement in Iran prior to the 1979 Revolution in the context of the Iranian struggle with modernity and modernism. The definition of modern is continually changing for Iran as to what being a modern state means. The concept of modernity differed in its interpretation depending on the regime in power or those able to vocalize a definition. In twentieth century Iran, modernity often focused on the accoutrements of the West because of the strong presence of Western visitors to the Middle East.<sup>4</sup> Reza Shah took a special interest in making Iran and modern state and women contributed to this goal and were able to vocalize their goals in the context of modernity. To Iranian women, before the 1930s, modernity and feminism focused on education. The London

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<sup>3</sup> Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).p 223.

<sup>4</sup> For a popular and very influential critique of westernization by an Iranian scholar of the mid twentieth century. This critique influenced the anti-Shah movement and those in the 1979 Revolution, though the critique cannot be seen as unbiased. See Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi [Weststruckness]*, ed. Ahmad Jabbari, trans. Ahmad Alizadeh John Green, vol. 5, Iran-E No Literary Collection (Lexington Mazda Publishers, 1982).

Times reported in August of 1910 that, “the [education] movement is in its infancy, but the fact that last April for the first time Persian women held a large meeting in Teheran to discuss problems of education seems to suggest that the education of women will play an important part in the future evolution of Persia.”<sup>5</sup> Males in Persia had been the center of education, often in a religious context of Twelver Shiism. As the twentieth century progressed, women called out for equality in education. Privileged women were often educated privately but Iran lacked a public education system for the female Iranian population. A movement for female child education was pushed forth by active women in Iran, focused initially in the private sector, with schools being founded by private foundations and groups.

Education for all minors is often used as one of the marks of a developed country. These standards have come from the Western view. Modernity in a global context is usually tied to the West and western standards. Even before the twentieth century, Iran was unable to completely avoid this scrutiny. Europeans who traveled to Persia often remarked on the Iranian customs and institutions in contrast to those of France and England. There was a mixed impression, especially when taken from a female or male European perspective. As feminism and the women’s movement took hold in Europe and America, a comparison as to the state of women developed in travel writings. European feminism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focused on gaining self determination and autonomy for women, fighting against the strongly ingrained male hegemony over politics, marriage and society.<sup>6</sup> When European women traveled to the Middle East, they came informed by this early feminist experience. The Persian woman was

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<sup>5</sup> Times Persian Correspondent, "The Education of Women in Persia," *The Times*, August 13 1910.

<sup>6</sup> Bianka Petrow-Enker Sylvia Paletschek ed., *Women's Emancipation Movements in the 19th Century: A European Perspective* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).p 7-9

visually different, covered from public and more specifically colonial eyes. The Iranian woman was often not educated in the western sense and the terms of marriage were different in Persia. In many ways, European women took these differences as license to feel superior. This affected the way in which these women acted towards Persian women as well as how Persian women began to view themselves. As Persia became more intertwined and involved with the Western countries so too did Persian standards of modernity. This struggle to attain the forever elusive goal of modernity became part of Persian culture. Money, westernization, education, and technology all played a part in how the modern state was defined. In most cases, it was the upper-classes that strove to attain this badge, to feel the superiority of the classification of being modern, and they looked to push it onto the rest of the country. Women were part of this movement. They were both those who strove to attain it as well as those under its yoke.

The women's movement in the West helps to frame the situation of Iranian women. Western women in the late eighteenth and early twentieth century were struggling to gain rights and freedoms belonging to their countrymen. The same can be said for Iranian women. The struggles of Iranian and western women did not run the same course but they did run parallel, each fighting for rights they felt they deserved. Women both in Europe and in Iran stood unequal to men in society. For women in Persia as well as Europe, the roles inhabited by women, as dictated by society, left the sex at a disadvantage in education, labor, financial independence, and political positions. There were important moments in the history of women in both locations where women broke out of these confining roles but they are seen more as the exceptions rather than the rule. The nineteenth and twentieth century awoke in women across borders a desire to rectify the inequalities of society but failed to generate a cohesive cross-national movement. This undertaking of change took different forms but was important in that it

spread to many societies and had important impacts on the female gender, not only their position but also their view of themselves as a sex.

The modern women's movement is seen by many as starting in France during its revolutionary period. Though throughout the Enlightenment and even before there were men and women who wrote pieces and treatises on the rights of women especially in relation to the male philosophy of the Enlightenment, it was not a sustained effort.<sup>7</sup> Women were active revolutionaries who made sacrifices and political statements in order to liberalize France and its government. In 1789, at the onset of the French Revolution, French women were part of the crowds involved in bread riots, political marches and rebellions. It was the event of the French Revolution that went beyond the previously scattered and feebly supported calls for equality between the genders. Women in France, alongside male revolutionaries fought for a new government and new rights for its citizens. Not only was the presence of women significant but their numbers were also important. This was not the support of a few and select women but of many, a marked participation of women. In some ways the French women distinguished themselves from their male compatriots in that they called for the rights of women along with the rights of man.<sup>8</sup> Political and intellectual clubs for women were formed where salon style conversations took place. As the revolution continued and the royal government was deposed, the men now in power often seemed resentful towards female calls for political equality. For the Jacobin men, women's place was in the home caring for the family and household and setting a good political and intellectual example for her children. They believed it was the duty of men to

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<sup>7</sup> For more information on feminisms and the Enlightenment, see "Reclaiming the Enlightenment for Feminism" in Karen M. Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> For further discussion of women's rights and participation in the French Revolution see "Challenging Masculine Aristocracy: Feminism and the French Revolution" in *Ibid.*

riot in the name of politics and to fight in the name of freedom and it was the duty of women to make peace in the household and to create a sanctuary for her husband away from his daily perils.<sup>9</sup>

Many French women wrote eloquently on their rights and need for recognition. This was not limited to political rights but also the freedom of assembly and education, the right to financial independence and health. One prominent female leader, Olympe de Gouges, wrote a pamphlet to be passed at the next National Assembly entitled *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman* in September of 1791. In this document, modeled on a declaration of similar name approved by the National Assembly of France (*Declaration of the Rights of Man* written in 1789) she outlines rights of women especially pertaining to equality under law and politics. As de Gouges declares first that, “woman is born free and remains equal to man in rights” so must she remain so in rights and social placement.<sup>10</sup> This is carried through from punishment on the gallows as well as taxation and thus women, “must therefore have the same proportion [as men] in the distribution of places, employments, offices, dignities and in industry.”<sup>11</sup> The post script of the pamphlet goes on to say that if women allow prostitution to remain then the Revolution has been lost, if women allow their fortunes to lie with men alone then indeed the Revolution has been lost. This document is one of many by French women who viewed the Revolution as a time to make amends for the desperate situation in which women could find themselves. Equality in politics and law were the most important issues addressed as well as the most frequent. As the Revolution progressed into violence, women were still written out of participation in the national

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p65.

<sup>10</sup> Olympe de Gouges, "Declaration on the Rights of Women , 1791," George Mason University, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/477/>

<sup>10</sup> Gouges, "Declaration on the Rights of Women."

political situation. Though women were citizens, the law distinguished between active and inactive citizens being those that participated in war, owned property, and participated in public political space. Women were given the vote and participation but only in the local levels of French government and excluded from involvement in the French Assembly. Women's political groups were banned and other measures were taken to prevent the same kind of position and participation that French women enjoyed during the Revolution. Despite the efforts on the part of French government, women could not be silenced.

Not only were women not silenced but their ideas also spread across the continent, across the channel and indeed across the Atlantic. British women especially took up the movement for the emancipation of women. Mary Wollstonecraft, an English writer and feminist, wrote a piece entitled, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Wollstonecraft's piece not only puts forth that, "if women are to be excluded, without having a voice, from a participation of the natural rights of mankind...this flaw in your [the British] New Constitution will ever show what man must, in some shape, act like a tyrant, and tyranny, in whatever part of society it rears its brazen front, will ever undermine morality".<sup>12</sup> Though the phrasing is somewhat convoluted, the point is important. The rule of law in a constitutional country, after the period of Enlightenment, should not be based on the tyranny of one gender. Wollstonecraft not only pursues women's place in politics but also their place in education. The basis of modern society in Europe is based upon education and women are part of modern society. So many excuses and reasons given by British men as to why a woman could not be educated ranged from their delicate constitutions to their mental inferiority. Wollstonecraft shows these opinions for what they truly were, prejudices,

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<sup>12</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, "Vindication of the Rights of Woman," George Mason University, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/579/>

saying, “that a kind of fashion now prevails of respecting prejudices...most covered opinions assume the disproportioned form of prejudices, when they are indolently adopted only because age has given them a venerable aspect, though the reason on which they were built ceases to be a reason.”<sup>13</sup> This statement gets at what women were to combat for centuries on every continent, a respect of prejudices rather than reason. These prejudices held mostly by men but also by some women sometimes stem from religion, sometimes from greed and sometimes from philosophy.

Women who were involved with and products of the women’s movement were often the same women who traveled internationally. Iran became a destination especially for British women as Britain became more intimately involved with the Middle East. European women brought with them not only feminist ideas but also the prejudices of the West. This not only affected the way in which they interacted with Persian women but also how Persian women saw themselves. Inevitably the opinions of the foreigners were observed by the women of Persia, the way in which European women mocked their form of dress and their occupation of the inner sanctum of society. In many ways, the superiority and disdain with which some European women viewed the Persians came from the still subjugated position of women in Europe. Comfort by Europeans could seemingly be taken in the fact that British women did not wear veils nor did they belong in harems. Yet Persian and European women shared the same kind of occupation of the private sphere of society, excluded for the most part from mainstream politics, lacking widespread and quality education and almost completely dependent on the prospect of marriage.

Both Western and Persian cultures contained moments of female importance and expression but they were not permanent. These were moments rather than a movement. Persian

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

women were to find the collective action that brought a stronger voice to French, British and American women in their struggle for emancipation. The spark that takes scattered moments into movements often involves political and social revolutions, changes which allow the social norms to be altered. This is true in Persia as the constitutional revolution, the White Revolution and finally the 1979 Revolution allowed for women to express themselves and find outlets for their voices in new and important venues.

### Chapter 3: Iran's Constitutional Revolution

Nearing the turn of the twentieth century, Iran was in a precarious position. In this precarious time, activist Iranian women came together in a show of strength. Iran being one of the few powerful nations never to find itself a colony of Europe began a slide into financial dependence after 1900. In 1826, another Iranian military action took place against Russia over some disputed territory. The Persian forces of Abbas Mirza were unable to compete with the Russian forces and their superior tactics and weapons. This loss represented an initial turning point in Iran's relations with the West as specified in the Treaty of Turkomanchai in 1828 with the Russians. The treaty granted to the Russians, most importantly, extra-territoriality and a fixed five percent import tariff on Russian goods and made the Persians were financially responsible for the costs of the war. These concessions to Russia soon spread to Britain and France.<sup>14</sup> Though Turkomanchai was central to Iranian economics and politics in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it did not completely cripple the country. For a short period of time, a concession was made to a British citizen, Julius de Reuters, of Iran's transportation, communications and natural resources like precious metals and gems. This concession was meant to help modernize Iran by putting it under someone familiar with the desired improvements; to give up power in order to later gain power. This concession, though advocated by the Prime Minister and accepted by Naser al-Din Shah, but was rejected by the population,

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<sup>14</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, Second Edition ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).p 38-43.

Russia and indeed Britain and was repealed in 1873, only a year after its concession.<sup>15</sup> Though de Reuters did retain one portion of the contract, the Imperial bank of Persia and a monopoly on the printing of Persian money. Before the 1890s, Iran had been a politically and economically sound nation trading with Europe and making profit rather than finding itself victim to colonial abuses. This comfortable position in the expanding world began to be more constrained when Iran's Shah, Naser al-Din Shah, made a concession over the production, the sale as well as the export of tobacco to British Major G. F. Talbot under the advice of British minister Drummond Wolff in 1890.

This economic transfer was pivotal in Iran not as much for its financial importance but instead for its social and political significance. The Tobacco Revolt, the reaction of most of Iran's population to the concession, mobilized an enormous percentage of Iranians because tobacco touched the lives of so many of them. That financial control, a monopoly of the tobacco industry, was secretly given to a British citizen without the consent of any of the tobacco growers or sellers violated the moral code of those Iranians in the same way that the de Reuters concession had violated their principles. Large-scale protests erupted throughout Iran from Shiraz to Tabriz, Mashad, Isfahan, and Tehran and onwards in 1891. The masses coordinated a wide scale boycott of tobacco. For a time, Iranians neither sold nor bought nor smoked the monopolized Iranian tobacco. The situation came to a head when demonstrators were shot at a protest in Tehran.<sup>16</sup> The reaction to the deaths of the citizens only spawned larger and more serious protests. The Shah was finally forced to admit defeat and revoke the tobacco concession in 1892. As a result of the revocation, Iran incurred its first foreign debt from the Shah

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.p 53-56.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.p 61-62.

borrowing £500,000 from the British Imperial Bank, established through the de Reuter concession, in order to compensate Talbot's company.

Although this was not the most important event in Iran's history, the revolt's significance stems from how it changed Persia's as well as the position of Persia's government in the eyes of Iranian and European citizens. With Iran finally beholden to Europe, there was room for influence and manipulation. The New York Times, in describing Iran's choice to take the British over the Russian loan in 1892 said, that;

the now satisfactory end of the negotiations for a new loan frees the Shah from an embarrassing financial situation without exposing him to grave political dangers. It also frees British trade in Persia from the effects of a customs tariff that would have been adjusted under Russian influence in the exclusive interests of Russian traders, while at the same time it frees British diplomacy from the discredit of being outwitted by her Asiatic rival.<sup>17</sup>

Iran's debt and ensuing poor financial decisions helped Europe, Britain, France and Russian in particular to gain a foothold in Persia. Not only had Europe encroached on Iran but Iranians had also found a previously unutilized collective power. The protestations and boycott of the citizens drove the Shah to act, to succumb to the wishes made known by the majority in his country. Not only this but the Revolt confirmed the power of the *ulama* as a popular mobilizer, able to unify with the *bazaari* in their collective interests. The Tobacco Revolt of 1891 lent importance to the voice of the people and laid foundation for revolutions yet to come.

The succession of Shahs turned into successive years of unwise expenditure, money that the Persian monarchy did not have and thus needed to borrow. Once Naser al-Din Shah opened the door to foreign debt, there was seemingly nothing to be done to close it again. His successor, Mozaffer al-Din Shah borrowed money from Russia and in return Russia required a new treaty

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<sup>17</sup> "British Influence Wins: Russian Designs on Persia Are Not Successful," *New York Times*, May 18 1892.

which lowered the tax on their goods to 2% thus lowering, significantly Iran's tariff income. This, of course, made them less able to pay off their loans. The vulnerability of Iran became more evident to foreign economic players after 1902.<sup>18</sup> It was the dire economic situation of Iran that led to civil unrest that in turn led to political demands.

The seemingly simple chain of events was seen the world over. It was, in 1905, that the concept of representative government began to gain a significant following in Iran. The event that put the Iranian Constitutional Revolution in motion seems small but represented the unreasonable demands and more unreasonable punishments that the Iranian government placed in the citizens for its own mistakes. The rate of inflation had risen significantly, thus it drove up the prices of goods. The mayor of Tehran demanded that sugar merchants reduce the price of their goods and when the merchants were unable to respond as commanded, several merchants' feet were beaten in a painful and degrading punishment.<sup>19</sup> It was sugar and feet which changed, if only momentarily, the course of Persian politics.

The *bazaari* and *ulama* responded to this incident of unwarranted violence with protests and taking *bast* (sanctuary) at important religious sites. The demand made by the protesters was for an *adalkhaneh* (representative house of justice) that the Shah granted but never followed through with any kind of action.<sup>20</sup> The Shah's inaction prompted further reactions and demonstrations including *bast* in the British legation as well as a general strike of Tehran's *bazaari* class essentially crippling the region. Demands escalated to a *majles* (parliament) with talk of a *mashruteh* (constitution). Mozaffer al-Din Shah accepted the *majles* and it was thus

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<sup>18</sup> Keddie, *Modern Iran*. p 65.

<sup>19</sup> Mohsen M. Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic*, Second ed. (Oxford: Westview Press, 1994). P 28.

<sup>20</sup> Keddie, *Modern Iran*. p 67.

elected in 1906. The *majles* quickly worked out two documents that became the basis for the Iranian constitution. The Shah accepted the constitution on his deathbed and was promptly succeeded by a son, Mohammad Ali Shah, who loathed the document. He made it the goal of his reign to rid Persia's monarchy of these constraints. Some important aspects of the Constitutional Revolution are that the main allies in the fight for a constitutional monarchy were the *bazaari* and *ulama* classes as well as the westernized intellectuals and that their political views were often divided. Also, the timing of the Constitutional Revolution is not entirely due to internal circumstances. In 1905, Russia suffered defeat in the Russo-Japanese war. The significance in this fight read from a more liberal Iranian perspective was that the major non-constitutional Western power lost to one of the only constitutional Eastern powers. The triumph of not only the East, but also the constitution was not lost on politically motivated Persians.<sup>21</sup> Russia was one of the prominent western powers attempting to hold great influence over Iran and the revolution experienced in Russia as a result of their loss allowed for the idea of success of a political revision to permeate Iranian society.

The concepts prominent in Iran's constitutional revolution were often influenced if not taken explicitly from western sources. It was common during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for wealthy Persians to send their children abroad for further education, often to Great Britain and France. Certain western political and social philosophies found fertile ground in some of these Iranian minds and were brought back upon return. The British constitutional monarchy was an especially important example. Throughout the constitutional revolution, the most popular goal was to reform the government but not to destroy the monarchy. The institution

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<sup>21</sup> Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy. & the Origins of Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p 37-8.

of the Shah and monarchy were important not only politically but also culturally and religiously. Thus it is not astounding that instead of opting for executions in the manner of the French Revolution, Persia instead followed a path seemingly less radical. The goals were more reformist than revolutionary and the outcome was indeed a constitutional monarchy with an elected *majles*. These goals motivated and mobilized a significant number of Iranians and stood out as a pivotal moment in Iranian history.

The Constitutional Revolution was not only an important moment for the citizens of Iran but more specifically it was an important moment for the women of Iran. This was the first time that a broad spectrum of Persian women became politically involved and expressed their power through protests, press, and political action. Though one cannot say categorically that all Iranian women agreed with and participated in the Constitutional Revolutions, a significant number of women were active. The women who were motivated by the goals of a constitution and a representative *majles* went beyond just the upper classes and came to incorporate middle and lower class women as well.

The Constitutional Revolution did not end once the constitution was accepted by Mozaffar al-Din Shah but continued until its forced demise by the Russians. Many women were active throughout the time period 1906 until the end in 1911. One of the most significant ways that Iranian women took advantage of the new more liberal period of politics was through *anjumans* (councils). These women's councils sprang up in many different cities and regions. Though they were concentrated in the more urban areas their existences were kept secret. Despite the covert meetings and members, the various women's *anjumans* were able to maneuver through the state system and have their voices heard and influence known. One of the

most famous examples of the stealth and abilities of the different women's *anjumans* is described by Morgan Shuster in his book, *The Strangling of Persia*. Shuster met a young man in his office one day who explained that,

his mother was [Shuster's] friend; that she had commissioned him to say that [Shuster's] wife should not pay a visit to the household of a certain Persian grandee...since he was the enemy to the Constitutional Government and [Shuster's] wife's visit would make the Persians suspect [Shuster].<sup>22</sup>

Though his tone is paternalistic in his book when he speaks of the women of Persia, there is still a sense of admiration of their bold gestures and willingness to exert influence despite the dangers.

These activist women were fighting against the momentum of a predominantly male dominated history and society and thus faced significant barriers to success but it increased the significance of their defiance. The atmosphere for women though more open than before the success of the constitutional revolution was still dominantly hostile. As the *majles* settled into its role, one of the most important acts was to define who would and would not be eligible for political participation. Women were excluded. Women were banned from voting as well as from the *majles*. This continued the tradition of Persian politics and government being alienated from the opinions of half of its population. Women protested this decision in the press while one man within the *majles* also stood for the rights of women. This man was Hajj Shaykh Mohammad Taqi Vakil al-Ra'aya questioned the denial of the vote to women saying

I will be bold and ask about that first part about forbidding women who are part of God's creation, from voting. If we are going to bar them from the vote, what logical reason do we have for barring them to vote? I dare say- that regardless of what we want and if we are bound to act with the Koran in all cases, those who do not want to can go; [they] are not forced to obey. So we must know here what logical reason for have to forbid them

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<sup>22</sup> W. Morgan Shuster, *The Strangling of Persia* (New York: The Century Company, 1912).

[from the vote]. If we have a logical reason for barring them, I will be the first person to pay deference to it. If we say they must be protected, and conceded this point, it is not necessary that they enter among men. It is possible for them to have their own world, and have everything. How long should these creations of God suffer because something that is a sign of their humanity is forcibly taken? We have gradually pulled back to the extent that we are hiding behind clouds.<sup>23</sup>

In this speech, Vakil al-Ra'aya expressed the notion that women are equal to men because they are both created by God and that the Koran wishes that all be treated the same as creations of God. A specific passage in the *al-Ahzaab* (the Clans) book of the Koran states that ,

surely the men who submit and the women who submit, and the believing men and the believing women, and the obeying men and the obeying women, and the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patient men and the patient women and the humble men and the humble women, and the almsgiving men and the almsgiving women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the men who guard their private parts and the women who guard, and the men who remember Allah much and the women who remember—Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward.<sup>24</sup>

This explicitly mentions both men and women, their religious responsibilities as well as their equal rewards. That al-Ra'aya demands logic for this choice of exclusion is important because it calls for a legitimate reason for excluding women, seemingly something that goes beyond tradition and calls for an understanding of the state of gender relations and the political shift taking place. These were the questions that many Iranian women were asking at that time as well. Because women had helped to bring about the existence of a *majles* and a constitution, an explanation was demanded. Why was their assistance not rewarded with continued political involvement? The secret *anjumans* were a way in which women expressed their desires and debated the issues of the day based on logic rather than tradition.

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<sup>23</sup> Hajj Shaykh Mohammad Taqi Vakil al-Ra'aya in Camron Michael Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman: Gender, State Policy, and Popular Culture, 1865-1946*, First ed. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002). P 38.

<sup>24</sup> Translator Shakir, "Koran, 33:35."

The response to al-Ra'aya in the *majles* by two individuals denied that women should be allotted the vote at present time and their reasoning for this decision was curious. The first to respond was the *majles* member, Mohammad 'Alim Forughi Zoka al-Molk, who drafted the legislation over which the debate centered saying:

Perhaps I am, more than anyone, a partisan of women having their main rights, having a proper way of life, and having the basic, fixed right they do have...I am also very eager that the situation of women in this country improve and progress, and that they come out of this life that is in fact a life of imprisonment. There is no one who is not sorry about the fact that their conditions of life are not good. That we negated their right [to vote] does not require reasons or demonstrations from me. Whenever it becomes *possible* (emphasis added) for women to participate in the elections and to vote, then we will immediately approve it.<sup>25</sup>

This implies that there was something at that current moment which prevented women from voting, something seemingly so obvious that it did not require reasons or explanation from the man responsible for the drafting of the electoral legislation in the *majles*. The second man to respond to al-Ra'aya's statement attempted to provide what he saw as a concrete reason for why women could not and would not be included in Persian suffrage. Sayyed Hasan Modarres was a cleric and teacher who observed the *majles* in order to keep it in accordance with Islam as well as being a member of Hayat-e 'Elmiyeh (Learned Council) who stated that:

First, women must not be named as those who have the right to vote because they are women...We must have reasoned conversation and the reason is that today no matter how much we deliberate, we will see that God has not given them [women] the capacity so that they might merit the right to vote. They and the feeble minded are among those whose intellects are not capable. Never mind that, in truth, women in our religion of Islam are under guardianship. "Men manage the affairs of women". They are under they guardianship of men. Our official religion is Islam...They will never have the right to vote. Others must protect the rights of women because God has ordered in the Koran that they are under guardianship and will not have the right to vote.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Mohammad 'Alim Forughi Zoka al-Molk in Amin, *Making of Modern Iranian Woman*. p 38-39.

<sup>26</sup> Sayyed Hasan Modarres in *Ibid.* p 39-40.

Modarres used “Islam” as the reason. He also denied the equality that al-Ra’aya claimed because of the two sexes being both created by God and claimed that women did not possess the same intellect as men and thus had not the capacity. This harkens back to a demand by Iranian women for female education so that their intellects might be enhanced rather than denied. Not only does Modarres believe that women are incapable of the ability to vote but he also purports that women’s role as the protected, under the guardianship of men, takes away their need much less ability to vote. This kind of circular logic takes away the need for a debate over women and their rights in society and politics. That the cleric’s statement ended the debate on this matter until it was forced upon the *majles* by Reza Shah fifty years later speaks to a certain complacency of many Persian men with the state of women at that point in time. Though al-Ra’aya brought up the question of women’s position as creatures of God and asked for an irrefutable reason as to why the *majles* could deny their rights, the answer though seemingly engaging in circular reasoning and denying al-Ra’aya’s premise of equality, ended the debate.

Even when men questioned the position of women and acknowledged that women’s rights were often suppressed, they did not press the logic or reasoning of the clerics and interpreters of the Koran. One might wonder why two men might have used the Koran to say that women and men were equal as well as that women lacked the capacity to vote because it was willed by God. This one holy text supported two opposite sides of an argument and the *majles* did not attempt to follow the debate to its conclusion. Perhaps this is why the women’s movement in Iran happened in moments rather than continual progression. The complacency of society to allow contradictions to continue makes it that much more difficult for women to build momentum, to call attention to their unequal social status and to force change. The largest and

most significant steps that followed the constitutional revolution were, for the most part, forced through by the Shah so that he might gain a more modern country and greater support.

Though the Constitutional Revolution did not yield the kind of political progress for which many Iranian women had hoped, there were some significant social changes. In many ways the strides and language made by activist women during the constitutional revolution mirrored the women's movements in the French Revolution. Education and suffrage were two key issues for French woman during their Revolution and these issues also came to the forefront in Iran's constitutional revolution. Iranian women, especially those in the numerous *anjumans*, called for widespread and government supported education for women. Though there were some female schools mostly founded and run by foreign missionaries, they reached a very small number of girls. Both in France and in Persia, the women justified the need for female education in order for the country to advance as well as for a more civilized and educated family life. Education of women, as purported by advocates, was seen to increase not only her personal worth but the worth of the country as a whole as well.<sup>27</sup> The most vocal advocates for education came from the upper and middle classes of society. Women from the upper classes of society resided where most of the men were already receiving an education but most women were not. Many clerics claimed that a woman's responsibility was in the home and to her husband and family, the private sphere. Activist women replied that education would enhance a woman's effectiveness in these spheres. Also, education would lessen the dependence a woman had on her husband; to be less of a dependent and more of a contributor for and education was the dowry that lasted a lifetime.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Afary, *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*. P 181.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p 198.

The most effective way women's *anjumans* made their voices heard was through publications and pamphlets. For the first time in Iran, women successfully and continuously used publications in order to make their presence known. This was similar to the way in which British and American women in particular spread their ideas to the public, translating the speeches of meetings into printed word so that more people might know their goals. Many of the women's *anjumans* published their own journals, pamphlets and newspapers expressing criticism as well as solutions. Though the men in power did not truly take heed of the voice of these activist Iranian women, the women made progress by establishing schools and educating female youth as well as creating infrastructure so that female activism and engagement could continue into the future.

Persian women, despite the neglect of the *majles*, defended it into the final moments of the Iranian Revolution. In November of 1911, Russia threatened Iran with military force if Morgan Schuster was not removed as finance minister. The *majles* refused Russia's demands and Iranian citizens, including women flocked to Tehran in protest. On December 1 women staged a protest outside of the *majles* and as Morgan Shuster describes they:

marched three hundred of that weaker sex, with the flush of undying determination in their cheeks...Many held pistols under their skirts or in the folds of their sleeves. Straight to the Medjlis they went, and, gathered there, demanded of the President that he admit them all...The President consented to receive a delegation of them. In his reception-hall confronted him, and lest he and his colleagues should doubt their meaning, these cloistered Persian mothers, wives and daughter 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.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Shuster, *Strangling of Persia*. p198.

These women were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice so that later generations of Persians could be proud of their past and the strength of their nation. The *majles* was eventually deposed and Shuster removed. The experiment in democracy was not over but had come across its first significant obstacle. Despite the many faults of the Persian government, activist women were fiercely patriotic. Iranian women acknowledged the shortcomings of Iran while at the same time espousing its greatness and working for its betterment. This mix of nationalism and activism in women stretched through the decades. In each political era of Iran, a push towards perfection was present. This patriotic activism reached the Iranian Revolution in 1979 because the ideal of Persian culture that was seen as sullied and tainted by Mohammad Reza Shah. Though the women's movement during the constitutional revolution did not achieve the success for which they strove, important progress was made and a strong female voice was found by Persian women who before had been silent and disconnected. This voice was to be heard under the Pahlavi regime as well as during the Iranian Revolution.

#### Chapter 4: The Rise of Reza Shah and the Co-optation of Women's Activism

When Morgan Shuster was dismissed from service in Iran and the *majles* was powerless to stop Russia's military, Iran's political power was put into sharp contrast to that of the encroaching Western powers as described by Morgan Shuster's *Strangling of Persia*. The constitution became a document rather than a revolution and the *majles* became a word rather than a symbol. Though alarming to monarchists, the Constitutional Revolution symbolized something seemingly fundamental to a country's development, the demand by the citizens for representation and a voice in the government and governance of the country. Iran's constitution came from a revolt, a revolution not against the West and their colonial powers but against the traditional and powerful indigenous Persian monarchy-the Shah. The *majles* and the constitution came about against the will of the Shah and functioned despite the Shah's best efforts against it.

Iranian citizens, including women, found a political voice and exercised it effectively. The Constitutional Revolution was the beginning of a liberalization of Iran, opening the government ostensibly to the population in order to check some of the Shah's powers and possible mistakes. This is the kind of revolution which many western states had experienced and even praised as the best form of government. Iran created a constitutional monarchy for itself. The New York Times described the revolution with a thoroughly western voice, pointing to the seeming inevitability of the constitution saying that the Constitutional Revolution,

was an incident in the determined effort of a long-oppressed people to secure freedom and representation in their government. The principle of constitutional government, in its progress around the world, reached Persia at last, and it was because the Shah placed himself in its way that it bowled him over. That the change was accomplished bloodily instead of peacefully is due chiefly to the evil advisors who

encouraged Mohammed Aly Shah to violate his own words and attempt to maintain the old despotism by fraud and force.<sup>30</sup>

It would be an external force in the form of the Russian military that would bring down this wholly internal revolution. This constitutional revolution differed from those of other Middle Eastern and African countries in that it did occur as a result of independence or the end of colonialism. In most instances of a constitutional revolution outside of Europe, they would occur in an effort to rid a country of a colonial power. Such was the case throughout the Middle East after the First World War as the Ottoman Empire lost power or throughout Africa after the Second World War when western imperialism and colonialism fell out of favor. Indeed, the Iranian constitutional revolution was not a revolution in the most traditional sense, where one form of government is replaced by different form.<sup>31</sup> The Iranian government became a constitutional monarchy instead of an absolute monarchy. This was one of Iran's first significant strides towards modernity in the Western sense. In a concrete way, the *majles* and the constitution were modeled on western ideas brought back to Iran by those who were educated abroad in Britain and France. The first constitution was directly modeled on the constitutions of France and Belgium.<sup>32</sup> The supplement to the constitution written in 1907 by a committee of men required that all members, "know a foreign language in order to consult European constitutional laws."<sup>33</sup> Though the movement for an Iranian constitutional monarchy and parliament was instigated and carried out by Iranians, it was inspired by western examples. In

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<sup>30</sup> New York Times Special Correspondance, "How Persia Passed through Revolution to Her Liberty," *New York Times*, August 31 1909.

<sup>31</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, "The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10, no. 3 (1979).p 386.

<sup>32</sup> Janet Afary, "Civil Liberties and the Making of Iran's First Constitution," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and Middle East Studies* 25, no. 2 (2005).p 345.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*p 346.

many ways, Iran has been unable to ignore the influences of the west in the dialogue of modernity. Europe, especially during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, was the model of modernity having already experienced political and industrial revolutions. Europe expanded their model of modernity through the second wave of colonization of the nineteenth century. In this second imperial movement by Britain, there was a greater focus on a more subtle form of colonialism and using the difference in industrialization to the advantage of European countries. Often Western powers would use the raw materials of the colony and undermine the local production of goods. This created both a source of goods for Europe and a market for manufactured goods within the colony. Thus, the Western powers remained the pinnacle of modernity. Persia was always free of colonization and was an important nation in its own right. That many of Iran's neighbors had fallen to occupation by the Ottoman Empire or by European powers only contrasted its independent status to a greater degree. Thus, when Iran's internal modernization in the form of the constitutional Revolution fell to Russia, the shock of it was magnified because its fall symbolized the slow demise of Persia's independence despite the nominal autonomy due to the lack of colonial status.

The ability of Russia to command the removal of Morgan Shuster against the will of the citizens and the *majles* put Iran's political power into sharp focus. Iran's powers were minimal once challenged by outside western forces. One anonymous Persian interviewed by the New York Times said of the situation in 1924 that,

Persia's ambition to develop and modernize itself has always been thwarted by one power or another. Each has a dog-in-the-manger policy because it does not want our resources developed unless it can develop them for its own profit, and generally has a political motive as well...Persia needs wealth for schools and social improvements. It can

only get wealth by developing its resources. It wants a chance to see its house in order. It asks only to be independent, to be let alone to work its problems out by itself.<sup>34</sup>

This disadvantageous position in relation to the west only worsened as the twentieth century progressed and made Reza Shah very conscious of Iran's relation to the West not only in terms of the military but also in more superficial ways like dress. Iran's lack of definitive power left women that much further behind their counterparts in Western and other eastern states. Despite the Constitutional Revolution being an event in which many Persian women found a voice in politics and expressed their political and social will, their gains in power were minimal since Iran overall had seemingly lost power by the end of 1911. The only real lasting changes were made by women who established schools and journals.<sup>35</sup> These had direct a direct impact of the lives of other women but they were not equivalent to women's suffrage or representation in the government whose effects would have been significant and widespread.

The external demands of western powers like Russia, Britain, and France would increase on Iran thus making it more difficult for women to achieve power in absolute terms because Iran's power in the same terms was decreasing, bowing to the demands of the West. This, in many ways, is why the women's movement in Iran was never truly a movement but a series of moments. The gains of women were usually superficial or short lasting and did not have the same impact as they would if Iran had a more independent political, economic, or military position internationally. When the main focus of the nation's government is on avoiding colonization of the economy and culture, women's issues and demands are ignored or

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<sup>34</sup> Nathaniel Peffer, "Old Persia Seethes with Ferment," *New York Times*, July 27 1924.

<sup>35</sup>For more information on the schools and journals established, see Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).p 51-56.

marginalized. Often, women's rights are seen as secondary to the needs of the state, the leading party, or the Shah. Women in Iran never truly occupy positions in which they are able to dictate policies

The progress of women is separated from the nation and citizens as a whole. Separation of women from the general public minimizes the importance of gender equality. In many ways the progress of women is essential to the progress of a nation. When women participate in the economy, education and politics, it raises the standard of living for the entire population and helps secure a better international reputation. Women's participation in politics and voting increases the legitimacy and thus mandate of a government and leader. Women's participation in the labor market bolsters the economy by tapping into an unused resource without needing to reach outside the borders for assistance. Women's education raises the literacy level of the population as a whole while also encouraging greater early schooling as educated mothers foster educated children. In Iran, "Policymakers must be persuaded of the positive payoff of investing in education and employment of women: a more skilled work force, stabilized population growth, healthier children, more prosperous households, an expanding tax base."<sup>36</sup> For a government to ignore the demands of half of its citizens puts it in a precarious position. That women's rights in Iran was largely neglected created a stale situation for activist women. Because of the environment, Iranian women continually took advantage of any political opportunities from regime changes to protests. The women's movement in Iran was rarely isolated and purist, often connecting to other movements and causes. Iranian women connected with the government or a revolutionary group because these unions increased the volume of their

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<sup>36</sup> Valentine M. Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*, Second ed. (Boulder: Lynne Reiner Publishers, inc., 2003).p 71.

voices yet their demands could also be overlooked. Even though Iran would benefit as a whole from the improvement in the quality of life for women, the state failed to view women's demands as worthy of attention. Only when it was convenient to the state did reforms in favor of women's rights occur. The influence of the West had a great deal to do with the attention, though minimal, to women's status by the Pahlavi regime. The women's movement was lost in the continual power struggle of Iran, competing for attention with modernity, money, oil, and Islam to name but a few.

In the wake of World War, I Reza Khan, who eventually became Reza Shah Pahlavi, rose to power from commander of the Cossack Brigade to Shah as part of a 1921 coup supported by Lord Curzon so that the British might secure greater influence over the Persian government, its oil, and stem the tide of Communism.<sup>37</sup> The British did not have the desired return in a puppet-like ruler. The original winner of the coup, Seyyed Zia, could not manage to stay in power and Reza Khan quickly surpassed his influence and replaced him. Reza Shah pursued an aggressive modernization of Iran with a special focus on its military strength. Reza Shah was forceful and persistent, modeling some of his reforms on that of Ataturk's in secularizing Turkey. Reza Shah became the ruler of Iran after the First World War during a time when the entire world seemed to be in a state of flux. He appeared determined that Persia would take advantage of all the opportunities offered by the more flexible state of world powers. In order to bring Iran into this dialogue, Reza Shah wanted the country to be modern. The view of Iran as modern by those outside the state would enhance the country's power and thus enhance Reza Shah's power. That

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<sup>37</sup> Michael P. Zirinsky, "Imperial Power and Dictatorship: Britain and the Rise of Reza Shah, 1921-1926," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 4 (1992).p 644.

Reza Shah should gain a firmer grasp on power seemed to be the most important goal governing all of his actions.

In many ways, women became important tools for Reza Shah and his government from how women dressed, to their available professions and education levels. Women's rights and the women's movement in Iran were incorporated into Reza Shah's policies as he orchestrated a women's awakening for the country. These changes and improvements in the rights of women were meant to gain him the support of women as well as to enhance his power by decreasing the power of the *ulama*.<sup>38</sup> The most widely known and studied aspect of Reza Shah's laws in regards to women is the ban on the veil. This visual break with the Persian past and Islam aggravated most of Iran and embarrassed many women who were forced to unveil. The true implications of this law will be discussed in a forthcoming chapter but at this moment it is most important to note that this ban was overtly challenging the *ulama*'s vision of women as well as the Western vision of Persian women. Women without veils were not visually Islamic and visually not under the rule of the *ulama* and thus this unveiling was another way in which Reza Shah attempted to lessen the influence and power of the *ulama* while increasing his own.

The change in the appearance of Iran's women was meant to signal Iran's advancement into the modern twentieth century to outsiders more so than to insiders. Many of Reza Shah's actions had this superficiality to them, they were changes made more for the benefit of those looking at Iranians rather than for Iranians themselves. As mentioned previously, Western imperialists had seen Persia as an exotic place with veiled and sensual women locked away in harems. In the past, Western eyes had defined Persia and indeed Islam by their concealed women, presenting the culture as both overtly erotic and oppressive and distinct in all ways from

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<sup>38</sup> Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*.p 66-67.

Western society. Reza Shah was attempting to break this stereotype in the most obvious possible way, by removing the veil and revealing the women of Iran to Western scrutiny.

Before Reza Shah, Persian women had attempted to gain political clout as well as greater influence in society. One of the ways in which they attempted this was through education of women. Iranian women's arguments echoed British women, that an educated woman means an educated mother that creates an educated nation of patriots. One woman, Fatemeh Adib al-Zaman Farahani expressed this desire in a poem saying,

Your knowledge can rescue the homeland  
 Get education, you, daughters of the homeland  
 Become authorities of knowledge, you, mothers of the homeland  
 Women are the soul and men the body of the homeland  
 Soul and body are the life and prosperity of the homeland  
 Endeavor, these women will exalt the homeland  
 To the sky, like the hand of Moses, miracles of the homeland  
 By aspirations of their cherishing tendering hands  
 Solve the problems and troubles of the homeland.<sup>39</sup>

Despite this, the progress made by women was slow and seemingly small. Reza Shah helped this process by mandating women's entrances into Universities and creating a Ministry of Education, with a focus on secular education thus taking power from the *ulama* and putting in the hands of the state.<sup>40</sup> Although female schooling remained behind male education, there was vast improvement. Education was made available to many more girls and women and increased the chances that these women would be able to gain the political rights for which their mothers fought.

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<sup>39</sup> Minoos Derayeh, *Gender Equality in Iranian History: From Pre-Islamic Times to the Present* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006).p 118.

<sup>40</sup> Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*.p 71.

Year <sup>41</sup>	Number of Female Students	Number of Schools
1910	167	50
1929	11,489	190
1933	50,000	870

Reza Shah's assistance for women in this arena was not without personal benefits. Reza Shah was once again decreasing the influence of *ulama* first by defying their desires to keep women from schools and second because the Ministry of Education removed the power over curriculum from the *ulama*. This transfer of power was one with potentially long lasting effects in that the curriculum of the government was modeled on the West and would be able to promote the Shah's ideals into the minds of the Iranian youth. Education is an important outlet for a government to spread its morals and program because the education of the youth rarely involved questioning. The Iranian children would initially question the lessons of neither the teacher nor the motives behind such an educational course. Reza Shah through the education of women and control over curriculum was gaining the possibility of many allies. Indeed, it was the Westerners that removed him from power and not the Iranians.

Careers originally banned to women opened up from positions in the *majles* to judges and teachers. Many women came out of the home and agriculture to occupy the service industry as well. This reflected the move of the Iranian economy to become more service oriented as encouraged by government funding. The emphasis on industry and more seemingly modern services took away from agriculture in a direct manner. Thus as people and women moved out of agriculture and into the cities and emerging towns, agricultural production decreased. This put

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<sup>41</sup> Statistics consolidated and taken from Ibid. p 71.

Iran in a dangerous and precarious position that was tipped in the Second World War because of battles which destroyed crops and fields throughout Iran.

Independence of the women's movement under Reza Shah was only present until the 1930s when the government took over the most significant reforms for women. In some ways this meant incorporating preexisting women's activist groups into the state structure as it was with the Patriotic Women's Society. The women who ran such groups, like Mohtaram Eskandari, saw it as prudent to become involved with Reza Shah in order to expedite the fulfillment of their demands.<sup>42</sup> In other cases, some women's magazines and groups essentially disappeared because they may have criticized the Shah or government or even male society in general and the government took away their license to publish or appear in public. In other instances, these women's organizations could not compete with the new government and would not join the Shah's new order.

This new state of women's affairs encompassed fewer voices than previously and they were more publicly aligned with the Shah and his goals for Iran. It seemed as though women had lost control over their own rights despite the gains made. Reza Shah's preoccupation with the appearance of Iranian society to outsiders made women a prominent group to which the Shah paid attention. Britain, an eminent influence and presence in Iran, had a liberal society in which women had fought for and won many political and social rights. English women often contrasted their own situation to that of Iranian women in order to help justify the paternalist mannerisms of their imperialism as well as their position as modern. This move of Reza Shah to encompass modernity within Iran focused on modernity as defined by the West. The struggle of women was once again wrapped up into Iran's struggle with modernity.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.p 81-83

The changing notion of a modern country defined by Reza Shah as a westernized country with a developed military, greater industry and liberated women. Reza Shah used the achievement of Western approval as the bar for accomplishment. This was the first time that Westernization truly became part of a force in Iran and more specifically as part of the Iranian government as driven by the Shah. Reza Shah used his position to push Iran into a more Westernized and thus, in the Shah's eyes, a modernized position within the international community. This is partially because of the influence that Britain had over Reza Shah's rise to power as well as the travels he took to Turkey and Russia.<sup>43</sup> In many ways, there was a movement toward efficiency and order in what Reza Shah saw as a negatively pastoral country. Yet, the Shah often overlooked the necessary infrastructure and made choices and improvements that focused on the more obvious and visual aspects. This included the forced settlement of nomadic tribes yet their settlement on insufficient lands led to revolts and a decrease in livestock.<sup>44</sup> The Uniformity of Dress law forced men to wear Western dress and hats, excluding religious students and *ulama*, thus separating the *ulama* visually from the rest of society. This visual change was one that could be seen as modernizing the Iranian public in Western eyes while at the same time distinguishing by dress Islam and Islamic scholars and leaders as somehow backwards or traditional. The hat required by the law made prayer and the touching of the head to the ground difficult, hampering indirectly *ulama* and their followers. In a meeting between the Shah and his former Prime Minister, as recalled by Mokhber al-Saltaneh, the:

Shah took [al-Saltaneh's bowler] hat off and said, Now what do you think of this? [al-Saltaneh] said it certainly protects one from the sun and rain, but that [Pahlavi] hat which we had before had a better name. Agitated, His majesty paced up and down

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<sup>43</sup> Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921: The Pahlavis and After* (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2003).p 67.

<sup>44</sup> Keddie, *Modern Iran*.p 91.

and said, All I am trying to do for us to look like [the Europeans] so they no longer laugh at us. [al-Saltaneh] replied that no doubt he had thought this to be expedient, but to [him]self, It is what is under the hat, and irrelevant emulations, which they laugh at.<sup>45</sup>

This law was certainly meant to be for the benefit of Western judgment rather than Iranian demands. In similar ways, the railroad built at great cost to Iran, was rarely used and not enough to justify the costs. It was more Western powers like Britain and Russian that benefited from the railroad rather than natives yet it was the Persians who paid for the symbolic modern transportation. The Shah and the government taxed its citizens heavily but those that paid the most for these sometimes trivial reforms were the lower classes and peasants. Landlords and the monarchy were often able to maneuver out of paying taxes and thus most of the burden fell on those least able to afford its cost. Not only could the lower classes least afford these reforms but also they were often those who benefited least from the improvements. Also, Reza Shah kept the institution of the *Majles* but abolished all rival political parties thus creating the image of a constitutional monarchy despite the Parliament and the constitution lacking any real restrictive power over the Shah. That Reza Shah did not grant women suffrage reinforces the superficial nature of his improvements to female rights. Suffrage had been an important aspect of the women's movement in Iran especially since the Constitutional Revolution as it had been for western women in their push for women's rights in Europe and America. Granting this right to vote would have put Persian women more in line with the position of Western women but the Shah was more concerned with that Iranian women were wearing rather than if they had political rights.

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<sup>45</sup> Touraj Atabaki, "Men of Order: Authoritarian Modernization under Ataturk and Reza Shah," (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004).p 34.

Reza Shah's ambitious Westernization and militant modernization were means to an end in enhancing his own power. The reforms made by the Shah during his reign, especially pertaining to women, were superficially and ultimately aesthetic with the removal of the veil being the most remembered by historians. The women's movement was pulled under the umbrella of Reza Shah's government that took away the individuality of activist women and their varied demands. Instead, only certain reforms were made and they did not include the most important demand of female suffrage. Mohammad Reza Shah, Reza Shah's son, carried on this push for reforms, especially for Westernization. The women's movement and reforms were still enveloped in the Iranian struggle for modernity. Yet it was due to the reforms made by Mohammad Reza Shah that activist women eventually found their voice and political power.

## Chapter 5 - Mohammad Reza Shah and His Women

Iran under Mohammad Reza Shah (M.R. Shah) underwent some important changes during his quest to modernize and Westernize Iran. As a result of these modernizations and a yearning to be accepted by Western nations, M. R. Shah implemented a number of reforms especially pertaining to the status of women in society. While some of these reforms were genuine, many, much like his father's reforms, were superficial. The desperate means by which M. R. Shah sought approval from the West and the manner in which he attempted to rule his country by reliance on shallow reforms and political and social repression, ultimately led to his downfall and the commencement of a new Islamic era for Iran.

The period of M. R. Shah's rule can be split in half, before the 1953 coup and afterwards. Before 1953, M. R. Shah was a somewhat inconspicuous ruler, rarely issuing any decrees or making requests that went against the *majles* or the foreign powers whose voices had become more prominent in Iran's affairs. During this period, M.R. Shah was a constitutional monarch, as intended by constitution. World War II proved to be a turning point for Iran as Reza Shah was removed because of his support of Germany and M. R. Shah took the throne. Not only did leadership change due to foreign authority but it also marked a more prominent place for American influence in Iran.<sup>46</sup> Iran's economy after the war was in a poor state stemming from multiple factors: illogical and unenforced taxation, poorly priced goods and services, bad use of available labor. These mistakes were exacerbated by the influx of foreign goods and the recent dearth of foreign buyers for Iranian goods. Politics and oil, two of Iran's most volatile issues,

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<sup>46</sup> For a good discussion of this see Keddie, *Modern Iran*. p 105-110.

came to blows beginning in 1947. A prominent man in the *majles*, Mohammad Mosaddeq, pushed for the nationalization of Iranian oil. When Iran did request of the Anglo Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), owned by the British, a renegotiation of the disadvantageous contract of 1933, the British foolishly refused.<sup>47</sup> Instead they offered a much weaker supplemental agreement to the Iranians, meeting none of the Iranian demands. The *majles* refused to accept this pitiful proposal. In response to this insulting contract, the *majles* passed Mosaddeq's proposed nationalization of Iranian oil in 1951.<sup>48</sup> This powerful economic measure was immensely popular with the Iranian public but was frowned upon internationally. The AIOC spearheaded a blockade of Iranian oil that was joined by the rest of the West including the United States. This economic sanction effectively cut off important foreign currency and profits from Iran and weakened its position internationally even further than before 1947.

M. R. Shah removed Mosaddeq from his position but due to the protests of the people was forced to reinstate and promote Mosaddeq to Prime Minister. Iran was caught between two forces, nationalism and international power. It was ultimately the international powers that won the battle. In many ways, the Western community's influence over Iran would undermine nationalist forces and intentions in Iran until the 1979 Revolution. The West, in 1953, would cement itself as the enemy in the mind of the Iranian public with one bold and subversive act. The coup of 1953, as imagined by the British and executed by the American CIA, would be a definitive moment not only for M. R. Shah but also for Iran itself (as well as for America and its Iranian relations). The British wanted to regain access to Iranian oil and needed to remove

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<sup>47</sup> For a good and brief discussion of the 1933 AIOC agreement see Francisco Parra, *Oil Politics: A Modern History of Petroleum* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003).p 21-23. The agreement lost Iran money and benefited the British almost exclusively. The agreement was inferior to those of surrounding oil-producing countries.

<sup>48</sup> Keddie, *Modern Iran*.p 123-4

Mosaddeq. In order to achieve this goal, the Americans were recruited because the British had been banished from Iran. Instead it was the CIA who would devise a coup, made possible by demonstrations and the eroding of Mosaddeq's base of support.<sup>49</sup> The purpose of the coup, as stated by the CIA in its files on the mission, was, "to bring to power a government which would reach an equitable oil settlement, enabling Iran to become economically sound and financially solvent, and which would vigorously prosecute the dangerously strong Communist Party."<sup>50</sup> In the end, Mosaddeq was removed from power and M. R. Shah sat comfortably upon his Peacock Throne, bolstered by the British and Americans, whom he admired so deeply.

An orchestrated and official political betrayal of a populist figure like Mossadeq eroded the legitimacy of M.R. Shah as well as the Iranians' trust of the Americans. This distrust would build in Iran, fostered by communist sentiment or religious fervor, and would erupt twenty-five years later. M.R. Shah was often reminded of his lack of true legitimacy due to the coup and his dependence on the West that appeared to manifest itself in a kind of blind emulation and admiration of all things Western. For M.R. Shah modernizing Iran was almost strictly equated with westernizing the country. Though many reforms were made such as implementing machinery or taking on large construction projects, they were done without the research necessary in order to tailor them to Iranian needs. This was as true for agriculture as it was for women's rights. Many of the reforms made were superficial and did not always correspond to the

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<sup>49</sup> For a more detailed description of the coup, its logistics, planning and execution see Ibid.p 126-131.

<sup>50</sup> Dr. Donald Wilber, "Overthrow of Premier Mosaddeq of Iran : November 1952- August 1953," ed. Central Intelligence Agency (New York Times, 1954).p iv. For more information on the 1953 coup, see Overthrow of Premier Mosaddeq which is the published secret CIA files about the coup. This contains both a summary as well as procedures and accounts and is very informative of the operation from those who planned and executed the coup.

demands of activist women nor was implementation of these reforms made a priority for the regime, thus making much of the legislation words rather than actions.

M.R. Shah was eloquent when speaking of the duty and privilege of reforming his beloved country yet many of his phrases, though thoughtful and elegant, did not match up to the realities of Iran. In his book, *Mission for My Country*, M. R. Shah extolled the independence and prudence of Iran in that:

Today we have far to go to catch up, and it is not enough merely to 'catch up'. Conditions in my country differ considerably from those in the West, and we need also to adapt. We are both adjusting the technology to our culture and our culture to the technology. And here lies a clue to a new kind of pioneering. With our great scholarly tradition and our thousands of university-trained young men and women, I foresee that my country may help provide leadership in the worldwide quest for a fresh synthesis of East and West, old and new.<sup>51</sup>

The Shah wanted to believe that Iran would formulate this synthesis of East and West. This desire prompted implementations that did not always correspond to local needs but were still forced upon Iran. Examples of the Shah's ill-fitting reforms included the use of tractors that helped to destroy Iran's already scarce topsoil and digging of deep wells that restricted water to fewer locations and often to one person's profit.<sup>52</sup> These Westernized methods did not correspond to the needs of Iran's specific geography and social system. Improper adaptation was not limited to agriculture but manufacturing and economics as well. The government, and thus the Shah, promoted a tax and tariff system that favored the use of local manufacturing. The problem with insistence upon Iranian manufacturing is that the high tariffs applied to all imported finished goods and did not favor those goods that Iran could not manufacture

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<sup>51</sup> Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, *Mission for My Country* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961).p 132.

<sup>52</sup> For a better understanding of the pitfalls of the Shah's agricultural reforms, see Keddie, *Modern Iran*. p 150-153.

efficiently or cheaply. Iranian manufacturing ranged from simple and high use goods to complicated goods that relied on multiple foreign parts such as the manufacturing of cars. This put Iran at a disadvantage to the international market because they were unable to take advantage of their own strengths in agriculture and business and thus became more dependent on foreign goods and foodstuffs. This dependence put lower classes, especially, at a disadvantage because they were unable to afford the same amenities and basics that tariffs and bad economic policy had priced above value.

M. R. Shah was determined to bring Iran into the twentieth century and up to Western standards. His method was to implement the “Shah-People’s Revolution” more commonly referred to as the “White Revolution” beginning in 1963. The use of white was meant to recall Iran’s pre-Islamic past in which white mean purity and God.<sup>53</sup> The White Revolution was a six point agenda designed by the Shah. In part, this ‘revolution’, was meant to demonstrate his own regime’s popularity. In addition, it was meant to bolster the Shah’s confidence that his power was indeed legitimate, a constant insecurity for M.R. Shah because of the 1953 coup. The White Revolution’s goals included: “land reform, sale of government owned factories to finance land reform, new election law including women’s suffrage, nationalization of forests, national literacy corps, plan to give workers share of industrial profits.”<sup>54</sup> Even though the National Front party boycotted the vote, the Shah’s program passed overwhelmingly in its referendum.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>This connotation for white comes from the Zoroastrians. It is in contrast to black as representing evil. The Shah will later cast Khomeini and his followers as the forces of the “black reaction”.

<sup>54</sup> Keddie, *Modern Iran*. p 145

<sup>55</sup> It should be noted that there is a deep seated suspicion that this referendum was rigged in favor of the White Revolution and the Shah.

Women's suffrage was a change in Iranian political culture that was very much inline with the course of the women's movement in the West. Iranian women pushed for the vote in previous decades, especially under Reza Shah but did not have success. M.R. Shah's choice to insert female suffrage into the White Revolution was both positive and negative for Iranian women. The advantage was that this reform was part of a program that was very popular, at least initially, with the public and was thus passed easily whereas on its own as a more singular piece of legislation it had failed in the past. The Shah granted women the vote. This connection to M.R. Shah himself was to be problematic because as time went on, the Shah's popularity decreased and the electoral reform was tied more to an unpopular, Westernizing regime rather than to the women and their struggle for equality in Iran. The connotation of female suffrage would later combine with the new more western image of women put forth by the Shah and his wife. In many ways, the White Revolution did not enable activist women to truly be part of the reform, the triumph. Suffrage was instead bound to the Shah and his whims and ideas rather than to the work and protests of Iranian women and more importantly the people. This new political innovation did not come from the bottom up and instead was implemented from the top down. This difference was important because it lacked the same legitimacy than if Iranian women and their supporters had truly won the vote by convincing the *majles* and the population that development would be furthered by full female political involvement.

This was in many ways the same fate for the women's movement in Iran. Just as female activist voices were gaining strength, the government beginning with Reza Shah and continued by M.R. Shah, co-opted the movement and the women. This gave greater resources and power to the now unified 'women's movement' in Iran but it took away the legitimacy gained when a movement or group has gained the respect of the population. Most of the population, especially

the religiously conservative, did not support the government under which the women's movement was co-opted. M.R. Shah's complete lack of popular support and thus a lack of solid legitimacy would again prove problematic not only for him but for the women's movement as well.

One important inroad for Iranian women was the opening up of the labor market. The Shah encouraged women to enter the labor force, proclaiming that,

More facilities for part time work...will permit fuller use of housewives and provide them with the opportunity to play a worthy role in the work of social reconstruction even while administering and supervising the home... Women... make up a great force whose effective participation in activities is an essential requirement for all development and progress.<sup>56</sup>

Women became an important asset to the Iranian economy, with occupations ranging from the factory to the office to the university. Though pay and treatment were not equal to that of men, work gave women, especially middle and upper class women, independence within their marital and familial relationships. Lower class women often worked out of necessity rather than choice but the opening of the economy allowed, at least superficially, a wider range of options and helped dissuade women away from prostitution. This was one of M.R. Shah's best reforms because with some economic means, many women were more able to gain a voice in their households because they were no longer simply drains on the house's or husband's incomes. Money equaled power. Yet this power was offset by the new consumer culture being brought to Iran, a culture more in harmony with that of America.

There was a continual paradox for women in Iran, as they gained a foothold in politics, its legitimacy was compromised due to the regime and as they gained economic freedom the money

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<sup>56</sup> Mohammad Reza Shah in Ramesh Sanghvi *The Revolution of the Shah and the People* (London: Transorient, 1967) as quoted by Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*. P 109.

was drained by consumer pressures requiring more spending. Since agricultural production decreased, the import of foodstuffs and a new cultural emphasis on Western habits encouraged the purchase of packaged or pre-made food from grocery stores rather than freshly prepared at home. This saved many women time in that they no longer had to cook all parts of a meal nor stand in line at a bakery. Packaged food fit into the western ideal of efficiency. This practice was especially prominent in the upper classes. The Shah was using women to push Iran into Western culture utilizing many approaches from women's rights to women's dress to women's occupation. Women once again became the visual marker of Westernization in Iran, a pawn of M.R. Shah's reform program rather than a more proactive and dominant force in their own right. However, the Shah's White Revolution was not a success. Most of its propositions failed to accomplish their goals but women, on the other hand, still retain suffrage. Beyond that, women entered the labor force and higher education in significant numbers. On the most basic level, foreigners could judge Iran's progress by the status of its women. Those women who lived in the cities, especially of a wealthier class, were seduced by the new consumer-based culture. This culture emphasized the aesthetic and included make-up and mini skirts, European fashions. The epitome of this adaptation of western standards was seen in the Miss Iran beauty pageant, running from 1965 until 1978.<sup>57</sup> The Shah emphasized the most visual aspects of the lives of Iranian women so that they could be held up as examples to the outside and especially Western world in order to prove that Iran had progressed. Mohammad Reza Shah would claim that his reforms had pushed women and Iran forward. That M.R. Shah had co-opted the women's movement meant that he was willing and able to take credit for the favoring of women by the

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<sup>57</sup> See Appendix D for photos of Miss Iran as well as a link to further information on the pageant and its winners. The pageant was sponsored by Ford, Revlon and IranAir.

state and society in reforms. M.R. Shah's amendments fell in line with the reforms of his father in terms of their connection to women. In many ways, both were focused on how changes in society made on the most shallow level could both alter their international prestige and gain approval by the public.

Activist women in the 1960s and 1970s had greater access to higher education and better occupations yet had fewer opportunities to publish independent views, especially those independent of the Shah or critical of the regime. In many ways, this parallels the religious leaders in Iran, many of whom were skeptical of the Shah and his reforms. Those who published their criticisms or openly spoke out against the Shah were arrested and jailed such as the soon to be Iranian revolutionary Ayatollah Khomeini.<sup>58</sup> Despite their similar restrictions on expression, women and clerics often found themselves on the opposite side of M.R. Shah as he furthered reforms pertaining to women that angered the religious conservatives.

The most prominent example of the Shah's efforts to put forth the position of women over that of religious leaders was the Family Protection Law (FP Law) passed in 1967 and amended in 1975. It regulated many issues central to women's lives such as marriage and divorce laws. The marriage age for women was raised from 15 to 18 years old, although girls could be married younger, above 13 years old, with parental consent. To put this in context, the

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<sup>58</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini was the upcoming leader of the 1979 Revolution and then leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. A quote from a speech made in 1978 exemplifies his feelings about the US and M.R. Shah. "As for America, a signatory to the Declaration of Human Rights, it imposed this Shah upon us, a worthy successor of his father. During the period he ruled, this creature transformed Iran into an official colony of the U.S. What crimes he has committed in service to his masters!...All they have to offer humanity is repression; we have witnessed part of it, we have heard part of it." taken from Imam Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, trans. Hamid Algar, Contemporary Thoughts, Persian Series (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981).p 215.

male age for marriage was raised from 18 to 20 years old with the same parental stipulation for younger marriages above the age of 15 years old. This raised marriage age above the official Shiite age of puberty. Many Westerners express shock over FP Law's (as well as the Islamic) age of marriage yet one must remember that this was not necessarily the age at which all women wed nor was it a decree that women must marry at such an age. In contrast to this fact, as a western woman, it can be difficult to come to terms with the sexual implications of marriage when it can be imposed at the onset of puberty rather than at its conclusion. There was an historical importance of children in Iranian culture, especially male children who might be heir or enter into a profitable marriage. Due to the emphasis on heirs conception is given equal importance in a marriage. The weight on children and thus a sexual relationship complicates a western woman's understanding and makes the concept of a young marriage equally difficult to emotionally understand.<sup>59</sup> Women benefited as now they were able to protest a young marriage but this power was limited as most often parents arranged the marriages and the voice of the guardians grew ever stronger the further away from the Family Court and Tehran they were located. This reform was more symbolic than it was helpful because of the parental consent clause that dipped down to the traditional puberty ages of Islam.

Though the raising of the age of legal marriage was an important reform, the most significant alteration to traditional Persian law, which followed the Islamic *Sharia* law, was women's rights pertaining to divorce. Previous to the FP Law, women were unable to initiate or protest divorce. Under the new FP Law, women and men held equal rights over divorce, each

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<sup>59</sup> It should be noted that this is the opinion of the author. The difficulty is my own and should not be taken to mean the western female reaction as a whole though it not an uncommon reaction among liberal or feminist western females to the cultural differences between Islamic society and Western society.

would be forced to prove that their reasons for divorce were irreconcilable to the Family Court.

Acceptable reasons to initiate divorce by women included,

- 1) If either spouse received a prison sentence of five or more years
- 2) “A dangerous addiction” on the part of either spouse, which could, in the opinion of the court, be hazardous to the welfare of the family
- 3) Marriage of the husband to another woman without the consent of his first wife
- 4) When either partner abandoned the family life. This was subject to the court’s confirmation
- 5) If the court decided that criminal conviction of either spouse was unbecoming to the position and prestige of the other partner.<sup>60</sup>

Women now possessed legal justifications for divorce and more importantly possessed some amount of power over the taking of a second wife. This specific issue went beyond traditional law that required a man to be financially able to take multiple wives. Though there remained a stigma around divorce in Iran, it was now possible for women to escape bad marriages and the new economic conditions made financial independence possible, though not easy.

The FP Law was an important piece of legislation in relation to Iranian women’s rights but it cannot be divorced from the Shah’s political and power maneuvers. M.R. Shah used the FP Laws in order to replace religious power with secular state power because it broadened the legal basis for female position and power especially within marriage as well as put the judgments for marriage and divorce in the hands of the Family Court, taking it away from the *Sharia* and the *ulama*. It was the Family Protection Law that was quickly reversed after the ascension of Ayatollah Khomeini and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is clear that women and their social and political position was not truly the aim of the Shah. His personal views about women ran counter to feminist ideals. Also, his desire to appeal to Western ideals about the

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<sup>60</sup> Gholam Reza “Iranian Women during the Pahlavi Regime” in Asghar Fathi, ed., *Women and the Family in Iran* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 1985).p 116-17.

position of women in society while at the same time, not completely disrupting the balance of Iranian society were more important to the Shah than women's equality. In an interview with Italian journalist, Oriana Fallaci, M.R. Shah spoke frankly about his views on women saying,

Women are important in a man's life only if they're beautiful and charming and keep their femininity and...This business of feminism, for instance. You're equal in the eyes of the law but not, excuse my saying so, in ability....You never produced a Michelangelo or a Bach. You've never even produced a great chef...have you ever lacked the opportunity to give history a great chef? You've produced nothing great, nothing!...when [women] govern, they are much harsher than men. Much crueler. Much more bloodthirsty...[women are] schemers, [they are] evil. All of you [women].<sup>61</sup>

For the Shah, women would never truly gain the equality for which they strove despite his granting of their equality under law. This highlights the contradictions in M.R. Shah's actions, using women in order to take power from the *ulama* and to gain respect from Western powers. Reforms were shallow and superficial despite some concrete benefits for Iranian women.

It was this division of motivations from actions that was reflected in the division in the women's movement within Iran; those who worked with the government and those that worked against the government. The umbrella government affiliated women's group was the Women's Organization of Iran (WOI). Through this group, the bulk of activist women came under state influence because at the head of the organization was Ashraf Pahlavi, the Shah's twin sister. It was the WOI that pushed for the FP law so that women might gain a firmer footing in legal practices. The true contrast of the WOI women to those who opposed the regime will be explored in an upcoming chapter but it is important to point out the dominance of the WOI for women's voices because it possessed access to the most microphones, presses and power. Though officially under the government, the WOI was able to accomplish some goals in order to bring Iranian women closer to equality with Iranian men, however superficial or brief.

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<sup>61</sup> Oriana Fallaci, *Interview with History* (New York: Liveright Publishing Company, 1976).

Mohammad Reza Shah's reign was fraught with economic hardships followed by grandiose oil wealth, a seemingly never-ending series of contradictions. M.R. Shah's relationship to women and women's rights was important but tainted by his need for Western approval and his desire for power and ultimately his disbelief in the equality of women. Like most of the rest of the Westernization and White Revolution, the Shah's reforms in the name of women were almost entirely shallow and superficial not changing the situation of women in a significant or lasting way. This is the same method that his father, Reza Shah, used while in power and culminated in the unveiling decree of 1936.

## Chapter 6 : Iranian Women and Often Misunderstood Veil

Reza Shah's unveiling proclamation of 1936 highlighted the aspect of Islamic and Iranian culture that has been the focus of historians and feminists often overshadowing the important meanings beyond and beneath the veil. Women throughout the Islamic world have been covered and uncovered, following the slowly fluctuating interpretations of *hijab* seemingly since the beginning of Islam. Two passages in the Koran highlight the importance of this covering, saying:

Say to believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them (24:30)

And say to the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their ornaments only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not reveal their ornament except to their fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, their brother (24:31) <sup>62</sup>

Modesty was highlighted for both men and women within the Koran, in the name of Islam. It was requested of both to guard their modesty and ornaments so that they might be greater as Muslims, serving both their faith and their purity in minds. It is difficult to assess the importance put into these verses other than by those who interpreted them later on and translated the Koran into *sharia*, Islamic law, for which Iran and many other nations strove and continue to follow.

The religious basis of the veil is important but it is not just the veil that is important. *Hijab*, the Islamic dress code essentially, has differed slightly through the centuries depending on interpretations by both men and women as well as outside influences. Before the unveiling decree in 1936, the chador was appropriate dress for women who would be seen beyond their immediate family outside of the private space of the home. Though it is difficult to describe, the

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<sup>62</sup> Koran as cited in Derayeh, *Gender Equality in Iranian History*. p 125.

basis of the chador is a loose garment meant to preserve a woman's decency from others' eyes. It also included loose pants and the head and face veil.<sup>63</sup> This should not be confused with the Afghanistan *burka* (which entirely covers the face and body) nor should it be assumed that Iranian women disdained this mode of public dress. Twelver Shi'i Islam was important to Iran because it was out of this religion that Persia came to be solidified and from which the rulers gained power. Iranian laws, before Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah made specific reforms, were Islamic laws and the *ulama* as men and as a class of religious leaders held great sway over the citizens and the direction of the nation. Throughout Persia's often-unstable history, after the onset of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Twelver Shi'a Islam was a constant and thus a continuous source of stability and power. This lent greater importance to *sharia* and the words of the Koran for they seemingly could not be separated from Iranian nationalism and pride. The connection of Iran to Islam fueled each separate part, making each more powerful to the citizens as a result (despite the constant power struggle between the two, the nationalist, almost secular government and the Islamic factions politically).<sup>64</sup> Iranian women followed *hijab* and wore the chador because they were Muslims but also because it was Iran. Women in Iran embraced the modesty as morality and as part of the female identity in Iran. At its most basic level, the veil was a tradition and as much a part of the culture as it was of the people in Iran. To wear *hijab* was to conform to the norms of Persia. As women were members of society, the veil helped to connect them to its culture and history and indeed religion. These factors intertwined with the

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<sup>63</sup> For a greater visual understanding of the chador and proper *hijab* pre-1939, refer to the appendix picture A and B. These photographs come from the New York Times.

<sup>64</sup> The state, especially under the Pahlavis was more secular in its leanings, veering away from the religious connotations and connections of the title of Shah. In Iran's history, there was a constant struggle between the Islamic hierarchy and the Iranian state due to the *ulama's* influence within Iran, especially through the mosques as centers of political thought and debate.

moral and religious aspects of the veil and help to explain the widespread adoption of *hijab* in Persian society by its women. The veil and *hijab* were not inherently bad or repressive but instead symbolized Twelver Shiism and the modesty expected of Islamic women.

Contact with the West greatly influenced how the veil and *hijab* came to be viewed as well as how the outside world came to judge Iranian culture in general. When the British began to travel and colonize in the Middle-East, definitions of Persia and Islam came not independently but instead in comparison to British, Western and Christian ideals.<sup>65</sup> Iranians and Muslims became the Other. Europeans saw Persian women as both sensual and oppressed, lacking the freedoms, education and refinement of their native ladies. A nineteenth century British traveler and scholar described Persian women as those who:

Receive no moral education whatever...Neither dancing, music and other accomplishments, nor reading and study ever develop or heighten their natural graces or enrich their minds. Living shut up in a harem, visiting and being visited by none but females, society never forms their manners; the power of human respect opposes no barrier to their passions, to the vices of their hearts, and to the extravagances of their disposition: the intercourse of women perverts rather than purifies their morals.<sup>66</sup>

Frederick Shoberl implies that there are certain inherently negative things about women, specifically Persian women, that neither society nor education corrects and thus it is passed on from mother to daughter. This kind of logic implies that half of Persian society is deficient in morals and all Western standards thus making the society as a whole inferior to the West. While

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<sup>65</sup> for a more detailed background on this see “Discourse on the Veil” in Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>66</sup> Frederick Shoberl, *Persia* (Philadelphia: John Grigg, 1828). P 114-6. This description is typical of Western men, judgmental in the extreme and often based on very little interaction with Persian women since they were indeed hidden from foreign male view and interaction.

Shoberl mocks the moral state of Persian women, he praises their beauty in describing their dress saying:

It is curious to see a number of tall and elegantly formed figures walking in the streets and presenting nothing to your view but a pair of sparkling black eyes, which seem to enjoy the curiosity they excite. The veil seems to be essential to their virtue; for as long as they can conceal their face, they care not how much they expose the rest of their person.<sup>67</sup>

This description appears to be less about the dress of the Persian woman than it is of her sensuality. The covering of the veil excites the man as well as the woman in the European male mind. Often the dichotomy of descriptions made by Europeans, that Persian women are both unattractive and attractive, embodying the anti-thesis of the Victorian female. The way in which the European mind wrestles with and describes the Persian woman is part of a cultural discourse described by Edward Said in the 1978 book *Orientalism*.<sup>68</sup> Orientalism is the way in which the West grappled with Eastern and Middle Eastern cultures, putting them together in one context as the Orient. To make so many cultures and peoples singular took away individuality and thus humanity. The western voice was creating an Other, a perfect contrast to its own morals and customs. The Orient and Orientalism was a system meant to reinforce the 'superiority' of western cultures over all others. Within *Orientalism*, Said also explores the dialogue between the Self (the West) and the Other (Orient) as put forth by French philosopher Michel Foucault. In some ways, Iran's concept of modernity was a product of the dialogue between Self and Other as internalized and localized by the Other (Iran's Pahlavi dynasty). Persia and its women were part of this discourse and part of the exoticism in the European mind. The sensuality of Persian

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.p 123.

<sup>68</sup>For greater detail of the arguments and structures of Orientalism, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House 1978).

women was projected onto them by the Europeans despite the morality and modesty of Islam and the veil used to signify that. This is exemplified by the veil because it is the visual marker that so separates one culture from the other.

As Western influence increased on Iran and Reza Shah prioritized modernity and Westernization, a logical reform was to unveil the Persian women. This decree in 1936 shocked many Iranians. There were many women who refused to capitulate to such a demand, seeing the veil as part of their identity as Muslim women. Reza Shah's reform was most importantly about the face veil so that the hair and face of the women of Iran might be exposed to the world and most importantly the West. The only hair covering allowed after 1936 was a European style hat. Reza Shah was attempting to prove Iran's modernity through the most obvious tool of appearance. The Shah was committed to ridding the streets of veiled women, giving orders to military and police to forcibly remove a woman's veil should they enter public with one.

This notion of complete unveiling was not realistic. In the most pragmatic sense it was difficult because most families could not afford to replace the veil and chador with European fashions. Secondly, this decree violated centuries worth of tradition and customs, the values that had been tied into the wearing of a veil and the importance that it held especially for those away from the prominence of western eyes and clothing. An immediate change was not realistic given the history and importance that it carried in Iran and to its people. This kind of westernization would have been better served by a more gradual transition, instead of banning the veil in public the Shah should have allowed women to not wear the veil in public. This effort would most likely have had the same effect with the more cosmopolitan and wealthy women adopting the European style of dress and the less prosperous and secluded woman continuing to wear the proper *hijab*. Instead, the banning of the veil, while seen as liberation by Western eyes, caused

offense in Iran. The decree split the female population because one was either veiled, thus aligning with the backward and Islamic tradition, or one was unveiling, thus aligning with the regime and its Western and modern notions of society. Women were not given a choice nor were they given a mode of compromise it was either for or against the regime, wearing or not wearing the veil. The most volatile reactions occurred in response to the forceful unveiling of women in public or to unveiled women who found themselves removed from the cities and the urban wealth and were shunned because they were unveiled. The visual symbol of an unveiled face became synonymous with the Pahlavi regime and the Westernization of Iran's modernization plan and was essential to the return of the veil in the 1979 Revolution.

The 1936 decree was truly for the benefit of the West and it was praised repeatedly by western observers. This kind of praise helped to garner support for Iran as a nation and more specifically Reza Shah as a leader from the West. Reza Shah used his power to force westernization and improve his international reputation, despite the possible internal costs of disaffected citizens. This reform while obvious was not substantive, it did not give women more or less power, it did not grant them more or less freedom; it simply replaced one law with another. When taken to its most basic level, Iranian women were in the same position after the 1936 decree as they were before it. The Shah did not want women to enter schools or the public sphere with a veil while previously women were not allowed to do either without the veil. In an attempt to keep the religious sentiment behind the veil alive, Reza Shah attempted to transfer the notion of modesty to those not wearing the veil. That the veil, before the notion of westernization became the dominant factor in Iranian politics, represented ideals of an Islamic woman. This woman was pious and modest, dignified and faithful to family and religion. In order for the veil to be removed yet not remove these ideals, the virtues attached to the physical veil needed to be

transferred away from it so that the veil itself was no longer necessary. This was meant to convey that women who were able to be modest without the aid of cloth were those that were indeed chaste and demure. Indeed, Reza Shah seemed to reason that:

Women's bodies needed to be unveiled so that the regime could display and celebrate the progress of women in Iran--progress it initiated, progress it co-opted, progress it controlled. The coercive power of the state operated on two levels: enforcing unveiling as a fact of life and defining the symbolism of unveiling in propaganda. In Pahlavi propaganda, unveiling was made to symbolize a blend of virtue, civilization, progress, Islam and ancient Iranian custom rather than impiety, the corrupting influence of Euro-American culture and sexual vice.<sup>69</sup>

The act of unveiling also fit into many of Reza Shah's reforms not only for its shallow intentions but also for shifting of power. Aesthetically, Reza Shah was creating the modest Islamic woman as one without the veil and chador, in opposition to the aesthetic ideal put forth by the *ulama*. The Shah put forth his own family as an example to be followed, his wife appearing at state and religious ceremonies unveiled. Not only his family but female school teachers were made to be unveiled.<sup>70</sup> The use of school teachers especially was a subtle way in which to instill in female children that it was possible to be intelligent, presentable and authoritative while not wearing a veil; such is the symbol of a teacher to their pupil. Reza Shah's intentions were to follow the example set by Turkey and take power away from the *ulama* and put it in the hands of the state. Throughout his reign, the clash of religious figures with the state pushed the Shah to take more aggressive steps toward westernization so that the *ulama* might be weakened by the imposition of secularization. By weakening the *ulama*, Reza Shah was bolstering his own power for as control left the religious institutions it was replaced by dominance in state institutions. Greater state power enhanced Iran's international appeal because it was less of an Other than it appeared

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<sup>69</sup> Amin, *Making of Modern Iranian Woman*. p 80-1.

<sup>70</sup> Pahlavi, *Mission for My Country*.p 230-1.

before religion and religious symbols were limited. This was embodied most aptly in the ban on the veil.

Reza Shah's modernization program continued through his son's reign with an even stronger idealization of the West. Thus, as many women in the cities sported European clothing and attended coeducational universities, disaffection for M.R. Shah's policies found expressions in various forms. M.R. Shah's reforms went further than his father, embracing the combination of, "secularization, co-optation and repression" in order to implement his vision onto the country.<sup>71</sup> There was a certain amount of denial inherent in M.R. Shah's reign. He was not willing to acknowledge the depth and importance of the economic and social problems of Iran and that the solutions he put forth were inadequate. Women were conscious of the deficiencies of M.R. Shah and his reforms in the name of women's rights. Once again, superficial and partial reforms did not address the roots of female repression in Iranian history and culture. Most of the prominent interpretations of Shi'i Islam and *Sharia* put women in an inferior position. This expressed itself in the segregation of the sexes, the lack of education for women and the general dearth of equality between the genders. The problems could not be fixed simply by passing a law or by giving women the vote in elections which were, for the most part, symbolic rather than effective expressions of the people's will. M.R. Shah was not truly committed to changing Iran because he was not willing to address the underlying flaws of society as doing so might threaten his power. Instead superficiality and the appearance of modernization took precedence over effective reforms.

Though the veil never truly disappeared, it was not prominent in the cities of Iran especially among the educated but instead was most used in the poorer or more rural locations.

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<sup>71</sup> Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*.p 104.

The veil itself came to symbolize the growing disparity between the wealthy and the poor, the westernized and the religious, the conformist from the dissenter. Due to its volatile history in Iranian culture:

the veil came to symbolize in the resistance narrative, not the inferiority of the culture and the need to cast aside its customs in favor of those of the West, but, on the contrary, the dignity and validity of all native customs, and in particular those customs coming under fiercest colonial attack—customs relating to women—and the need to tenaciously affirm them as a means of resistance to Western domination.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, the reappearance of the veil by the politically active and especially the educated youth was more shocking to the Shah and the West than it was to Iranians. When female protesters donned the veil, it was not necessarily because they wished for a repressive Islamic regime or for segregation. Instead, the veil became a symbol of dissent. Anglo-fashions and extravagant militarism characterized the reign of the Pahlavi family. The importance placed on the aesthetic and the superficial by both Reza Shah and M.R. Shah made the visual protest of the face veil by women that much more appropriate. This was especially effective because of the sheer number of women; the visual impact magnified the message of those protesting. In many ways, it was the reappearance of the veil that truly disturbed Western observers. For the West, this symbolized a return to repression rather than, as unrecognized in the West, a rejection of that repression which had never really disappeared. Despite appearances and unsubstantial reforms, the position of women from before the Pahlavi regime has not changed in many significant ways; sexism and oppression still existed, inequality was still the norm rather than the exception in Iranian society and politics. A New York Times article published in July of 1977 used,

a recent survey of 175,000 women and girls, including government employees, college students, working women and housewives, shows that 80% of the older women are still

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<sup>72</sup> Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*.p 164.

veiled but only 6% of the younger generation. The middle group, 18-40 years old, is split according to class lines, with 79% of the lowest income group still veiled but only 18% of the government employees and university students.<sup>73</sup>

Women's wearing the veil was not uniform in its purposes or its interpretations. Some wore full *hijab* or chador while others opted for the face veil or head scarf. The face veil is one which not only covers the hair but also draws across the face, revealing the eyes while the head scarf covers the hair and showcases the face.<sup>74</sup> Women during the Revolution chose different levels of *hijab*, some still chose to remain unveiled. The importance of the veil was not religious but symbolic. Khomeini and his followers effectively transformed the symbolism of the veil and *hijab* so that it was used successfully to bring women of varying creeds and classes to unite visually and politically in their anti-Shah sentiments. Once again, the veil's meaning was transformed by revolutionary forces into something both,

enabling because it allowed access to public spheres where access by women had always been accompanied by sexual harassment and humiliation, such as walking on the street, using public transport or participating in mixed demonstrations, and It was felt as empowering because it portrayed women as free, non-sexual, politically aware and in solidarity with the Revolution.<sup>75</sup>

The veil was not a menace or a symbol of oppression. It became instead a symbolic rejection of oppression of the political apparatus of the Shah. The newest symbolism of the veil and *hijab* aided the Revolution's success because women were able to unite under the disaffection of the Shah rather than divide due to their political and class differences.

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<sup>73</sup> Marvin Howe, "Iranian Women Return to Veil in a Resurgence of Spirituality," *New York Times* 1977.

<sup>74</sup> For greater visual understanding of the face veil, see Appendix C which is the picture which accompanies Howe's article.

<sup>75</sup> Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). P 215.

The last iteration of the veil occurred after the Islamic Republic was solidified and Khomeini truly seized control as ruler of Iran. The success of the Revolution would have been nearly impossible without the widespread participation of Iranian women from all walks of life. This would in turn have been impossible without the lack of specificity to women's rights associated with women's participation: women were not revolting for women's rights specifically but against the Shah generally. This lack of clarity allowed for unity. Once the time came to sharpen ideologies and political demands, Khomeini announced that the veil would be mandatory for women. This declaration prompted protests. In one instance,

15,000 protesters took over the Palace of Justice for a three hour sit-in. A list of eight demands was read. They included the right to choose the attire that best suited women and the country's customs; equal civil rights with men; no discrimination in political, social and economic rights and a guarantee of full security for women's legal rights and liberties.<sup>76</sup>

Many women were not demanding that the veil be banned but instead that they have the freedom of choice. Though Khomeini retracted his statement and 'clarified' that his suggestion was that women wear modest dress, this did not satisfy the population. Iranian women soon after this protest were forced to wear the veil and good *hijab*.<sup>77</sup> The veil once again transformed into what the West had always thought it to be, a symbol of a repressive society and a repressed woman. As time went on and Khomeini gained more power, the liberal aspects of Iranian law were changed so that women lost most of the rights gained throughout the twentieth century, all except the right to vote. This right proved meaningless when the elections meant little. The Revolution

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<sup>76</sup> Gregory Jaynes, "Iran Women March against Restraints on Dress and Rights," *New York Times* 1979.

<sup>77</sup> See appendix picture C. Good *hijab* was meant to consist of loose clothing and a veil that covered the hair but did leave the face visible rather than necessarily including the face veil and chador. Dark colors were also encouraged though not required. Good *hijab* was a somewhat vague definition that was strictly enforced by the *Komiteh*.

of 1979 and the Islamic Republic that resulted from it destroyed the hopes of most active Iranian women. The veil and its many meanings throughout Iranian history in the end symbolized what the West had always claimed: oppression.

## Chapter 7: Women and the Revolution- An Uneasy Alliance

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 was swift and effective, accomplishing its goal of ridding Iran of the Shah and starting with a new political system. Women were an integral part of the Revolution, participating in many ways and becoming for the West an important visual symbol of rebellion against the Westernization of M.R. Shah and the Pahlavi reign. The trajectory of the Revolution carried Iran into becoming an Islamic Republic, despite the intentions of many of those involved in the Revolution. The changes that overtook the country politically and socially shocked many women and citizens and brought up questions as to whether life under Ayatollah Khomeini was better than life under M.R. Shah. This undercurrent of doubt would be accentuated at the advent of the Iran-Iraq war and was exacerbated by the decisions made by the Islamic government as to how much the country would sacrifice. Women's positions went far beyond the resurrection of the veil but into fundamental questions as to women's position in relation to Islam and the twentieth century.

The discontent of Iran under M.R. Shah outgrew the restraint of its citizens in the late 1970s. A long list of complaints about the Pahlavi regime went from repression, torture, and secret police to conspicuous consumption, western imperialism, and overt secularism. Nearly every member of society was dissatisfied with life in Iran and blamed M.R. Shah for those conditions. In many instances, the circumstances were the fault of the Shah. His mismanagement of the new and overwhelming oil wealth essentially destroyed the Iranian economy. Instead of a focus on fixing the agriculture or housing crises, the Shah spent seemingly infinite funds on military machinery from America and Britain or funded public projects that had little relevance or use in Iran. M.R. Shah was blinded by his obsession with Westernizing Iran, of modernizing

Iran, both concepts being interchangeable for the Shah. An article in the New York Times at the end of 1978 described the situation saying:

By monopolizing the modernization programs, the Shah made himself the exclusive target of all of the hostilities caused by what many felt were attempts to westernize them against their will and to flout their traditional religious beliefs. He also reaped all the anger caused by the waste, mismanagement and corruption that piled up as the programs continued.<sup>78</sup>

The population was not willing to continue the situation.

The most prominent voice calling the people to rise against the Shah was Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini had been against the regime since the 1940s but had become more vocal and inflammatory in the 1960s leading to his exile from Iran in 1964. Khomeini made remarks denouncing the Shah and his policies that initially led to his arrests and imprisonment and later to his exile after protests erupted in support of Khomeini. Those who responded to Khomeini were often more religious in nature. Also, university students answered Khomeini's call for revolution. The youth of Iran were an especially volatile section of the country, having come of age surrounded by the repression and secrecy of M.R. Shah's rule. Many of those at university identified with Khomeini's words and responded through protests.<sup>79</sup> The speech that was the immediate cause of Khomeini's exile dealt with a law passed that allowed US nationals to be subject to US laws and be tried in US courts for crimes committed rather than be subject to Iranian laws and courts. On October 27, 1964 in Qum he spoke of the recently passed law saying:

American cooks, mechanics, technical and administrative officials together with their families, are to enjoy legal immunity, but the *ulama* of Islam, the preachers and servants of Islam, are to live banished or imprisoned... We do not regard as law what they claim to

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<sup>78</sup> Nicholas Gage, "Iran: Making of a Revolution," *New York Times*, December 17 1978.

<sup>79</sup> Keddie, *Modern Iran*.p 147-8.

have passed. We do not regard this *Majles* as a *Majles*. We do not regard this government as a government. They are traitors, guilty of high treason!<sup>80</sup>

Khomeini's inflammatory words stressed the role of the religious leaders, believing that they should have a greater role in governing Iran because the *ulama* would save Iran from the so called tyranny of the West. Khomeini's speeches lacked a filter which was perhaps part of his skill as a revolutionary leader as well as why M.R. Shah did not want him in the country.

Khomeini's words inspired many Iranians to rise against the flawed government.

Though Khomeini had a strong presence among those ready to rebel, his was not the only voice of protest. There were those separated from the strongly Islamic movement, those whose inspirations reached out to Marx and Lenin. On the left, the two main parties actually began as one in the *Mojahedin* organization. A split occurred in 1976 due to the influence of Islam as well as violence. The group that opposed these two notions became the *Peykar Khalgh* while the remaining members named themselves the *Mojahedin Khalgh*. *Peykar Khalgh* wanted a peaceful revolution, lacking in deaths as well as the possible tautology of Islam as proposed by Khomeini. The *Mojahedin Khalgh* strengthened their ties to Islam especially through the writings of Ali Shariati.<sup>81</sup> Despite the split, the leftist parties were important to the Revolution of 1979 because many Iranians believed in the Marxist ideals, especially due to the influence that Marx, Communism and Russia had had on Iran in its history most notably in Azerbaijan.

The Revolution was not one homogeneous movement with a singular vision and a single voice. The unity of the revolutionary forces was fragile and fell apart after the goal of deposing the Shah was achieved. The two main components of the revolutionary forces lay on opposite

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<sup>80</sup> Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*.p 186, 188.

<sup>81</sup> Paidar, *Women in Political Process* p 202.

sides of the political spectrum and there was a void of those parties representing the middle and more moderate groups. This is seemingly common to revolutions. When a time of drastic social or political change arrives, it is difficult for citizens to accept a gradual change. Revolutions are meant to be quick and drastic rather than moderate and slow.

Especially due to the actions of SAVAK and the repression of oppositional voices, Iranians were, in general, not willing to wait nor were they sure of the possible consequences of compromise. This left little room for women to unite under the banner of women's rights. This was not an option especially considering the amount of legal and social ground gained by women under the Shah, and, "feminist activism in Iran was stigmatized domestically by the history of Western women's involvement in the Iranian feminist arena and by their close associations with the WOI."<sup>82</sup> Activist women, dissatisfied women, and religious women were given the chance to unite as citizens under the anti-Shah and the anti-imperialist banner. In many ways, this helped make women equal to their compatriots, all with individual complaints but voicing their discontents through protests, violent and peaceful, through papers and speeches. Women were able to choose how much or how little they wished to participate and which parts of the movement they wished to embrace from the return of the chador to the end of American supremacy in Iran.

The veil became a very prominent symbol of the Revolution for women, as discussed previously, but women in general took to the streets in numbers not before seen. Women's involvement in ridding Iran of the Shah surpassed numbers seen in the Constitutional Revolution and other important movements before this. Many western observers find this difficult to grasp;

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<sup>82</sup> Nima Naghibi, *Rethinking Global Sisterhood: Western Feminism and Iran* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).p 96.

why women would want to overthrow a rule whose reign brought them rights not yet seen in Iran, rights that would not be seen again. An important aspect of the Revolution was that before the end of the provisional government, it was not certain that Iran would become an Islamic republic and that the clergy would be ruling that republic. The revolutionary forces were divided in politics but united in their cause. Also, Khomeini did not, at least from the general public's perspective, give the impression that he was concerned with being a political leader because,

he succeeded in situating himself ahead of every section of the anti-Shah movement. He managed to persuade most sections of the population to consider him as the spiritual leader of their movement, a leader above party political affiliations. His responsibility was seen as providing general guidance for the anti-Shah movement and the anti-imperialist anti-Pahlavi direction of Iranian society in general. Khomeini ruled out the possibility of direct rule by the clergy after the Shah's overthrow. The public was persuaded that the mundane aspects of running a country would be beyond the roles of a spiritual leader such as Khomeini.<sup>83</sup>

These were important skills for Khomeini. He understood that in order for him to be a leader, he would need to give the impression that he did not seek to gain such a position. This was similar to the vague terms he used when describing the goals of the Revolution. In leaving terms broad, each individual or party might define them as they found it appropriate. The more specific the demands or goals of a revolution, the smaller number of people to which it will appeal. For the most part, Khomeini and other revolutionary leaders skirted the issue of women's rights, instead simply encouraging the women to participate, to free themselves of the constraints and corruptions which the Shah had put upon them. These were, through the eyes of the revolutionaries, the defilements brought about by the Westernization and corruption of the Pahlavi regime.

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<sup>83</sup> Paidar, *Women in Political Process* p 201.

The way in which Khomeini spoke of women, when he did was to emphasize their role in Islam, and that,

As for women, Islam has never been against their freedom. It is, to the contrary, opposed to the idea of woman-as-object and it gives her back her dignity. A woman is a man's equal; she and he are both free to choose their lives and their occupations. But the Shah's regime is trying to prevent women from becoming free by plunging them into immorality. It is against this that Islam rears up. This regime has destroyed the freedom of women and well as men. Women as well as men swell the population of Iranian prisons, and this is where freedom is threatened. We want to free them from the corruption menacing them.<sup>84</sup>

That men and women were equal under Islam is supported by many passages in the Koran in which men and women and their obligations under the religion are referenced specifically separately. This inherent equality in the language of the Koran and Khomeini's initial acceptance of that premise makes the treatment of women after his ascension more surprising. Towards the final months of the Revolution, even women from the WOI joined the anti-Shah movement. There was a sense of importance that even these women who were so tied to the government would turn against the Shah in the name of women's rights.<sup>85</sup> There was an assumption by many women that participation in the Revolution would result in winning more equality for women, the equality promised by the Koran and lacking in the more overt sexuality of M.R Shah's reign. This promise was left unfulfilled once Khomeini solidified his power.

The question as to how the revolution went from a united force against the Shah both leftist and Islamic, to a fiercely traditionalist Islamic Republic speaks to the skills of Khomeini as a revolutionary leader and to the inability of oppositional forces to resist the momentum of

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<sup>84</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini in Ali-Reza Nobari, ed., *Iran Erupts: Independence, News and Analysis of the Iranian National Movement* (Stanford: Iran-American Documentation Group, 1978).p 13.

<sup>85</sup> Guity Nashat Lois Beck ed., *Women in Iran: From 1800 to the Islamic Republic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).p 130-1.

Khomeini's revolution. Women were the first targets of Khomeini's fundamentalist approach to Islam and government. Throughout the Revolution, the leadership positions belonged to men despite the high participation rate of women. Women were part of the rank and file rather than the elite of the Revolution. This stands in contrast to their positions before 1979. Women held seats in the *majles*, were judges and politically active. After the ousting of the Shah and the installment of the Provisional Government, women did not hold important positions in which influence could be exercised. Instead, the power of women was left to be expressed through protests. This was a dangerous bargaining position for activist women. Instead of the ability to argue their position in the *majles* and be rebutted with words, they could only argue by numbers in the streets and be repelled by force. There was a strong sense of hostility towards women who took to the streets to express their disaffection with Khomeini's initial reforms in the early months of the Provisional Government.

By the end of March 1979, most of the most important legal triumphs in the name of women under the Shah were reversed. This included the Family Protection Law and affected most importantly women's right to initiate and protest divorce. Khomeini's repeals included: women were no longer eligible to be judges, beaches and sports were segregated, education was segregated, the use of stoning and flogging as punishment for adultery. Step by step women's place in the new society of Iran was becoming more restricted, more in line with a radical interpretation of Islam. The equality of which Khomeini spoke in 1978 was nowhere to be seen in the new Islamic Republic of Iran. Khomeini skillfully manipulated the situation in order to establish an Islamic republic. When the time came for a popular referendum to designate the government, the many factions of the revolutionary forces had suggestions ranging from a socialist state, to a democratic republic to an Islamic republic. Khomeini claimed, as

summarized by Paidar, that “the people had already chosen the Islamic Republic as their future political system when they demonstrated against the Shah and demanded an Islamic Republic. The referendum, which took place on 31 March 1979, asked the nation to vote yes or no to an Islamic Republic” rather than to vote on which form of government the people desired.<sup>86</sup> In response to the political censorship, the National Democratic Front and the *Fadaiyan Khalgh* parties on the left boycotted the vote. Other parties outside of the Islamists objected to the referendum but voted yes in spite of it. The result of the referendum was 98% in favor of the Islamic Republic. Thus Iran became the Islamic Republic of Iran and after the passage of a new Constitution, Khomeini became the Supreme Leader (head of state). In October of 1979, after the referendum, Khomeini gave an interview to Oriana Fallaci. This provocative interview produced enlightening insights into the Ayatollah’s view of the revolution:

Fallaci: So when you speak of “the people” you refer exclusively to the people connected with the Islamic movement. I ask you: the people who were killed by the tens of thousands, did they die for freedom, or for Islam?

Khomeini: For Islam. The people fought for Islam. And Islam means everything, also those things that, in your world, are called freedom, democracy. Yes, Islam contains everything. Islam includes everything. Islam is everything....

Fallaci: And by democracy what do you mean, Imam? I’m asking this question with much curiosity because-in the [March 1979] referendum on whether there was to be a republic or a monarchy- you prohibited the expression “Islamic Democratic Republic”. You banned the word democratic, saying “Not a word more, not a word less”. As a result, the people who believe in you use the term “democracy “ as though it were a dirty word. What’s wrong with this noun...?

Khomeini: To begin with, the word Islam does not need adjectives such as democratic. Precisely because Islam is everything, it means everything. It is sad for us to add another word near the word Islam, which is perfect. Besides, this democracy, which you love so much and that you consider so valuable, does not have a precise meaning. Aristotle’s democracy is one thing, the Soviet democracy is another thing, the

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<sup>86</sup> Paidar, *Women in Political Process* p 226.

democracy of capitalists is still another thing. We cannot afford to have such an ambiguous concept placed in our Constitution.<sup>87</sup>

These were words that were not expressed during the revolution for indeed under the banner of the anti-shah movement stood both those from the left and from Islam.

Women were not united in their opinions of the revolution and its outcome as much as they were not united in their reasons for joining the revolution. There was a rise in status of the underprivileged, at least superficially, to the more ideal fashion of living. There were women in favor of the enforced *hijab*, believing it to be a sign of modesty and piety. Yet there were many women who did not agree with the direction of Iran after the conclusion of the Revolution.

Khomeini's lack of definition for the rights of women were clarified after he assumed power.

Women's rights would be the rights enumerated in the Koran. Fallaci asked Khomeini about women's participation in the Revolution and Khomeini responded saying:

The women who contributed to the revolution were, and are, women with the Islamic dress, not elegant women all made up like you, who go around all uncovered, dragging behind a tail of men. The coquettes who put on makeup and go into the streets showing off their necks, their hair, their shapes, did not fight against the Shah. They never did anything good, not those. They do not know how to be useful, neither socially, nor professionally. And this is so because, by uncovering themselves, they distract men, and upset them. Then they distract and upset other women.<sup>88</sup>

These were not the words of freedom nor the choices that were expounded by the revolutionary forces in 1978. Women watched as their choices in dress and occupation dwindled. Though there were protests by women, especially in March, against Khomeini's veiling decree, these rebellions diminished as time went on and the *komitehs* who enforced Islamic standards became vigilantes in their practices.

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<sup>87</sup> Orianna Fallaci, "An Interview with Khomeini," *New York Times*, October 7 1979.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

The Iran-Iraq War that began in 1980 had a profound affect on the newly formed Islamic Republic, helping to solidify the Republic and unite the population against the common enemy. Because there was an outside physical and political threat, Khomeini was provided a catalyst to reuniting the factions of the revolutionary activists. The nationalism evident during the revolution became that much more pronounced against the attacks of Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The sacrifices and cohesion necessary when engaged in a war negated other complaints about the new Islamic state. A common outside enemy for the state of Iran also made dissent that much more of a threat. When the left began to protest the government, hundreds of executions took place.<sup>89</sup> Women were left without recourse for their position in society. To protest would be unpatriotic and un-Islamic. These two qualities could have dire consequences for women in the same way that it did for the left. Dissent, especially during the Iran-Iraq war was discouraged.

It is hard to fathom how the women of Iran went from participating openly in the government, holding positions in the judiciary, to being more prized for their roles as mothers and homemakers in such a short amount of time. Khomeini's skills as a revolutionary leader and the necessity of many factions to unite in order to overthrow the Shah left few opportunities for women to assert themselves based on specific gendered concerns. This was seen as selfish and once Khomeini had solidified power, it was seen as dangerous. The way in which Khomeini spoke to Fallaci of those not fitting into the Islamic ideal was of their person being useless. The pervasiveness of this idea and the discipline called for by the war with Iraq made it seemingly impossible for women to assert their specific concerns and demands. When women protested the *hijab* comments of Khomeini, they were often insulted, taunted and physically hurt due to their

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<sup>89</sup> Associated Press, "Khomeini's Backers Raid Headquarters of Iranian Leftists," *New York Times*, August 13 1979.

dissent. The assertion of an independent political voice was made as difficult under Khomeini as it had been under M.R. Shah. Despite the prominence of Islam, the Revolution left much of the Iran's population in the same position of being repressed. The name of the oppressor changed but the same standards applied. The power of a successful revolution was followed soon after by the power of a state at war which intensified and solidified Khomeini's position as leader spiritually, politically and physically. Women, despite their numbers and often common needs and opinions, were unable to turn a successful revolution into a stance for women's rights within Iran. The promises of another leader to women were again denied. Women's rights within Iran never took shape in a meaningful way and those advances made were often led by men attempting to enhance their own power. The women's movement did not take shape despite a long tradition of activist women. The superficiality of reforms and changes made in the name of women reflected the disingenuous nature of those making the reforms. Women instead became symbols of Iranian culture, symbols of Iran's modern status or Iran's Islamic piety. Iranian women were symbols instead of citizens.

## Conclusion

A consolidated women's movement never gained any ground in Iran's modern history despite the important place of women within politics and society. Moments of strength and activism occurred, especially politically, throughout the twentieth century such as female involvement with the Constitutional Revolution, the White Revolution and the 1979 Revolution. Though women proved to be an essential part of Iranian society and politics in the twentieth century, their specific concerns were not often addressed but instead were overlooked or relegated to secondary status. This neglect, especially by the government, is due to a number of factors such as interpretations of Islam, attempts to modernize, and superficial reforms. The Pahlavi regime was especially concerned with the perceived status and use of women for political reasons yet their reforms did not speak to the greatest needs of women. Ayatollah Khomeini understood the power of women yet he prioritized revoking this power, making women as insignificant as possible under the Islamic Republic of Iran. Despite the efforts of countless women throughout modern Iranian history, a women's movement never truly came into being in a consolidated and significant way thus women's rights were never addressed by the government as a social or political imperative.

Iran as a nation, especially as a historically strong and independent nation, was continually involved in the search for modernity. The attainment of modernity was a quest for a specific standard of living and a multitude of factors which became a prominent force within the world with the spread of colonialism. With imperialism came the spreading of western attitudes and more importantly of western judgments. Indeed the attainment of modernity is impossible because it is a concept which continually alters; the finish line is continually pushed further

forward. Iran as an important nation within the Middle East and its status is highlighted by its constant independence from colonial rule of Britain and Russia. The political independence of Iran from the West, I argue, placed a greater emphasis by Iranian leaders on the goal of modernity. To be judged a modern country, especially by outsiders, would bolster Iran's, Islam's, and the Middle East's status internationally.

Achievement of modernity became especially important in the twentieth century as the world seemingly became smaller, more intimately connected between countries and peoples. The exchange of products and ideas and peoples was often times skewed in favor of those nations more able to dominate. Domination often came from military and political might and later from economic strength. Iran's power according to these three factors altered as the twentieth century progressed from a position of great strength to greater weakness. The changes occurred partially because of Iran's quest to grasp modernity and partially because of poor judgments made by bad leaders. Britain, Russia and America were poised to take advantage of these unwise decisions thus making inroads into Iran's international and national power. This continuum of power as well as the influx of influences helped to subvert women's rights and that particular struggle to the importance of a 'modern Iran'. An important aspect of their subversion is that successful women's movement often occur in countries where the bulk of 'modernization' has already occurred: countries who have attained wealth, political stability or industrialization. In many ways, all societies put women's rights below the attainment of those particular factors of society and civilization. Perhaps this is due to the prominence of Western influence and the order in which the West experienced modernization and social revolutions but women's rights are not part of the primary goals of a nation. Thus women's rights were placed by Iranian society at large below the fight for modernity and often times was incorporated into this struggle.

Women became visual symbols of the state of a nation. The aesthetics of women in Iran was seemingly of paramount importance to those Westerners who visited the country. The seemingly exotic and veiled Iranian woman, to the foreigner, represented the differences between Western and Islamic nations. The visual demarcation of the veil especially intrigued foreigners. There was a greater focus on the dress of women over that of men, despite the obvious differences in dress between Western men and Iranian men. This focus on women allowed a form of colonialism through feminism wherein westerners asserted the superiority of their culture over that of Islamic societies, reasoning that the aesthetics of women and how Islamic societies treated their women was inferior to the life of Western women. This kind of thinking was eventually reflected in native literature, a reflection of Western, imperialist, chauvinistic thinking. Those imperialists who espoused such reasoning for the encroachment of Western culture on Eastern culture, were no more feminists than Thomas Jefferson was an abolitionist. Leaders like the Pahlavi men embraced this logic, that part of what made Iranian society inferior or less modern than that of the West was the look and place of women in Iranian culture. Thus reforms made by the Pahlavis were not made through an organic and sincere concern for the rights of women. The reforms made were superficial, a way in which to change the basic outlines of the argument of imperialism through feminism. That the veil was the first real change made to the status of women by the Pahlavi government speaks to the weight given to Western opinion because it was the veil which most prominently separated Iranian women from 'modern' Western women.

Though some of the changes made by the Pahlavi regimes were in line with the demands of some activist women, they were often incomplete and benefited the regime more than the women. The reforms of the twentieth century were not in response to the demands of women but

instead were in response to the reaction of the West. This can even be seen after the 1979 Revolution, when Ayatollah Khomeini made some drastic changes to the status of women and reversing what had been done by his predecessors. It was the effect of the West which Khomeini was attempting to counteract, which he viewed as promiscuous, indulgent and heretical to Islamic values. One of the few previous reforms which Khomeini did not reverse was women's suffrage. Women under both the Pahlavis and Khomeini were symbols of their leadership, visual markers of the state of society and the values preferred. Under M.R Shah, many women were aesthetically western, dressed in the fashions of America and Britain, wearing make up and living in the city out of the chador and veil. This dress reflected the value system being adopted by the regime, one focused on the West and modernity.

Reza Shah and M.R. Shah's reforms focused on women were not profound or aimed at the root of their subverted place in society but instead were aimed at enhancing the regime power through Iran's image to outsiders and a diminished power of the *ulama*. Also, the reforms of the Pahlavis did not have the same authority outside of Tehran. The power of the liberalizations was limited to the capital where enforcement was possible. Many women were willing to embrace these changes despite the double purpose of them until the corruption and shortsightedness of the M.R. Shah outweighed the benefits of his ruling. Women participated in the 1979 Revolution not as women but instead as revolutionaries. This distinction is important in that times of revolution are often times of a women's movement or at least important gains by women. This did not occur because once again, women's needs and desires were placed second to the desires of the revolutionary factions. Khomeini, an agile revolutionary leader, manipulated a situation in which supporting anything more specific than an anti-Shah and anti-monarchy movement was to be divisive and subverting the Revolution to personal ends. Women were left without a solid

revolutionary foundation upon which to carry forward the demands of the female population for an expansion of women's rights. In the same way that M.R Shah equated the reforms of women's lives to modernity and Westernization, Khomeini equated his reforms of women's lives to morality and piety to Islam. Neither leader treated women's rights as a separate issue and once again women's aesthetics became a symbol for the progress of a nation as women were forced under Khomeini to reveal. Both the Pahlavi regime and Khomeini made superficial changes to the status of women, willing to use them as symbols of the progress of Iran as a nation. Iranian women were tools of the government, rarely having the chance assert their independence and power.

In Iran's history, women's rights ideology was never allowed to become a separate movement. Since the call for women's rights was always part of another movement, it was always put below the demands of that particular movement whether it was Westernization, Islamization, or militarization. Keeping women as a fraction of a particular movement diminished their power. Especially after the Revolution, the general public was willing to act violently against women-specific protests because it could be construed as anti-Khomeini, anti-Islamic or pro-America. Connotations were assigned to women and women's rights. These connotations were not indigenous to women themselves but instead were the product of outside forces and influences. It was Westerners that assigned women's rights, in a superficial manner, essential to being seen as a civilized society. It was the Pahlavis who assigned modernity and Westernization to the banner for women's rights and it was Khomeini and other radical *ulama* deemed women's rights to be heretical and part of Westoxication. After the Revolution, women attempted to define their place, protect the reforms they desired and point out hypocrisy in the newly forming Islamic regime under Khomeini such as his decree for women to put on their veils

again. The protests of Iranian women in March of 1979 was the first time that a large group of women vocalized their specific needs from the government, that women's rights were the primary focus of the protest rather than a political or religious ideology. This gathering of women was not focused on opposition to someone or something in particular as much as it was on women's rights. The violence and lack of direct, positive, political action after this show of force by thousands of women confirmed yet another moment in modern Iranian history in which women's demands were ignored or subverted to the demands of the current regime and the power that said regime craved.

It is difficult to label Iranian women as a whole, possessing a single set of demands because the groups of women who expressed certain complaints or desires were not always in the majority of women nor did a majority of Iranian women ever take to the streets in order to vocalize their varied needs. The women of Iran never united under a single women's movement. This facilitated the efforts of those in power to divide women, thus weakening their differing demands and relegating them to second class revolutionaries. Yet, the importance of women to politics and society in Iran was proven by their bold and consequential actions; in helping to overthrow M.R Shah and elect Ayatollah Khomeini solidly to power. The ruling powers or the dominant voices of the time often created the context in which women's voices were heard. The power as a result of this position could help to minimize or discredit those vocal women should their demands not be in line with the priorities of the government. This is exemplified by Khomeini and the effort by women to retain their power to divorce and a choice to wear a veil. Khomeini claimed that these women were those who held out against the Revolution and were in favor of the entirety of M.R. Shah and his policies rather than being women who participated in

the 1979 Revolution and were in favor of the small freedoms gained while M.R. Shah was in power.

Khomeini built a context for women in Islam but not in Islam in general but of a specific and strict interpretation of Islam. Islam itself is not sexist but gives to both genders freedoms and responsibilities. It is the interpretations of Islam that create a sexist context in which a woman's testimony is worth half that of a man's testimony, where a woman might be killed in the name of family honor, where a woman is thought less intelligent and capable than a man. These views are difficult to understand from a western female perspective and were part of the challenge of this project. In order to understand why Iranian women would choose the Islamic Republic of Iran over the democratic Iran, it was imperative to understand the Iranian women's movement as a whole. This investigation led me to understand that it was not necessarily Ayatollah Khomeini that was being chosen nor was he the reason why women became involved in the 1979 Revolution. The moments in the twentieth century of women's strength and activism were in many ways putting pressure on the establishment to grant to women that which men already possessed and women would often couch these progressions in the context of nationalism. Educating women would benefit the nation as a whole because women were the mothers and first educators of the children of Iran. Political involvement of women in Iranian politics would bring greater legitimacy and thus power to the government because it would be speaking for a larger number of its citizens. Women's integration into the labor market would increase the production of the country. These are the major accomplishments that women demanded of the government. The reforms often highlighted by outsiders are instead the most superficial and aesthetic ones like the banning and later mandatory wearing of the veil. It is appropriate that Westerners be entranced by the veil because it was a practice never common in Europe or

America and one so entirely foreign that its exoticism overwhelms the indigenous meaning and purpose of the clothing. Yet, so much scholarship and attention is given to the veil that other aspects of Iranian women and their quest for rights are ignored. An important reform for women was embodied in the Family Protection Law yet these reforms to women's powers in divorce, marriage and child custody were small changes. The Women's Organization of Iran pushed for reforms in this area of women's rights though not all their demands could be met in full. This important progression was not entirely in the interest of women's rights as it was small and toothless reforms. The Family Protection Law was also meant to take power away from the religious courts and place it in the hands of the government.

In many ways, the Family Protection Law is exemplary of the women's movement in Iran. It was done at the insistence of a co-opted women's association and benefited the government as much if not more than women in the power it transferred and once a law it was not universally implemented or enforced. Yet, the repeal of this law after Khomeini gained power marked an important turning point for women in Iran. Not only did Khomeini repeal the law, he implemented a more strict set of rules for marriage and divorce, more Islamic and seemingly regressive. It is this progression rather than the implementation of the veil that embodies the changes and direction which the leadership of Khomeini brought for women. If women had joined the Revolution as a solidified force, united in their political and feminist goals, perhaps they would have held a stronger position after the rise of the Islamic Republic and had greater participation nationwide of women, more willing to continue a progression of gaining more freedom and autonomy for Iranian women in general. The flaw of the women's movement in Iran is that it was never united nor widespread. A movement truly centered on the demands of women would have lent greater force to their voices as well as left little room to

relegate women's concerns behind other priorities and projects. The Pahlavis wrapped women's rights into the general progression towards modernity and Westernization and Khomeini enveloped and divided women into the anti-Shah and anti-monarchy Revolution and later into a push towards a pious Islamic state. The subverted position of women's rights allowed for leaders to satisfy the public and quell, temporarily, women by implementing superficial reforms.

The progression of women's activism in twentieth century Iran rarely resulted in giant leaps or groundbreaking reforms. The 1979 Revolution drew women into its fold due to the deficiencies of the Shah's regime as a whole, not just for women. Khomeini was the spokesperson of the Revolutionary movement due his anti-Shah history, his rhetorical and political skills and his religious legitimacy. Revolutionary women were not united under the Islamic faction, primarily divided between the Islamic and leftist revolutionary forces. Participating women were not fighting in favor of the Islamic Republic of Iran but instead were fighting against M.R. Shah and his inability to competently govern and lead Iran in its citizens' best interests. The Iran-Iraq war closely following the Revolution solidified the leadership and interests of Khomeini and put a greater focus on the nationalism ever present in Iran. This nationalism that often fueled and justified the actions of Iran's women was instead used to repress women, to mold them into Khomeini's vision of virtuous Islamic women. In times of great national danger, there is little room for women's rights. The consequences of the 1979 Revolution for women resulted from Khomeini's manipulations as well as the forces of war on Iran. Women were not in a position to reflect on the Revolution and to make decisions as a group as to whether or not they were satisfied with the direction of the portrayal of women within this new society. War in many ways took away the time of reflection and planning and was replaced by unity under nationalism and leadership. The successes and failures of the 1979 Revolution

were not apparent until many years afterwards because focus was put on how to combat Iraq though mistakes of the leadership became more visible as the war continued. The sacrifices that Khomeini was willing to make with the lives of the Iranians in the name of nationalism grew as the war continued. Even in the present, a unified women's movement has yet to emerge in Iran though a consciousness is emerging, finding a voice through art and literature displayed behind closed doors. It is debatable if the correct circumstances will ever emerge where Iranian women will band together with one voice and revolt in the name of their own rights and agenda rather than as part of something else. It is unclear what circumstances will foster this union since it has not happened in times of Revolution or political calm, nor in times of war or peace.

## Appendices

**Appendix A:** Example of the *hijab* of women in the 1930s before the banning on the veil by Reza Shah in 1936.

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

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<sup>90</sup> Felix Rowland, "Iran Women Lift Veils: Innovation Marks the End of the Centuries of Seclusion," *New York Times*, November 17 1935.

**Appendix B:** example of different styles of *hijab* before the banning of the veil by Reza Shah.

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

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<sup>91</sup> Ross C. Feld, "Women's New Status in the Changing Moslem World," *New York Times*, January 31 1937.

**Appendix C:** Example of women wearing chador and *hijab* in 1977, during resurgence of the veil.



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<sup>92</sup> Howe, "Women Return to Veil."

**Appendix D:** The crowning of Miss Iran 1968, Elaheh Azodi. The cape is presented by Forough Mesbahzadeh, the editor of *Zan-e Ruz* magazine



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<sup>93</sup> Bcubed, "Nostalgia," Iranian.com, <http://www.iranian.com/Nostalgia/2003/January/miss.html>.

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