

**"I saw myself released": The Impact of Modernization on Women's Literature
in Pre-Revolution Iran, 1941-1979**

By: Nasim Mogharab

**Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the MA degree in History**

University of Ottawa

© Nasim Mogharab, Ottawa, Canada 2016

Abstract

This thesis examines the first collections of modern Persian literature written by Iranian female authors in the context of a process of gender modernization during the Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's reign (1941-1979). This thesis argues that women's literature written during the period of transition from tradition to modernity is clearly influenced by the state's gender policy and illustrates the changing position of women's status in private and public life. Indeed, an examination of the collections of short stories and poems that were produced in this period demonstrates that female authors were concerned with the unveiling policy, arranged marriage and polygamy, women's education, women's social participation, women's domestic obligations, women's political awakening, and female sexuality. Furthermore, central themes covered by female authors changed significantly based on the transformations of gender politics the society experienced from the 1940s and 1950s to the 1960s and 1970s.

Résumé

La thèse porte sur la première collection de la littérature moderne persane écrite par les écrivaines iraniennes dans un contexte féministe pendant le règne du Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941-1979). L'étude montre que cette littérature durant la période de la transition de la tradition à la modernité est évidemment influencée par la politique du régime Pahlavi et illustre la position changeante des femmes dans la vie privée aussi que publique. En effet, l'étude des nouvelles et poèmes produits dans cette période indique que les écrivaines mettent le doigt sur des questions très variées de société féminine ; par exemple, le dévoilement, le mariage arrangé, et la polygamie, l'éducation des femmes, la participation sociale des femmes, les obligations domestiques, l'éveil politique, et la sexualité féminine. En outre, les thèmes principaux abordés par des écrivaines ont significativement changé la politique de la transformation de la sexualité dans la société iranienne au cours de quatre décennies (1940, 1950, 1960 et 1970).

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Ryme Seferdjeli, for her guidance and her patience, especially throughout the last stages of this project. Besides my supervisor, I would like to thank Dr. Heather Murray for her precious support and encouragement. My sincere thanks also go to Dr. Damien-Claude Bélanger, graduate studies supervisor, and Suzanne Dalrymple, graduate program assistant at the University of Ottawa's Department of History for their help and support.

I would like to express gratitude to my parents, who gave me financial and emotional support. I would also like to thank my friends; in particular, I am grateful to Mina, Hamdam, and Nazila for their endless empathy and support during this journey. I am also extremely thankful to Carole and Leslie for their comments and encouragement. I also want to place on record my sense of gratitude to one and all who, directly or indirectly, have helped me to accomplish my dream project.

To my best friend, Hamed Farmand, my eternal appreciation and love for supporting me intellectually and spiritually throughout the writing of this thesis. Without his love, understanding, and support I could not have survived the moments of despair.

I would like to use this opportunity to express my gratitude to my feminist friends and all Iranian women writers who have inspired me throughout my life. My greatest debt, however, is to all the women's rights activists who fought for women's education.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
Modernizing women	7
Women's issues and Iranian women's literature	13
Organization of the thesis	19
CHAPTER 1	
WOMEN'S EXPRESSION IN THE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES IN IRAN	22
Introduction	22
Women's verbal expression and Female Plays	23
The emergence of women's writing in the Qajar era	34
Conclusion	42
CHAPTER 2	
EDUCATION, MARRIAGE, AND SEXUALITY: FROM 1941 TO 1953	45
Introduction	45
Unveiled, educated women and marriage	49
Cultural norms, married women, and women's sexuality	60
Conclusion	69
CHAPTER 3	
CULTURAL TRANSITION: FROM THE 1953 COUP D'ÉTAT TO THE 1963 WHITE REVOLUTION	72
Introduction	72
Women's social participation and changing gender roles	76
Expressing sexual pleasure versus sexual objectification	87
Conclusion	91
CHAPTER 4	
GENDER EQUALITY AND MODERN LIFESTYLE: FROM THE 1963 WHITE REVOLUTION TO THE 1979 ISLAMIC REVOLUTION	93
Introduction	93
Women's legal and political rights	98
Modern lifestyle, popular culture, and women's sexuality	114

Table of Contents

Conclusion	125
CONCLUSION	127
BIBLIOGRAPHY	133

INTRODUCTION

If two or three poets add their voices to mine,
the people will soon start humming this song.
Their hums will uncover the women's fair faces,
the women will proudly throw off their vile masks,
the people will then have some joy in their lives.
But otherwise, what will become of Iran?
With the women in shrouds, half the nation is dead.¹

Mirzadeh Eshghi (1893–1924)

These words were written by the popular Iranian activist, poet, and writer Mirzadeh Eshghi in support of the unveiling of Iranian women as part of the modernization process in early twentieth-century Iran. In the first sentences he explains the importance of poetry in developing a social discourse in Iran. In fact, the social position of literature in the history of Iran in general, and in the history of modern Iran in particular, indicates a context of interaction between the writer, the reader, and the ruling regime. Over the past decades, the politics of writing in modern Iran have been examined by both Iranian and non-Iranian scholars.² However, within the larger body of

¹ From a well-known poem called “Women in Shrouds.” Translation from Persian to English is from Eliz Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini* (New York: Praeger, 1982), 31.

² For example, see Hamid Dabashi, “The Poetics of Politics: Commitment in Modern Persian Literature,” *Iranian Studies* 18, no. 2/4 (Spring-Autumn 1985): 147-188; Kamran Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000); M. R. Ghanoonparvar, *Prophets of Doom: Literature as a Socio-Political Phenomenon in Modern Iran* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984).

literature written about the relationship between literary subjects and the historical events prior to the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the literary works published by women authors have received very little attention.

The first collection of short stories written by a female author was published in 1948, and some of the most acclaimed female authors in the history of modern Persian literature began to work at the time of gender modernization during the Shah's reign (1941–1979),³ which shows the significance of this period. However, even within the existing literature about this subject, most scholars have argued that the feminist literary movement emerged in the post-revolution era, rather than before the revolution, and that women writers emphasized socio-political issues more than specific gender issues in the pre-revolutionary period.⁴ I suggest that the absence of feminist literary criticism analyzing women's literature in Iran in this period, coupled with the overuse of Marxist literary criticism, led to a disregard for women's literature from the pre-revolutionary era. I also suggest that the few number of books published by the first generation of women authors of modern Persian literature is another reason why this developing body of works was overshadowed by the dominant, long existing tradition of male publication either in classic or modern literary styles.

³ The Pahlavi dynasty, which was the ruling house of Iran from 1925 to 1979, was founded by Reza Shah (1878-1944). In 1941, Mohammad Reza Shah (1919-1980), known as the Shah, succeeded the power from his father and remained the ruler of Iran until the 1979 Islamic Revolution. In this thesis, Mohammad Reza Shah, the last Shah of Iran, have been referred to as the Shah.

⁴ For example, see Kamran Talattof, "Iranian Women's Literature: From Pre-revolutionary Social Discourse to Post-revolutionary Feminism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 4 (November 1997): 531–58.

The total number of published collections of short story, novels, and collections of poem written by female authors during the Shah's era does not exceed twenty-five books. In addition to the patriarchal dominance of publication in Iran, likewise the rest of the world, this small corpus can be largely attributed to the low literacy rate of Iranian women in pre-revolution Iran. Indeed, according to available statistics, in 1976, the literacy rate of the total female population above the age 6 in Iran was 35 percent. Statistics also show that in the same year women only formed 28 percent of the total university students.⁵

This study is an attempt to provide a perspective from which modern Iranian women writers and the literature they produced during the Shah's era can be analyzed in relation to a process of gender modernization and the resulting transitional society in which they lived. In this thesis, I examine gender and sexuality in women's literature in the period of transition from tradition to modernity, and I argue that the literary works produced by Iranian women writers during the Shah's reign, despite their diversity of artistic values, commonly manifest a remarkable sensitivity toward women's issues and that central themes covered by female authors changed based on the transformation of gender politics during this period. My study will examine transitions in themes in the course of three major historical periods and will show that women's literature in the 1940s and early 1950s was mostly concerned with unveiling, women's education, and marriage, while the literary works produced between the coup d'état of 1953 and the

⁵ Mahnaz Afkhami, "A Future in the Past: The Pre-revolutionary Women's Movement," in *Sisterhood in Global*, ed. Robin Morgan (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1984), 335; S. Kazemipour "Educational and Vocational Activities of Iranian Women. Progress or Regress?" *Farzaneh* 1, no.1, (1994): 27-28.

1963 White Revolution dealt with women's social participation and changing gender roles. I also suggest that significant gender reforms in the 1960s and 1970s prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution influenced women's literature in terms of the conceptualization of gender equality and redefining gender norms. Furthermore, I trace the changes that appeared in the presentation of female sexuality in women's literature during these periods.

I believe that in order to gain a full understanding of the cultural changes that took place under the Shah and the challenges of modernizing women's position in private and public life, it is necessary to rethink the history of modern literature in Iran. My study is important for two reasons: One is that most current historiographies of women and gender modernization have relied on the press as their primary source of information. In the absence of published life narratives from this period, literature can open a window into women's lives with regard to both their private challenges and their public experiences. Second, many of the relatively few literary works produced by women writers during the Shah's era have either been banned or not republished in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In this study, my main sources are women's literary works published during the pre-revolution era. However, this thesis is not a literary interpretation and analysis of the works produced by Iranian women writers. It is also not an intellectual history of the pre-revolution era nor does my work position itself within the history of modern Persian literature. Rather, I use women's literary works to analyze the impact of modernization

on women's writing and the extent to which literature embodies change. I analyze this body of literature in terms of continuity and change, rather than focusing on its literary and linguistic values.

While all of the existing literary criticism has looked at outstanding works by only the most influential female writers, my work will cover the broader collection of women's literature in this period. This category of works includes all published works of Simin Daneshvar (1921-2012) in the pre-revolution era. This includes her first collection of short stories, *Atash-e Khamoush* (*Quenched fire*, 1948), her second short story collection, *Shahri Chon Behesht* (*A city like paradise*, 1961), and her best selling novel *Savushun* (*A Persian Requiem*, 1968). I also examine three short story collections published by Mashed Amirshahi (1937-) in the 1970s, including *Sar-e Bibi Khanom* (*Bibi Khanom's Starling*, 1968), *Bad Az Ruz-e Akhar* (*After the Last Day*, 1969), and *Be Sigh-e naval Shakhs-e Mofrad* (*First Person Singular*, 1971). Except from *Savaushun*, these literary works were not republished after the 1979 revolution.

This thesis also examines the five collections of poetry written by Forough Farrokhzad (1935-1967), one of the most acclaimed, iconic women poets of modern Persian literature, including *Asir* (*Captive*, 1952), *Divar* (*The wall*, 1954), *Esyān* (*Rebellion*, 1956), *Tavalodi Digar* (*Another birth*, 1964) and *Iman Biavarim be Aghaz-e Fasl-e Sard* (*Let us believe in the beginning of the bold season*, 1974). Three collections of poetry published by Simin Behbahani (1927-2014), including *Ja-ye Pa* (*Footprint*, 1954), *Chelcheragh* (*Lamp of many lights*, 1955), and *Marmar* (*Marble*, 1961) are also examined in this thesis. Besides these best-known collections of poetry, I include a less-

known collection of poetry, *Salam Agha (Hello, Sir, 1978)* published by Kobra Saeedi (1946–).

In my study I consider only published works of fiction and poetry; the only two non-fiction life narratives published during the Shah's period are not considered, as non-fiction is not the focus of my study. I have also excluded from this study Mashed Amirshahi's collection of short stories, *Kuche-ye Bonbast (The blind alley, 1966)*, Simin Behbahani's collection of poetries, *Setar-e Shekasteh (The broken Setar, 1951)*, and *Rastakhiz (Resurrection, 1971)*, Kobra Saeedi's collection of poetry, *Ba Teshnegi Pir Mishavim (Thirsty, we age, 1972)* and Tahereh Saffarzadeh's collection of poetry *Tanin Dar Delta (Resonance in the Bay, 1971)*. None of these works were republished in post-revolution Iran. Unfortunately, I was not able to find the first publication of these books outside of Iran and did not have access to libraries or black market inside Iran where one can probably find books that were published during the Pahlavi era. I have also excluded books in the style of magic realism, such as Shahrnosh Parsipur's collection of short stories, *Avizhay-e Bulur (Crystal Pendant, 1977)*, as they are not relevant to this study.

I use both English and Persian sources for this work. If an English translation of any of the works exists, I note the English translation in the bibliography.

Modernizing women

In order to understand women's status in modern Iran, in the following section I examine the history of the independent women's movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and then continue with state feminism and gender reforms under the reign of the Pahlavis (1925–1979). In fact, the roots of gender reform in Iran go back to the Qajar era (1794–1925), when women's status in the family and society were significantly influenced by traditional customs and Islamic orders.

A group of progressive urban women from middle and upper social and economic levels started the feminist movement in Iran. They challenged the traditional status of women in the society. At the time, in urban areas, the worlds of women and men were kept apart. Women were mostly responsible for domestic life, while men participated in social and political life. However, the situations of rural and tribal women were slightly different. The lifestyle and economic needs of rural and tribal women and of members of the lower economic levels provided the opportunity for women of those groups to participate in the social life of their communities.⁶ However, in this study I focus only on urban women because they played the major role in the women's movement.

The Constitutional Revolution⁷ (1905–1911) opened a space for women's activism. In fact, the first generation of women's rights activists in Iran could also be

⁶ Shireen Mahdavi, "The Structure and Function of the Household of a Qajar Merchant," *Iranian studies* 32, no. 4 (1999): 557–71.

⁷ The main objectives of the Constitutional Revolution, which marks the beginning of modern Iranian history, were to establish a parliament, limit the arbitrary power of kings, and develop social justice.

seen as constitutionalists and subsequently nationalists. The first broad participation of women in a nationalist protest started in the domestic arena. During the 1891–92 tobacco boycott, royal women in the harem of Naser-al-Din Shah, who reigned from 1848 to 1896, refused to smoke *shisha*.⁸ Following the establishment of the parliament in 1906, women's participation in socio-political affairs expanded significantly during the social movements. Simultaneously, constitutionalist men, who launched various campaigns against the despotic rule of the Qajar kings and supported social justice and the rule of law in the society, encouraged men to support women's presence in the nationalist movement. With support especially from the social democrats, activist women, many from the upper classes, began to organize themselves into both gender-segregated and gender-mixed *anjomans* (societies). Believing reforms in women's affairs to be essential to improve the social order, these activist women raised women's issues and managed to bring about changes in the lives of women.⁹

In the following decades, access to modern education, adult literacy, improvements in health and hygiene, and the establishment of orphanages remained central concerns for advocates of women's rights. In the absence of institutional support, women began on their own to establish and finance schools, health clinics, and orphanages.¹⁰ In particular, special attention was given to women's education because

⁸ A popular instrument used for smoking in the Middle East.

⁹ Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 51; Eliz Sanasarian, "Characteristics of Women's Movement in Iran," in *Women and the Family in Iran*, ed. Asghar Fathi (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 93–94.

¹⁰ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 67–68.

women's rights advocates realized that women's education was not only an essential instrument to empower women but also an instrument that would eventually challenge the sex-segregated order in all aspects of socio-cultural and political life. By shaping a new generation of women readers and writers, literacy could also challenge the barriers between the private and public spheres. Through a grassroots campaign for women's education, the first generation of feminists aimed at establishing schools for girls and convincing families that education for girls was necessary for their future lives.¹¹

The establishment of an authoritarian regime under Reza Shah's reign resulted in radical transformations in both the women's movement and women's position in the society. Reza Shah banned all grassroots activities and channelled feminist advocacy from independent women's organizations into state-sponsored women's organizations. The monarch's top-down approach to taking steps toward the modernization of women was rooted in the belief that women's emancipation would contribute to his vision of a modern Iran, as well as undermine the clerical power in the society. Inspired by Mustafa Kemal Atattak's project to modernize Turkey, Reza Shah formulated his most controversial gender policy in 1936 when he banned the practice of veiling. In addition, women's participation in newly established sectors of the modern economy, the modification between 1931 and 1937 of some Islamic laws governing family affairs, and

¹¹ Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 182.

various developments in schooling for girls, including the establishment of public primary schools in 1936, were main areas of change under Reza Shah.¹²

In 1941 the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran forced the abdication of Reza Shah in favour of his son Mohammad Reza Shah. Unlike the previous ruler, the new Shah did not suppress social and political activism at the beginning of his rule, and for almost thirteen years activists were able to take advantage of more freedom of expression and association. During this period the young Shah was not powerful enough to establish his authoritarian power. He did not continue the policy of enforced unveiling of women in public. The independent feminist movement benefited from his weaker control over socio-political advocacy, and women's publications and non-governmental women's organizations appeared and developed all around the country. However, most women's organizations were established as branches of various political parties during this period. The central concerns of women's rights activists included women's education; legal inequalities; women's suffrage, as initiated by left-wing groups; and the poor condition of women in the labour force. The 1953 coup d'état orchestrated by British and American CIA forces against the popular democratic prime minister, Mohammad Mossadeq, put an end to struggles for gender equality and women's suffrage during this period, and from then on, the Shah restored state-sponsored feminism.¹³

¹² Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 69; Sanasarian, *Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 61–62; Amin Banani, *The Modernization of Iran, 1921–1941* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 81–83.

¹³ Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 276–326.

Between the 1953 coup d'état and the 1963 White Revolution,¹⁴ the Shah consolidated his personal power. While women's activism was subjected to political repression, the state channeled women's activities into welfare services. Some women's welfare organizations and professional associations emerged under the control of the government.¹⁵ At the time, one of the main governmental organizations contributing to the centralization of women's rights was the Charity Association of Soraya; Soraya was the Queen of Iran between 1951 and 1958. Another organization with a similar function was the Welfare Council for Women and Children. Meanwhile, some professional Tehran-based associations were founded, including the Iranian Women's Medical Association, the Association of Women Lawyers, and the Iranian Nurses Association. A highlight of the state-sponsored women's rights movement in this period was the founding of an umbrella organization called *Shora-ye Ali-ye Jamiyat-e Zanan_e Iran* (the High Council of Women's Societies of Iran), under the patronage of Princess Ashraf, the Shah's twin sister. The High Council's main goals were expanding women's education, rehabilitating female ex-prisoners, and international networking. Other women's organizations were encouraged to stop their semi-independent activities and

¹⁴ In 1963, Mohammed Reza Shah used his absolute power to launch his White Revolution, which was intended to construct "a modern and progressive Iran." The national reform program included land reform, the sale of government-owned factories to finance land reform, a new election law that included women's suffrage, the nationalization of forests, a national literacy corps—mainly for teaching in rural areas—and a plan to give workers a share of industrial profits. Later other reform measures were added to these, and the program was referred to as the "Revolution of the Shah and the People."

¹⁵ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 136.

join the High Council.¹⁶ However, major changes that transformed various aspects of women's condition in the family and in society appeared after 1963.

The period between the 1963 White Revolution and the 1979 Islamic Revolution may be seen as one of the transformative periods for gender reform. Although the monarch did not personally believe in women's full liberation, he supported reforms and insisted that women's education and greater social participation would contribute to the image of a modern nation.¹⁷ In 1963, the first improvements in women's legal status appeared in regard to women's suffrage, and women gained the right to vote. In 1966, the state replaced the High Council with the Women's Organization of Iran (WOI), an umbrella organization for women's causes and the main official force behind gender modernization during this period. Fifty-five existing women's associations affiliated themselves with the new WOI to pursue large-scale cultural, social, economic, and political activities. The organization's contributions to the development of family welfare centres across the country, and its role in the revision of the Family Protection Law in 1967 and the addition of supplementary laws between 1967 and 1975, are undeniable.¹⁸ In fact, the Shah and his supporters saw state laws as cultural engines that would turn a traditional and religious Iranian society into a modern and secular society.

¹⁶ Ruth Frances Woodsmall, *Women and the New East* (Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, 1960), 77–83.

¹⁷ Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Answer to History* (New York: Stein and Day, 1980), 102, 118.

¹⁸ Sanasarian, *Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 83–93.

Regardless of the causes and results of this policy, in my work, I examine the way in which gender policies influenced women's everyday lives. I look at women's literature as my primary source because literature has been considered as a creator or producer of culture in Iran's history. I also argue that during the contemporary history of Iran, female authors were at the same time both participants in and observers of gender transformations. Who better than the women who witnessed and experienced the changes to tell us how the changes influenced women's everyday lives?

Women's issues and Iranian women's literature

Many historians, including Janet Afary, Camron Michael Amin, Valentine Moghadam, Parvin Paidar, Eliz Sanasarian, and Hamideh Sedghi, have studied the impact of political change, the women's movement, and particularly the Family Protection Law on the position of women in Iran.¹⁹ These scholars collected and analyzed data on the ways in which modern institutions changed women's position, looking in particular at polygamy, fertility, sex-role differentiation in the family, women's entry into education and employment, and women's participation in social and

¹⁹ Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Camron Michael Amin, *Making of the Modern Iranian Women: Gender, State Policy, and Popular Culture, 1865–1946* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002); Valentine Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2003); Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*; Sanasarian, *Women's Rights Movement in Iran*; Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*.

political affairs in modern Iran. But few looked at women's literature to examine cultural changes.

There is general agreement among scholars that the initial driving force behind the project of modernization in both the Qajar (1794–1925) and the Pahlavi (1925–1979) eras was intellectuals. Even members of the Iranian intelligentsia who opposed the state's politics were greatly influential, through their artistic or literary productions, in transforming the society by creating and spreading social and political discourses. In fact, ideas and concepts of modernity were initially introduced to Iranians through publications. From the 1870s through the 1890s, the circulation of Persian-language newspapers printed in Istanbul, Calcutta, Cairo, and London introduced ideas of liberalism and democracy to Iranians. Mirza Malkon Khan (1833–1908), a London-based journalist, was the first Persian²⁰ reformist writer to introduce such key terms as *qanun* (codified law), *eslahat* (reforms), *majles-e shura* (consultative council), *mellat* (nation), *melli* (national), and *hoquq-e mellat* (rights of the people) in his newspaper *Qanun* and his book *Daftar-e Tanzimat (Book of Reforms)*, written in 1858–59. Gradually, the first generation of modern writers in the Qajar era manifested a feeling of dissatisfaction with backwardness, especially regarding the political and cultural life of Persians, and shaped a public discourse about modernity.²¹

The movement of progressive Persian writers toward modernity not only significantly challenged the political and cultural structure of the late nineteenth century

²⁰ In the twentieth century, *Iran* became the legal name for Persia.

²¹ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 65–81.

but also transformed the classic literary forms and writing style of prose and poetry. Influenced by Western literature, new forms of Persian literature, including drama, novel, and short story, emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Subsequently, emerging techniques in modern poetry revolutionized the long tradition of classic poetic forms. Regarding the content of literature, one can say that the main difference between classic and modern Persian literature is that the latter was influenced by and demonstrated social and political changes. The history of contemporary Iran is completely taken up with the political and religious dictatorship that limited freedom of expression. In order to avoid censorship, Persian writers had to use a metaphoric language for expressing their ideas about socio-political issues; however, the total structure of modern Persian literature is more realistic.²²

During the Shah's reign, the dominant literary discourse continued to be dominated by socio-political issues. The terms *Adabiyat-e Moteahed* (committed literature), *Adabiyat-e Marxist* (Marxist literature), *Adabiyat-e Paydari* (resistance literature), *Adabiyat-e Chapi* (leftist literature), and *Adaboyat-e Enghelabi* (revolutionary literature) have been used by scholars to describe the politics of writing in this period. Socialist realism was a distinctive feature of literature in this period. Committed writers combined realism and revolutionary romanticism to characterize heroes who sacrificed their personal interests, love life, and family for a political goal. In the revolutionary atmosphere of the mid-1970s, in the absence of open party

²² Homa Katouzian, "Modern Persian Literature: From the Constitutional Revolution to the Revolution of 1979," in *Iran: Politics, History and Literature* (London: Routledge, 2013), 180–201.

platforms, leftist organizations used literature as a mode of communication with their underground members.²³ To give one example, in 1954, a major literary figure in modern Persian literature, Ahmad Shamlu, addressed the issue of the dominant literary discourse in the pre-revolutionary era and the poet's duty in a well-known poem entitled "She'ri Keh Zendegist" ("Poetry which is Life"). The translation reads: "Today / poetry is the weapon of the people / Because poets are themselves a branch from the forest of the people / not jasmines, hyacinths in someone's flower garden. / Today's poet / is not a stranger to the common pains of the people. / He smiles / with the lips of the people / He grafts people's pains and hopes / to his own bones."²⁴

Even within the larger body of literary criticism about modern Persian literature, more attention has been paid to the committed and revolutionary literature in the Shah's era and less to the literary works that seemed not to directly challenge the Shah's policies, such as the majority of women's literature in this period. One study on the history of modern Persian literature, which specifically examines the subject of literature as a socio-political medium in Iran, is M. R. Ghanoonparvar's book *Prophets of Doom: Literature as a Socio-Political Phenomenon in Iran*, published in 1984. As the title suggests, Ghanoonparvar sets himself the task of investigating the social significance of a modern tradition in Persian literature. His work is based on the Hegelian form of literary criticism, in which the artist conveys historical and social truths. He suggests a connection between artistic experimentation and various forms of

²³ Kamran Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran*, 4, 83.

²⁴ Ahmad Shamlu, "She'ri keh Zendegist," *Hava-ye Tazeh [Fresh Air]* (Tehran: Nil, 1975), 87–99. Translation is from M. R. Ghanoonparvar, *Prophets of Doom*, 78.

social and political change in the history of contemporary Iran. He examines the effects on the literary forms of the different social forms experienced by Iranian society, including autocratic monarchy, socialism, communism, military dictatorship, and the Islamic Republic. The focus of his book is the dominant literary discourse in this period, which he refers to as the “committed literature.” Ghanoonparvar also defines what he calls the “politicized readership,” which was caused by censorship, and he discusses the act of decoding metaphors in literature.²⁵

Using a different analytical model, Kamran Talattof in *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature*, published in 2000, suggests an episodic literary model. He identifies four episodes in the history of Persian literature in the twentieth century: Persianism, committed literature, modern Islamic literature, and feminist literature. Although Ghanoonparvar and Talattof do not share the same approach and theoretical outlook, they both use a Marxist literary criticism to study either men’s or women’s literature. Talattof, for example, argues that in the pre-revolutionary era, Marxist ideology shaped the works of the majority of writers and that the focus of works produced by female writers was not on specific gender issues. Talattof considers feminist literature as the outcome of the 1979 revolution. He argues that women’s literature in this period may not be considered as a literary movement because “the term ‘movement,’” which is applied to a trend or development in literature, “has a leftist, oppositional, and revolutionary connotation in Iranian contexts.”²⁶

²⁵ Ghanoonparvar, *Prophets of Doom*.

²⁶ Talattof, “Iranian Women’s Literature,” 15, 531-559.

While these scholars overlooked women's literature, based on the argument that it did not form a literary movement, there are a few scholars, including Amy Motlagh and Farzaneh Milani, who looked at the process of producing literary meanings and its relationship with women's issues.

Motlagh's book is one of the few studies on the relationship between legal reforms and the development of modern Persian literature that focus on the institution of marriage. In *Burying the Beloved: Marriage, Realism, and Reform in Modern Iran*, she argues that marriage was the central metaphor of the Pahlavi period, both in literature and in social discourses regarding women's position.²⁷ Despite her interdisciplinary approach and focus on women's issues, Motlagh's study does not consider only women's literature. In fact, the only study that uses feminist literary criticism to explore the interaction between the policy of modernizing women and women's literature is Milani's book *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*, published in 1992. In this book, Milani takes the veil as a very powerful social symbol that has influenced women's cultural identity and the establishment of social values. Her research rests on a fundamental assumption that unveiling women during the Pahlavi era helped to bring Iranian women to the public sphere, as well as to give them a voice to express themselves verbally and in writing. She argues that the veil as a cultural phenomenon that creates social distances has also been an obstacle for women's self-

²⁷ Amy Motlagh, *Burying the Beloved: Marriage, Realism, Reform in Modern Iran* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

revelation. However, this book looks only at the interaction between literature and the practice of hijab.²⁸

Organization of the thesis

Chapter 1 covers the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this chapter, I examine a form of oral literature, known as Female Plays, that was produced by women and played in women-only gatherings. To show how this kind of folk art was influenced by women's everyday life experiences, and based on the limited existing reports of the dramas, I discuss the popular themes in these plays, which included arranged marriage, female sexuality, and erotic feelings. I argue that women's self-revelation goes back to the Qajar period, when the female population was exclusively veiled and the society was highly sex-segregated. I conclude that illiterate traditional women were not voiceless, and they found a way and provided a space to express women's issues in their private settings. Chapter 1 also highlights the development of women's literacy and girls' education at the turn of the twentieth century. In this part I look at a significant transformation in women's social visibility, as well as at the emergence of women's writing in periodicals during the Constitutional Revolution.

Chapter 2 covers from 1941, the year the Shah came to power, to the 1953 coup d'état. In this chapter, I analyze the representation of gender in Simin Daneshvar's

²⁸ Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voice of Iranian Women Writers* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992).

Atash-e Khamoush (*Quenched Fire*, 1948). I show how the policy of unveiling, women's education, and marriage are the main themes Daneshvar approached in this book. I also examine the sexual politics of this period and the theme of sexuality in *Asir* (*Captive*, 1952), the first work of Forough Farrokhzad. Based on Farrokhzad's poems, I will show how an ambitious woman saw herself as "captive" inside the institution of marriage.

In Chapter 3, I argue that although the period between 1953 and the 1963 White Revolution did not see legal changes concerning women's issues, literary works published by female authors dealt with the changing gender norms in the family and in the society, and this illustrates ongoing cultural transformation. An examination of Farrokhzad's works shows that a woman could openly express her sexual feeling through the publication of her poems in this period. Simin Behbahani's different approach to female sexuality and her criticism of the objectification of women are also examined in this chapter.

Chapter 4 looks at the aftermath of the White Revolution to the end of the Shah's monarchy. This is a unique period regarding both women's legal status and women's literature. In this chapter, first, I explain the remarkable progress in women's status in the political structure, as well as the legal situation of women in both the family and society. Then, based on an examination of the best-known works of Daneshvar and Farrokhzad, which were published in this period, I argue that the development of gender equality helped women to redefine their social and political identities. Based on Mashid Amirshahi's stories, I also look at the influence on women's literature of popular culture

and changing lifestyles during the 1960s and 1970s. Finally, through an examination of Farrokhzad's later works and Kobra Saeedi's poems, I show how female authors presented female sexuality in a different way than did the entertainment industry.

CHAPTER 1

WOMEN'S EXPRESSION IN THE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES IN IRAN

Introduction

Within the larger body of literature on the history of the status of women in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Iran, women's oral literature, as part of the history of women's self-expression, has received very little attention. This is rather surprising because up until the twentieth century, the majority of the Iranian population was illiterate; thus, oral traditions played a major role in their everyday life. In any analysis of the condition of women in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Iran, ignoring women's oral traditions leads to a false understanding of women's invisibility in history. To argue against the dominant belief that women were voiceless in pre-modern, nineteenth-century Iran,²⁹ I look at a unique and little-known form of women's oral literature, Female Plays. These plays are significant for understanding the background of women's self-expression. By examining some of the most popular examples of Female Plays, a form of folk art, I will show how these dramas reflected women's desires and challenges in their daily experiences. By examining Female Plays, I hope to shed light on the nature of women's self-expression and women's autonomy in interpreting and reinterpreting themselves within the dominant male-centred structures.

²⁹ For example, see Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words*.

In the next section, I will also explore how female journalism emerged during the Constitutional Revolution (1906–1911) and opened a space for women’s writing, a writing that was shaped within the socio-political discourse of the period. However, it is not my intent to look at that socio-political discourse; rather, I look at female journalism in order to understand the origins of women’s literacy and women’s publishing in Iran.

Women’s verbal expression and Female Plays

Prior to the emergence of the women’s movement during the Constitutional Revolution, educational opportunities for women were limited to the traditional elementary schools, which were led by clergy. However, most girls remained uneducated, and, according to one report, by 1925, 97% of all Iranian women were illiterate.³⁰ For an illiterate population, traditional folk art was a powerful way to convey thoughts, feelings, and emotions.

The diverse types of folk art may be divided into individual forms versus collective forms. A good example of individual folk art is handicrafts. Traditionally, women produced handicrafts for everyday domestic uses. A detailed examination of the different kinds of handicrafts uncovers the untold stories of their producers. For an illiterate Iranian woman who spent a large share of her time engaged in domestic life, weaving a carpet or embroidering was a way to express her untold feelings and thoughts through

³⁰ Munubar Rahman, “Movement for the Emancipation of Women in Persia,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Islamic Studies* 1 (1957): 27, quoted in Sanasarian, “Characteristics of Women’s Movement in Iran,” 88.

different patterns and colours. In comparison to this symbolic, visual form of expression, oral literature, including folk songs, folk stories, and proverbs, gave people the space to engage in a collective activity and to share their experiences of everyday life. A combination of oral and physical activity shaped a unique experience of collective expression for traditional women in pre-modern Iranian society. In this section, I study Female Plays, which was a secular, theatrical form of folk art created and performed predominantly by women actors for women-only audiences.³¹

These plays are classified as a form of oral literature in the Persian literary tradition because they did not have specific written texts or a specific writer. They took place inside houses, in private gatherings where most female participants were illiterate. No males above the age of seven were allowed. Since it was impossible to record a play in nineteenth-century Iran, our current understanding of the Female Plays comes from a few written reports that were provided by men and women who, in their childhood, accompanied their mothers to observe the plays.³² The story scenes depicted in the plays were largely domestic and concerned various aspects of women's lives. Based on existing reports, the audience, consisting of female family members, female friends, and

³¹ Scholars have used several terms to refer to the female theatrical forms that existed during the Qajar period, depending on the approach the scholars described or how they analyzed the plays. The most common term, *Bazi-ha-ye Namayeshi* (dramatic or theatrical games), was first introduced by A Anjavi-Shirazi, a well-known folklorist in the early twentieth century. Since the focus of my study is on the content of the plays, not their performative expression and structure, I use the term "Female Plays." This term was used by Bahram Beiza'i in his original research on the history of theatre in Iran, *Namayesh dar Iran* [Theatre in Iran] (Tehran: Kaivan Press, 1965), 216-219.

³² Ali Bolukbashi, "Namayesh-ha-ye Shadi-avar-e Zananeh-ye Tehran" [Women's comic plays in Tehran], *Honar o Mardom* 27 (Tehran, 1964), 48.

female servants of all ages, sat around a central space, such as a large room or a courtyard, where the play took place.³³

In contrast to religious female plays,³⁴ which represented female-centred Islamic folk stories, secular Female Plays portrayed and narrated simple stories of everyday life. Traditionally, all secular theatrical forms performed by men and women were known as *imitation*, and the players were called *imitators*. This is another reason to see the Female Plays as a cultural mirror. Furthermore, the casual verbal form of the plays was close to ordinary people's everyday conversations and was associated with specific local features depending on where the play took place. Besides professional female performers, any interested woman in the household and among the audience could contribute to a play if she wished, and the audience engaged in the performance by clapping and chanting. Sometimes, the actresses were able to improvise rhythmic questions and invite answers to more actively engage spectators in the play.³⁵

The harmonious, rhythmic dialogues were accompanied by simple musical instruments, such as drums, bells, and castanets. When a host could not afford to hire professional musicians, the accompanying music was made using the back of a tray or a pot. The cast in a play comprised one, two, or several women and was divided into two

³³ Willem Floor, *The History of Theater in Iran* (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2005), 60.

³⁴ *Tazia* was the most popular religious play during the Qajar era. As a Shi'ite passion play, *Tazia* presented the death of the second Shi'ite imam and his seventy-two followers in a war that took place in Karbala in 680. *Tazia* was performed exclusively by men in the public sphere. Traditionally, young men played the roles of the female characters involved in the drama. However, during this period, some wealthy women provided space in their homes for female *Tazia* performers, who focused mostly on stories about sisters and wives of men who died in the Karbala events.

³⁵ Davoud Fathali-Beigi, "Taghlid-e Zananeh, Yek Sonat-e Namayeshi" [Female imitation, a theatrical form], *Faslname Theaternp*, no. 42-3 (Tehran, 2008), 212-214.

groups: the semi-professional actresses and musicians, who played in the ceremonial productions for marriage, childbirth, and religious ceremonies; and the unpaid amateurs, who acted in plays for women's gatherings among their female friends and family members. Actresses were from diverse social classes and various age groups, and they could be single or married.³⁶

Unlike the male-oriented plays, with their emphasis on social and political concerns, the female theatrical forms were mostly about domestic issues. In nineteenth-century Iran, traditional and religious order shaped gender roles and directed interactions between men and women. The plots of the Female Plays were created and developed at a time when, especially in urban areas, men's engagement in activities outside the house and in the public sphere kept their world apart from women, who mostly engaged in domestic life. So most of the plots presented the figure of a mother, a mother-in-law, a sister-in-law, a daughter, a wife, or a servant. The plays covered issues such as polygamy, arranged marriage, the lack of economic security for women, and conflicts between a married woman and her in-laws. The sex-segregated nature of the plays provided space for women to explore themes concerning women's sexuality. For instance, the most popular roles were those of a young woman being courted and a pregnant woman whose marital status was not clear. I examine two popular categories of themes in this section: the plays dealing with domestic issues and sexuality, and those that are more erotic in nature.

³⁶ Ibid.

A play about arranged marriage is a good example of the way Iranian women communicated about their experiences of domestic issues. In nineteenth-century Iran, when a majority of women were not in paid employment and suffered from a subordinate position in male-dominated society, marriage played a principal role in a woman's identity, and the economic function of marriage was an undeniable reality in a woman's life. However, most Iranian women were powerless in the decision-making process and negotiations about their marriage. Instead, within the traditional, religious, hierarchal, patriarchal social and cultural structure that characterized Iran at the time—which considered nine-year-old girls to be ready for marriage—families played the most important role in the choice of a husband. Even if a girl's family had her interests at heart regarding considerations such as the social and financial status of the prospective husband, the decision to accept or refuse a suitor was made by the family, not the girl.³⁷

The following example shows how the demand for a woman's right to choose her own husband was raised in Female Plays. *Abji Nesa (Sister Nesa)* is a play about a young, single woman who is in love with a poor, young man and who refuses to marry the “ugly,” “toothless,” and “bald” old man her family has chosen for her. Her lover is not in a good financial position, and so the young woman's mother tries to force her to marry a rich, old man. The poor, young man and the rich, old man are compared in a satirical way, and the play reflects the economic difficulties of urban families, women's economic insecurity, and wives' economic dependence on their husbands. The young woman argues that the young man is “kind” and “handsome,” but her mother and her

³⁷ Guity Nashat, “Marriage in the Qajar Period,” in *Women in Iran from 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, eds. Lois Beck and Guity Nashat (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 38.

aunt describe young men as “pickpockets,” “gamblers,” and “alcohol-drinkers,” lacking “manliness,” “honour,” and “wealth.” The play ends with the young woman’s refusal to marry the old man despite her mother’s desire. Her last words are:

How many times have I told you I won’t? Again, I say I won’t! I don’t want a rich haji! I don’t want chicken and fesenjun!³⁸ What is a new dress to me? What can I do with chicken and polo?³⁹ What is money and wealth to me? What can I do with a house and furniture? I will not marry a baboon! You can’t make an ass out of me with these things! My love is a young man, not old and decrepit (like the haji)! He is educated, eleven years worth! He isn’t pompous or full of airs! The haji with his baboon’s looks is a sacrifice to one strand of his hair!⁴⁰

One might say that the young and passionate girl naively ignores the importance of money in life, but it can be debated that although the participation of urban women in the work force was limited during the Qajar era, even in contrast to the participation of tribal and rural women, who played a more active role in agriculture and animal husbandry, urban women could be employed in a number of sex-segregated paid jobs, such as working in public women’s baths, hairdressing, midwifery, and working as domestic servants.⁴¹

In this play, the female character is not presented as a voiceless, minor girl who disappointedly accepts to marry an old man she does not like. Instead, conscious of her

³⁸ *Fesenjun* is a conversational form of the word *Fesenjan*, a Persian dish whose ingredients are costly.

³⁹ A rice dish.

⁴⁰ A. Anjavi-Shirazi, *Bazihaye Namayeshi* [dramatic games]. edited by A. Anjavi-Shirazi (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1974), 68. Translations are from Kaveh Safa-Isfahani, “Female-Centred World Views in Iranian Culture: Symbolic Representations of Sexuality in Dramatic Games,” *Signs* 6, no. 1, “Women: Sex and Sexuality, Part 2” (Autumn 1980), 45–46.

⁴¹ Ali Asghar-e Shamim, *Iran dar Doreh Saltanat-e Qajar* [Iran during the Qajar Dynasty] (Tehran: Zaryab, 1995), 370.

desires, she voices her opinion. She values love, education, and youth. She also challenges the sex-segregated culture that prevented girls and boys from engaging in premarital social interaction. She shows that she is aware of her desired husband's kindness, but she does not provide further information about her contact with him.

While this play challenges traditional norms regarding gender relations, the central character does not challenge one of the principal purposes of marriage in the Irano-Islamic tradition, which is regulating the sexual relationships of men and women, which we will see in the next section.

Khaleh Ro-ro (Aunt Ro-ro) is one of the best examples of the Female Plays dealing with female sexuality and marriage. This play concerns pre-marital sex and pregnancy. The play opens with a dialogue between the central character, Ro-ro, and an elderly woman, Khaleh (aunt):

Khaleh: "How many months pregnant you are?"

Ro-ro: "Keep this secret! One month married and two months pregnant."⁴²

In this play, the main character does not clarify whether she is pregnant because she was a temporary wife or because she engaged in premarital sexual relations, so the play remains open to interpretation about marriage and virginity. If it is the case that Ro-ro married for the first time one month ago but is two months pregnant, she challenges the taboo against unmarried girls losing their virginity. However, the fact that temporary marriage was a common form of marriage in the Qajar society makes temporary

⁴² Anthony Shay, "Bazi-ha-ye Namayeshi: Iranian Women's Theatrical Plays," *Dance Research Journal* 27/2 (Fall 1995): 17.

marriage another possible interpretation as a reason for her pregnancy. In either case she refers to women's issues.

At the time in Iran, two types of marriage were common: *nikah* (permanent) and *mut'a* (temporary). While the virginity of the girl was deemed to be an important factor in the institution of permanent marriage, temporary marriage provided a chance for men either to begin their sexual experience or to experience sexual relationships outside of their permanent marriage. A significant difference between temporary and permanent marriage is that in the former the woman does not need her family's permission and she can agree to become a man's wife for a minimum period of one hour upon the receipt of dowry. The couple also does not have to provide the written contract and two witnesses that are required in a permanent marriage. Sex was the main reason for a man to have a temporary wife, while a woman saw this kind of marriage primarily as an economic opportunity. If the woman became pregnant, the man had the choice to renew the marriage or not. Having witnesses was recommended in temporary marriage partially because Sharia laws legitimize the same rights for children born of temporary marriage as for the offspring of permanent marriage.⁴³

In this folk performance, as the play unfolds, Khaleh asks Ro-ro the same question repeatedly to see how many months pregnant she is, and Ro-ro keeps on increasing the number of months of marriage and pregnancy until nine, when finally she says, "my time has come, [but] its father hasn't come." In this case the father might be a man who left his temporary wife during or after her pregnancy, and financial needs might be Ro-

⁴³ Nashat, "Marriage in the Qajar Period," 38, 49–50.

ro's reason for marrying her current husband, who does not play a role during her pregnancy and delivery. On the other hand, as the play continues, Mama, a midwife, comes to help Ro-ro deliver her baby but threatens to not assist the pregnant woman, saying, "I will not deliver this child because it's a bastard," which suggests that perhaps the sexual relationship happened outside of the institution of marriage.

Finally the baby is delivered, with Mama, who represents society's opposition to premarital sex, beating and kicking the pregnant woman. A newborn baby is carried around the room, and each member of the audience pretends to put some money as a gift on the blanket that covers the baby and to lightly slap the baby.⁴⁴ Slapping the baby represents purifying him or her. Surprisingly, it shows that the audience is sympathetic to Ro-ro. The play ends with no explanation given as to how the young woman got pregnant.⁴⁵ This open, unresolved ending shifts the focus away from the pregnancy and makes the woman's mysterious sexual relationship the central interest in the play.

Women's sexuality is also presented in some plays that are more erotic in nature. I have chosen to examine *Amu Sabzi Forush (A Grocer)*, one of the most popular Female Plays, for two reasons: First, this play is a good example of erotica from the Qajar era. Second, it displays a unique feature of the Female Plays that have a male character. Since sex-segregated society prohibited male performers from acting in Female Plays, women played the male roles in the plays. Imitating men was a chance for women to break the barriers between men's and women's daily experiences. Ali Boloukbashi, a

⁴⁴ A. Anjavi-Shirazi, *Bazihaye Namayeshi*, 4–19.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

well-known folklorist who as a child accompanied his mother when she participated in Female Plays, wrote:

Wherever they [the women] took the role of a man, mimicked him, wore men's clothes, made themselves up like a man, and took on the aspects of walking and moving their arms like a man and chanting their voices to sound like a man, one would have said that a real man was playing there of a man.⁴⁶

This play presents one of the rare situations during which men and women interacted with each other in public spaces in Qajar Iran. At the time, among some well-to-do-families, running the household was left to the wife or the mother of the head of the house. These female heads sent male and female servants to purchase ingredients for food from street vendors.⁴⁷ *Amu Sabzi Forush* depicts a female customer negotiating buying vegetable with a local vegetable seller in a public arena.⁴⁸ This play is a clear presentation of women as active sexual subjects. Each time the female character picks up a kind of vegetable to check whether or not it is fresh and clean, she says an erotic sentence and gestures at and moves a part of her body. The opening scene reads:

Vegetable seller
(you) Short selling pimp!
Will you accept my “gher” [a suggestive motion of the hips, buttocks, and belly]?
Your vegetable is thin!
You with the dark hole!
I want mints!
I want you alone!

⁴⁶ Bolukbashi, “Namayesh-ha-ye Shadi-avar-e Zananeh-ye Tehran,” 26; Translation is from Shay, “Iranian Women’s Theatrical Plays,” 18.

⁴⁷ Guity Nashat, introduction to *Women in Iran from 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, eds. Lois Beck and Guity Nashat, 17.

⁴⁸ The male version of this play, in which the female character was played by a man, was also performed in Iran.

Do you have spinach?
Do you have a kiss?⁴⁹

In another scene, the woman bargains over buying a vegetable and simultaneously having sex with the seller. At the end of the play the woman aggressively asks the man: “Are your eyes blind?” In this plot, the woman not only expresses her sexual desire and blames the man who ignores her desire, but also opposes the invisibility that cultural norms imposed on women. In fact, the sex-segregated private environment in which the plays were performed provided a secure place for women to express their erotic feelings and also find their voices to express their thoughts and opinions.

Farzaneh Milani, in her pioneering study on the relationship between women’s freedom of movement, sex-segregation, unveiling, and women’s literature, suggests that in the Qajar era, when women were veiled and consequently invisible and the society was highly sex-segregated and patriarchal, women were discouraged from expressing their feelings and thoughts. She argues that unveiling women during the Pahlavi era as part of the state’s modernization project helped to bring Iranian women to the public sphere and to give them a voice to express themselves both in speech and in writing.⁵⁰ Although I agree that the modernization of women in the twentieth century had a very strong impact on women’s presence in the public sphere in Iranian society, I challenge the idea that women were voiceless in pre-modern Iran. Female Plays show how urban women softly practised their communication skills, and this enabled them to express

⁴⁹ Safa-Isfahani, “Female-Centred World Views,” 41.

⁵⁰ Milani, *Veils and Worlds*, 31.

their negative feelings about traditional gender norms and marriage, as well as their sexual feelings, in female-only gatherings.

While Female Plays gave women the opportunity to express themselves orally, the Constitutional Revolution opened up new opportunities for women to participate in social and political matters and to express themselves publicly through journalism, which paved the way for women's literature.

The emergence of women's writing in the Qajar era

The development of Iranian women's education and women's professional engagement in writing and publication goes back to the early twentieth century when the women's movement began as part of the Constitutional Revolution, which was a turning point in modern Iranian history. The constitutionalists' main objectives were to replace the arbitrary power of the Qajar kings with parliamentary laws, to decrease the imperial power, and to achieve social justice and economic independence. Political changes, including the foundation of the parliament in 1906, were followed by social and cultural transformations in Iran. Women in particular played an active role in the boycott of foreign textiles and the establishment of a national bank during the constitutional period. Soon some progressive male liberals and social democrats publicly raised the debates about women's specific causes. While the dissolution of the second constitutional

parliament and the Anglo-Russian occupation ended the revolution, the women's movement continued after the revolution, and women's writing developed.⁵¹

The general discontentment in society and debates during the Constitutional Revolution provided room to women to express themselves publicly. Constitutional laws neglected women's right to vote and to organize political societies, so female nationalists—any wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters of progressive constitutionalists—started to organize secret and semi-secret societies that met in private properties to discuss socio-political affairs. One of the most progressive societies emerged in 1907 under the name Anjoman-e Azadi-e Zanan⁵² (Association for the freedom of women). Activist women organizers of the association planned several mixed-gender gatherings and aimed at providing a space for both men and women to participate in cross-gender political debate and discussion. In particular, they emphasized developing women's socio-political awareness and empowering them to play an active role in national debates.⁵³

Women also organized themselves in women-only organizations that met in their homes. During the Constitutional Revolution, activist women began specifically to address women's concerns. In this period, advocates of women's rights considered access to modern education for girls, adult literacy, improvements in women's health and hygiene, and the establishment of orphanages as their central concerns. In the absence of institutional support, women began to establish and finance schools, health

⁵¹ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 81–110.

⁵² Also known as Anjoman-e Horriyat-e Zanan.

⁵³ Mansoureh Etehadieh, "The Origins and Development of the Women's Movement in Iran, 1906–41," in *Women in Iran: From 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, eds. Lois Beck and Guity Nashat, 87–88; Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 68–69.

clinics, and orphanages. The first female writers, whose works were published either at the time or years later, were active members of women's societies as well.⁵⁴

Before explaining the emergence of women's writing, it is useful to look at the status of women's education in Qajar era. The modern educational system was established in Iran early in the twentieth century. Before that, children received early and intermediate tutorials under the instruction of clerical teachers in traditional educational settings—at teachers' homes or in mosques. The focus of classes was to teach students to read religious texts and moral lessons from classical literature. Girls and boys could study together from the age of five or six up to the age of nine or ten. Beyond the age of ten, only a few progressive families allowed their girls to follow any intermediate education before marriage.⁵⁵

Until the constitutional period, only a few modern schools for girls existed, and these were established and run by American missionaries and subsequently by members of Iranian Christian communities. The first such school was established in 1838 in Urmia. By 1900 fewer than ten such schools existed across the country. These schools were forced by the government to admit only students from a Christian background. However, by the 1890s, a few Muslim families had sent their girls to receive modern education in these schools. Among the non-Christian community, especially Babi⁵⁶ thinkers and Zoroastrians advocated women's literacy and education. There were also

⁵⁴ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 68–69.

⁵⁵ Jafar Shahri, *Tarikh-e Ejtemai Tehran dar Ghran-e Sizdahom*, vol. 4 (Tehran: Rasa, 1990), 447–56.

⁵⁶ A religious movement that flourished in Iran in the late Qajar era.

some progressive families who privately provided further education for their daughters.⁵⁷

During the Constitutional Revolution, male and female advocates for women's rights quickly realized that education was an essential force for progress for women. Parvaresh (training), the first school devoted to the education of Muslim girls, was opened in Tehran in 1903 at the home of Mirza Hasan Roshdieh, who has been recognized as the father of modern education in Iran. His sister-in-law, Tuba Roshdieh, was the school's principal. In the following years many private schools were founded by members of women's societies in Tehran and all around the country. The government did not provide any funds for education for girls, and some women dedicated parts of their homes for educational settings for a limited number of pupils. The number of private schools that focused on modern education increased in the following years. Prior to 1918 there was no public school for girls, but, according to one report, by 1911 forty-seven schools for girls were active in Tehran alone, in which 2,187 girls were enrolled, compared to seventy-eight schools for boys, with an enrolment of 8,344 pupils.⁵⁸

Progress in women's education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries shaped a small group of female writers and readers. Women activists also favoured development in the publication of newspapers in Iran to further challenge the barriers between the worlds of men and women.

⁵⁷ Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Education xxv. Women's Education in the Qajar Period," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/education-xxv-womens-education-in-the-qajar-period>; Banani, *Modernization of Iran*, 90.

⁵⁸ Najmabadi, "Women's Education in the Qajar Period"; Banani, *Modernization of Iran*, 90.

The history of publishing in Iran goes back to 1850, when the first Persian newspaper emerged under the official supervision of the government and mostly covered news related to the court. A half century later, the appearance of privately owned newspapers and specialized journals opened a new space for women's engagement in publishing. Unlike the first journals, which covered only court news or political affairs, newly established independent periodicals began to cover issues that were needed to bring about social and political progress.⁵⁹

During the Constitutional Revolution, the number of newspapers increased rapidly. Progressive newspapers expressed solidarity with women's causes and provided the opportunity for individuals to express their opinions, demands, and complaints through letters to the editor. Some literate women from Tehran and other big cities took action to engage in social and political debates by sending letters to newspapers. For example, in 1906, during a period of social debate regarding the establishment of a national bank, a letter appeared in Tehran newspapers from a woman who addressed a parliament deputy and offered to donate the jewellery she had saved for hard times to contribute to national reforms.⁶⁰

Women activists also used newspapers as an instrument to expand their ideas. For example, from the very beginning, schooling for girls was opposed by many Muslim religious authorities, who considered women's education disgraceful. The other obstacle to the development of schooling for girls came from those who believed that women

⁵⁹ Amin, *Making of the Modern Iranian Women*, 49.

⁶⁰ Afary, *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 179.

were incapable of being educated. Activist women reacted by publishing letters of protest in major progressive newspapers. They referred to examples of women's equal treatment in Islamic texts and tradition. Furthermore, they cited statistics related to women's education in Japan, China, and Europe as models of development for Iran. They also encouraged literate women to teach illiterate ones in their circle of family and friends how to read and write.⁶¹

Newspapers also contributed to developing a social network among female activists. For example, in 1910, Bibi Khanum Starabadi (1858–1920), one of the pioneering figures in the women's movement and the founder of one of the first elementary schools for girls in Tehran in 1907, was a famous journalist who held a regular political gathering of women in her house on weekends and used newspapers to further women's causes. Bibi Khanum reached a public audience by publishing an invitation in *Iran-e Now*, an organ of the Democratic Party. She announced that “any one of the sisters who wishes to lecture will be allowed and permitted to do so. I will be speaking on the advantages of constitutional reforms and the disadvantages of autocracy.”⁶²

Gradually, women joined the field of journalism by printing articles in influential newspapers to challenge the patriarchal culture of the time and to criticize the discrimination against women in society. In 1910, for the first time a woman published a newspaper, entitled *Danesh* (Knowledge), to discuss women's concerns. The newspaper

⁶¹ Ibid., 178–90.

⁶² Ibid., 195.

was published by a physician's wife, and its objective was to focus on domestic life and to teach women household management. Another example was *Shekoufeh* (The blossom). This paper was published continuously from 1912 to 1916 to promote schooling for girls and women's education. The third important newspaper of this kind, *Zaban-e Zanan* (Women's voice), was a progressive newspaper more specifically concerned with women's rights, and it contributed to discussions on socio-political issues.⁶³

The first phase of women's writing was shaped inside the nationalist movement, and the first generation of women writers started their professional careers by publishing newspaper articles. However, evidence reveals that literate women also began to write privately about their personal lives, feelings, and ideas. Among the most important writings by women in the late nineteenth century are the memoirs of Taj al-Saltaneh (1883–1896), a member of the royal family who later joined the Association for the freedom of women. Her memoirs were first published in the 1980s, almost a century after her death. In her memoirs, Taj al-Saltaneh discussed her forced, loveless, arranged marriage at the age of thirteen.⁶⁴

It has to be noted, however, that women's memoirs did not become a popular form of writing in Iran until the 1980s. In the next chapters I will show that in the absence of women's memoirs published during the Shah's era, the first collections of fiction and

⁶³ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 92–94; Ettehadiieh, "Origins and Development of the Women's Movement," 93–94; Sanasarian, "Characteristics of Women's Movement in Iran," 93.

⁶⁴ Badr al-Moluk Bamdad, *Zan-e Irani: az Enqelab-e Mashrutiyat ta Enqelab-e Sefid* [Iranian women from the Constitutional Revolution to the White Revolution] (Tehran: Ebne Sina, 1968), 34.

poetry written by women showed that female authors were influenced by the milieu in which they lived and worked and in turn reflected on the issues women faced in their everyday lives.

Women's writing under Reza Shah saw little development from the earlier constitutional period. Under Reza Shah, women's rights activists continued to write articles and publish journals. However, strict censorship limited freedom of speech, and this period saw a decrease in women's publications. Nevertheless, some women continued to write and even demanded, through poetry, gender equality and reform in women's status. One example is a poem written by Zandokht-e Shirazi (1909–1953), a female journalist who, in 1931, founded a journal dedicated to women's concerns, called *Dokhtaran-e Iran (Daughters of Iran)*:

Why isn't commerce a woman's job?
Why isn't industrial work my profession?
Why shouldn't a woman make women's shoes?
Why isn't a woman a surgeon and a physician?
My sister, until when do you intend to remain futile?
Have you been created only for capitulation?
Are you only skilled in the love of men?⁶⁵

While on the one hand Reza Shah's strict censorship decreased the number of publications and limited writers' freedom of speech, on the other hand, the establishment of the first modern university in Tehran in 1934 and the founding of a PhD program in Persian literature created a new generation of educated Iranian women, some of whom became involved in professional writing, including Simin Daneshvar, the first Iranian

⁶⁵ Translation is from Sanasarian, *Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 1.

female fiction writer.⁶⁶ The first phase of women's participation in publishing could be divided into two categories: the writings of political activists in the nationalist political movement, and the writings of women's rights activists demanding reforms in women's status and improvements in women's basic rights. Indeed, the first generation of female writers paid attention exclusively to political and social matters and barely revealed their feelings about their private lives.

Conclusion

During the Qajar era, Female Plays as a source of social interaction raised the awareness of ordinary Iranian women. In an age where women were passive observers in the male-dominated public spaces, these plays provided an alternative form of expression for women to present and share their experiences of living in a sex-segregated society. As Anthony Shay points out, "the importance of the *bazi-ha* [Female Plays] is that these theatrical entertainments embody the only collective voice of many Iranian women."⁶⁷ However, he argues that the Female Play "does not reflect Iranian reality. Rather, it provides an escape from the reality, in the same manner as the carnival does, by emphasizing the world upside down through role reversal."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Roxane Haag-Higuchi, "Modernization in Literary History: Malek al-Sho'ara Bahar's Stylistic," *Culture and Cultural Politics Under Reza Shah*, eds. Bianca Devos and Christoph Wener (London: Routledge, 2014), 19.

⁶⁷ Shay, "Bazi-ha-ye Namayeshi: Iranian Women's Theatrical Plays," 16.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

In contrast, I believe Female Plays as a form of self-expression can be seen as a reflection of Iranian women's everyday life, since the typical issues that interested traditional Iranian women in Female Plays were some of the problems discussed by women's rights activists during the women's rights movements in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the absence of an educational system, associations, and media, the plays provided a platform for both urban and rural women from all around the country to share world views, protest their suppression, and criticize domestic issues. Plays also provided the space for women, both performers and audience, to practice the acts of negotiation and expression in front of each others. Furthermore, the element of eroticism in some plays helped women to reconnect themselves with their sexuality, which was suppressed by the outside world. As Kaveh Safa-Isfahani discusses in his study on the symbolic representation of sexuality in dramatic games, Female Plays provided an opportunity for women to exercise "some degree of autonomy, not only in defining and interpreting but in redefining and reinterpreting how the dominant structure defines and interprets them."⁶⁹

During the Constitutional Revolution, the first generation of women's rights activists brought the discussion about women's issues from the private, sex-segregated gatherings into the political and social discourse. In fact, at the time of social and political transformation, the history of Iranian women's professional writing began with the publication of female journalists and women's rights activists. Women's literature in this period was subject to women's empowerment. I believe that Iranian women's

⁶⁹ Safa-Isfahani, "Female-Centred World Views," 34.

literature remained political in the following decades, and in the next chapters I will show that women's storytelling and poetry during the process of modernization of women that took place during the Shah's reign reflected not only the public themes of social and political transformation but also women's personal experiences and feelings.

CHAPTER 2

EDUCATION, MARRIAGE, AND SEXUALITY: FROM 1941 TO 1953

Introduction

During Reza Shah's reign, from 1925 to 1941, the politics of desegregation of the sexes and modernization of women dramatically increased women's access to the public arena and strongly impacted the cultural transformation in Iran. Reza Shah's policies, which were further developed by his successor, the Shah, targeted five primary domains: marriage, women's education, women's employment, women's legal status, and women's participation in society. As a result, a new generation of Iranian women with an increased physical access to the public sphere started to challenge the cultural boundaries, and literature played an influential role by uncovering women's thoughts and feelings about their private life as well as about the social changes concerning them. Unlike women's rights activists, female authors did not directly or in plain language demand social and political changes, but they reflected the reality of everyday life and of women's personal and social status during this period of social, political, and cultural transition.

In this chapter, I examine how the state's gender program prior to the 1953 coup d'état⁷⁰ influenced women's literature. I will look at how women are depicted in the

⁷⁰ During the Cold War, the nationalization of Iran's British-owned oil industry by the popular prime minister Mohammad Mossadegh initiated a two-year period of conflict between Iran, Britain, and the United States because of financial and political matters, leading to the overthrow of Mossadegh in the CIA- and British-assisted coup in 1953. The coup changed the political structure of Iran and has also been considered a major turning point in modern Persian literature.

works of the first female authors and how women's literature produced in this period dealt with gender issues. I will show how the major areas of change that dealt with women's social participation and the desegregation of the sexes are reflected in the first books produced by female writers and how the literature depicts the sexual politics of this period.

In the 1940s and early 1950s, Iran experienced dramatic changes, including in 1941 the historic transfer of power from Reza Shah Pahlavi to his twenty-one-year-old son, Mohammad Reza Shah; the emergence of the *Tudeh* (Communist) party; and the struggle of a popular, democratic prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, who targeted the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (BP) in an attempt to nationalize Iran's oil industry, leading to a severe political and an economic crisis in Iran.⁷¹ Domestic changes and international conflicts during the Second World War and their impact on Iran's politics led to a rise in interest in domestic and world news. Consequently, during the Second World War, the number of newspapers in Iran increased.⁷² Despite earlier advances in publishing technology that supported the publication of books, newspapers still dominated the publishing scene. Many citizens could not afford to buy books or preferred to spend their money on newspapers to stay informed about the country's political situation. The popularity of newspapers is likely one reason why many authors preferred to publish their works in the press and why short stories, published in these

⁷¹ Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 105–31.

⁷² Hasan Mirabedini, *Sad Sal Dastan Nevisi dar Iran* [One hundred years of fiction-writing in Iran (Tehran: Cheshmeh, 2001), vols. 1 and 2, 130.

newspapers, became a popular literary form among writers and readers in the 1940s. While book publishing covered mostly socio-political subjects and was male dominated, newspapers encouraged more diversity in both readership and authorship.⁷³ It was during this period that the first collection of short stories written by the first female fiction writer was produced.

During the first period of the Shah's reign (1941–1953), only two female authors published their literary works in the form of books, Simin Daneshvar and Forough Farrokhzad.

Daneshvar (1921–2012) was born into a middle-class family to educated parents. She was raised during Reza Shah's reign in an environment where English was spoken and modern education for girls was welcome. Her mother was a painter, and her father a well-known physician. After her father's death in 1941, Daneshvar started to work in radio to be financially independent. In the early 1940s, she pursued a higher education in Literature at the University of Tehran and entered the male-dominated literary society, publishing her short stories in Tehran newspapers. In 1948 she was one of the first female students to receive a PhD in Literature from the University of Tehran, and that same year she published her first short story collection, *Atash-e Khamoush (Quenched Fire)*, becoming the first female fiction writer of modern Persian literature.⁷⁴

Four years later, in 1952, Forough Farrokhzad (1935–1967) published her first collection, titled *Asir (Captive)*. *Captive* contains forty-four poems and was the first

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Farzaneh Milani, "Niloofar-e Abi dar Mordad ham Mirouyad," *Nimeh Digar* 1, no. 8 (Fall 1988), 8–9.

collection of poems written by a female poet under the Shah. Farrokhzad was not the first female poet in the history of Persian literature, but her work—which was largely autobiographical—differed from that of her predecessors. When *Captive* was published, Farrokhzad was a teenager. She was eighteen years old, married to her mother's cousin, who was fifteen years her senior, and was the mother of a newborn son. Farrokhzad grew up in Tehran in a middle-class family. After her marriage to Parviz Shapour, a well-known satirist and cartoonist with whom she had fallen in love, she moved to Ahvaz in the south of Iran. Her short and unhappy marriage was not an arranged marriage; years later, the young poet recalled it as a “nonsense marriage” at the age of sixteen.

Farrokhzad never attended college and did not see herself as a professional poet in those years. Years after publishing *Captive*, she recalled, “I was a housewife who started creating poems when she felt tired of housework.”⁷⁵ In the following years, she became famous for expressing her sexuality in her poems.

Quenched Fire and *Captive* are the first collections produced by two of the most acclaimed authors of modern Persian literature. However, these books have been largely overlooked by scholars. Daneshvar, who became the first female chair of the Iranian Writers Union at the age of forty-seven, and Farrokhzad, who is considered by many scholars to be a “true voice of Iranian women,” proved that Iranian women could not be “quenched” or held “captive” when they spoke up about what it was like to be a woman in Iran in the 1940s.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Mahasti Shahrokhi, “The Biography of Forough Farrokhzad,” *Kasi ke Mesl-e Hich kas Nist*, ed. Pouran Farrokhzad (Tehran: Karoon, 2004), 15.

⁷⁶ For example, see Talattof, “Iranian Women’s Literature, 537.

Unveiled, educated women and marriage

In the early twentieth century, the Iranian women's rights movement saw the veil—the black chador—as an obstacle to improving women's personal and social status.⁷⁷ In 1936, inspired by the gender policies of President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in neighbouring Turkey, Reza Shah took advantage of controversial debates among Iranian women's rights advocates concerning the hijab and decreed compulsory unveiling of women in public places. Based on the new regulations, the police became responsible for protecting unveiled women in public spaces.⁷⁸ Up to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the first day of enforced unveiling was mentioned in the Persian calendar as a feminist holiday to celebrate the day of “women's liberation” in Iran, as assumed and promoted by state feminism during the Pahlavi period.⁷⁹

Reza Shah's unveiling policy has been acclaimed by many, particularly by supporters of state feminism and Pahlavi's gender policies. In recent scholarship, however, enforced unveiling has been strongly criticized. In *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Revealing*, Hamideh Sedghi argues that “women's emancipation meant state exploitation of gender as a measure to combat and contain religious forces

⁷⁷ Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*, 80.

⁷⁸ Annie Stocking Boyce, “Moslem Women in the Capital of Persia,” *The Muslim World* 20, no. 3 (1930): 265.

⁷⁹ Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran,” *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. Denis Kandioti (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 49.

and their bazaar⁸⁰ supporters.”⁸¹ The compulsory Unveiling Act of 1936 has been also considered as a drive towards the creation of “uniformities” through the imposition of a dress code and a cosmetic reform in women’s status in the society rather than a substantive progress.⁸²

In contrast, women’s education, the other area of major changes during Reza Shah’s reign, has been examined as an important step for improvement in women’s condition. Progress in education was fairly impressive. The number of female students rose from 17,000 in elementary schools and 700 in secondary schools in 1926–27 to 47,000 and 2,000 respectively in 1936–37. The mid-1930s also saw the opening of teacher training colleges and the establishment of the University of Tehran, the first university in Iran. In 1936–37, over seventy women students enrolled at the university. However, women still faced obstacles in pursuing their education. Girls’ access to educational opportunities was limited compared to that of boys, in part because in the traditional patriarchal society men were seen as the breadwinners and, therefore more eligible to be literate and educated.⁸³

Another change during Reza Shah’s reign appeared regarding family laws and regulations. Between 1931 and 1937, the Parliament of Iran passed new laws relating to family affairs, which were applied for the next thirty years. Traditionally, Sharia law and

⁸⁰ Bazaar-masque interdependence plays a major role in the socio-economic and political history of modern Iran.

⁸¹ Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*, 67.

⁸² Najmabadi, “Hazards of Modernity and Morality,” 49, 53.

⁸³ Sanasarian, *Women’s Rights Movement in Iran*, 61–62.

the clergy defined and controlled marriage and divorce, but based on the new Civil Code and the regulations made by the Ministry of Justice, every marriage and divorce, whether permanent or temporary, had to be registered in the courts.⁸⁴ Furthermore, the legal age of marriage for women increased from nine to thirteen. However, new legislation aimed at reducing the clergy's power and modernizing Iranian society, rather than at improving women's status within the institution of marriage.⁸⁵

Traditionally, families played a large part in the choice of a husband for a girl. Since the Constitutional Revolution, progressive thinkers had criticized arranged marriage.⁸⁶ Another step towards modernizing marriage laws occurred in this regard. According to the Civil Code of 1931, the agreement of both parties was also required for a marriage.⁸⁷ In the 1930s, the state used the press as a propaganda tool to support companionate marriage as a "modernizing" type of marriage.⁸⁸ Even years later, one of the supporters of state feminism under Reza Shah warned young Iranians that they "ought to know how a young suitor had to choose his lifelong partner and companion without seeing or knowing her."⁸⁹

⁸⁴ The Archive of Majles Shoraye Melli [National Consultative Assembly archive], *Ghanoun-e Raje be Ezdevaj 1310 [Marriage Act of Iran 1931]* <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/92288?keyword=%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC>; Ali Reza Naqavi, "The Family Laws of Iran," *Islamic Studies* 7 (June 1968): 158.

⁸⁵ Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*, 73–74.

⁸⁶ Amin, *Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*, 115.

⁸⁷ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 109.

⁸⁸ Motlagh, *Burying the Beloved*, 24.

⁸⁹ Badr al-Moluk Bamdad, *From Darkness into Light*, trans. F. R. C. Bagley (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1977), 11.

In this section, I argue that the first example of women's fiction writing, *Atash-e Khamoush* (*Quenched Fire*, 1948), can be analyzed in relation to state feminism and the process of the modernization of women in the first half of the twentieth century. In this regard I will look at three specific themes in this book: unveiling, women's education, and marriage.

Quenched Fire comprises sixteen stories,⁹⁰ eight of which were inspired by stories by O. Henry.⁹¹ When the book first appeared, Iran had been under Mohammad Reza Shah's reign for seven years, but most of the stories, written years earlier and published previously in newspapers, dealt with the changes that appeared during Reza Shah's reign. Criticism of this collection of short stories has primarily focused on its aesthetic value in comparison with Daneshvar's masterpiece, *Savushun* (1969). For example, Hasan Mirabedini, a historian of modern Persian literature, states that Daneshvar, in her first work, is not capable of developing the personality of her fictional characters, focusing instead on eternal concepts such as love, death, and conscience. However, he admits that *Quenched Fire* initiates the engagement of Iranian fiction with "feminine feelings."⁹²

Quenched Fire starts with a fifty-page story, *Ashk-ha* (*Tears*), written in 1942, which is concerned with Reza Shah's gender politics. This story addresses the impact of the 1936 Mandatory Unveiling Act and the development of women's education and

⁹⁰ None of them have been published in English, and all translations are mine.

⁹¹ William Sydney Porter (1862–1910), known by his pen name O. Henry, was an American writer. In the history of world literature, he is famous for his short stories.

⁹² Mirabedini, *Sad Sal Dastan Nevisi dar Iran*, 197.

employment. *Tears* tells the love story of a young female university student and her male professor. There are many obvious similarities between the anonymous main character and the writer. Both of them are young, unmarried, and educated. At the same time that she was writing and publishing short stories in newspapers in the 1940s, Simin Daneshvar was studying Literature at the University of Tehran, just as was the main character of *Tears*. Based on descriptions in the story, the main character is from Shiraz, and there is no father figure in her life. Both the writer and the character are familiar with the ideas of Western philosophers and know foreign languages. Neither one veiled. Another similarity appears between the character of the mother in *Tears*, an open-minded woman, and Qamar-e Daneshvar, the writer's own mother, to whom the book is dedicated. All these pieces of evidence might be recognized as the writer's attempt to express, through her creation of this character, her ideas and feelings about herself as a modern woman in the 1940s.

This story, like all women's literature in the Pahlavi period, follows the heterosexual norms. Classical Persian literature is full of symbolic representations of same-sex relations in Iran, but they are exclusively between men. During the Constitutional Revolution, homoeroticism and same-sex practices in Iran between an adolescent boy and an adult man—partially the result of limited interaction between the sexes and women's invisibility in the public sphere—were criticized by pro-Western Iranian intellectuals, who considered homosexuals as a cause of Iran's backwardness.

So, the heteronormalization of arts and culture became a condition of “achieving modernity.”⁹³

In *Tears*, an Iranian professor with a Western appearance who has recently returned from Europe repeatedly compares the cultural status of Iran with that of Europe. As was frequent in the dominant discourse of modernization, traditional Iranian women are depicted in contrast to European women. No information is given about the professor’s wife other than that she is European. The professor does not have a good relationship with his European wife. In the second half of the story, he decides to divorce his pregnant wife to marry one of his students. He explains his decision to marry his European wife as follows:

When I left Iran, women were veiled, they were untrained and illiterate, disabled from accompanying their husbands and taking part in a husband’s life. When I was living in Europe, the only image I had in my mind from Iranian women was the large vats covered in the black cloths.⁹⁴ Even looking at my female cousin’s face was prohibited to me... I believed even an animal does not absorb by another animal without seeing her. As a human being, for this reason, I preferred to choose a spouse, who can accompany me in my life journey, and not represents herself as a boggle in a black cage. I would liked to marry an independent woman, who has an idea, taste, creativity, and intelligence.⁹⁵

These words reflect the policies of the official state feminism of Reza Shah’s reign: to unveil and to educate women, and to introduce the European woman as a model. The

⁹³ Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 3.

⁹⁴ Refers to *Chador* (veil).

⁹⁵ Simin Daneshvar, *Atash-e Khamush* [Quenched fire] (Tehran: Ali Akbar Elmi, 1948), 34. Translations are my own.

veil is referred to as a “black cage,” and a veiled woman is humiliated by calling her a “vat” and a “boggle.” The monologue also touches on modern marriage versus traditional marriage and binds the latter with unveiling and women’s education.

Following the abdication of Reza Shah in 1941, conservative clerics and their supporters called for the return of the veil. In 1944, a *fatwa* was issued to lift the government restrictions on veiling. The state did not oppose this, and a large number of women returned to practising veiling in public areas.⁹⁶ Simin Daneshvar, among some members of the new middle class, chose to remain unveiled. In this story there is no veiled character. Without specifically mentioning Reza Shah’s name, there is a clear reference to his policy of enforced unveiling. The professor criticized Iranian culture and expressed his appreciation of the person (Reza Shah) who “was motivated to fill in the gap between Iranian men and women, and did not allow men to be educated and literate while veiled women live in a darkness of ignorance and illiteracy.”⁹⁷ The writer reflects Reza Shah’s policy, whose enforced unveiling and orders to make progress in schooling for girls were understood as a means of gender desegregation and the making of the modern Iranian woman. Like Reza Shah and the women’s rights advocates, the writer believed the veil was women’s main obstacle to progress. Here and there in the story, women appear in sophisticated clothes and wearing moderate makeup. However, there

⁹⁶ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 187–88.

⁹⁷ Daneshvar, *Atash-e Khamush*, 34.

are many statements to emphasize the importance of intelligence and spiritual beauty as well as physical beauty.⁹⁸

All domestic conversations in *Tears* happen between the main female character and her mother, and this to some extent shows how different generations adapted to changes in Iranian society. According to the female character, the mother is progressive enough to be entrusted with secrets. When the mother learns about her daughter's passion for her professor, she does not dissuade her, as traditional and conservative mothers would, and the daughter confesses that "it was the first time that I felt blessed to have such a graduated and wise mother, who can be a trusted refuge for her young and inexperienced daughter."⁹⁹ The writer links education and progress in parent-child relations, and she claims that education has a positive impact on mother-daughter relationships. However, in comparison to young female characters in the story, the mother is presented as a semi-modern woman who, on the one hand, accompanies her daughter in social spheres, such as parties and cinemas, and, on the other hand, prays and uses Islamic terms in her everyday life. For instance, when she learns about her daughter's sadness and unusual attitude, instead of talking to her daughter, she turns to a traditional practice and swears to the names of honorable Islamic martyrs, the Quran, and God to convince her daughter to speak up.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ibid., 13, 34.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 29.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 28.

Moreover, based on the advice she gives her daughter, we understand that unlike the younger woman, the mother has not actually changed her traditional beliefs regarding gender relations. For instance, at a non sex-segregated party, her reaction to her daughter's desire to dance with a stranger is that "you are not a prostitute to dance with anybody who asks you to dance." However, she does not ignore or belittle her daughter's passion for the professor. She still believes that men are active figures in (heterosexual) romantic relationships and that "a woman should not lower down her price...It should be difficult to obtain her and uncertain to be able to enjoy her sexuality."¹⁰¹ These words indicate the mother's traditional belief that a woman should behave in a way that considers men's desires and needs so that she can be successful by being chosen by a man as an appropriate wife. However, arranged marriage is not the only acceptable option in the mother's mind as it was for her predecessors. She prevents her daughter from dancing with strangers and cautions her that "you are so naive if you think men would like and select jaunty girls."¹⁰²

The climax of the story happens when the professor confesses he loves the student as well and suggests that he will divorce his pregnant wife to marry her. The story continues with the female character's monologues as she strives to settle the conflict between her heart and her mind and reach a decision. At the beginning of the story, the female character criticizes the educational policy, which, in her eyes, is not essential to improving women's private lives. She questions the benefits of learning science for

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 36.

¹⁰² Ibid.

everyday life and its role in knowing a good choice from a bad one.¹⁰³ As the story continues, however, the answer appears in her refusal to accept the marriage proposal of a married man even though she loves him. Feeling confident about her decision, the female character argues, “My mind is trained, and my heart is enlightened.”¹⁰⁴ Daneshvar does not directly criticize family laws and the absolute right of men to divorce their wives and to marry an additional wife, but she does indicate a clear disapproval expressed by an independent modern woman regarding entering into a relationship with a married man.¹⁰⁵

The independence of educated women must also be looked at in the context of student-teacher relationships. In the socio-cultural history of Iran, the relationship between students and teachers was established in a hierarchal order in favour of the teacher. Teachers were respected and had absolute control over students; students did not have the right to challenge a teacher, and female students’ independence was unusual. For instance, in the first pages of the story, the professor addresses his student (the female character) as “missy,” which is patronizing, and the student admits to feeling “lesser” toward him. There are many sexist terms in the Persian language, such as “masculine determination” and “masculine promise,” which are also used by the female character to praise the professor in the early pages.¹⁰⁶ However, we must read the text in the linguistic-historical context of 1940s Iran, when the concept of sexism had not yet

¹⁰³ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 50.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 48–50.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 6, 33.

been created. In the end, traveling and reading are the female character's solutions for dealing with emotional pain.¹⁰⁷ This is also a sign of independence and freedom of movement for a new generation of women who prefer to take active roles in their private lives and who desire to engage in social life.

Daneshvar again addresses gender relations and marriage in the ten-page short story *Klid-e Sol (G-Clef)*, written in 1943 and published in 1948 in *Quenched Fire*, in which a young female challenges traditional marriage. This story is about the love of a young woman named Feri and her private music tutor. She is learning how to play a Western musical instrument, the violin. Feri is about to marry an elderly man, but when she confesses her feelings to her tutor, she realizes that he also loves her. The young woman decides to cancel the arranged marriage and marry the person she loves. The creation of a new generation and the transformation of traditional gender norms into modern ones is narrated through Feri's conversation with her family. Her mother, representing traditional women, strongly opposes Feri's decision to refuse to marry a wealthy old man and to choose a young but poor artist as her husband. Mother argues, "It is worth marrying a rich man to live in comfort. You should not care about his appearance because it's the barber's job to make him look younger."¹⁰⁸

In her response, Feri calls that argument "cheap and silly." She admits, "I know that money is essential to living, but I help him [the artist]. I like him, not his money. I

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 50.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 79.

will save money. I will work and earn money. We will manage our life together.”¹⁰⁹ This demonstrates a transformation in women’s beliefs regarding gender roles in a family, an attitude also influenced by the new opportunities for women’s employment. There are no reliable data on women’s employment and economic status during the Reza Shah era, but the few accounts we have show that women increasingly entered the service sector as teachers, nurses, charity workers, midwives, and seamstresses during the 1930s.¹¹⁰ Addressing her mother, the young Feri asserts, “We do not live in an age in which men and only men are breadwinners. Now, men share financial and mental responsibilities with women.”¹¹¹ The mother, failing to convince her daughter, admits, “The new generation of women is unusually different from their mothers.”¹¹² This is clearly a message about generational clashes and cultural transformation. It also illustrates what was considered as modern in relation to gender relations and marriage.

Cultural norms, married women, and women’s sexuality

Despite the modification of some of the Islamic laws in the new Civil Code of 1931, the marriage laws were legitimized based on Sharia laws, and most discriminating laws concerning marriage, divorce, and household relations continued to be applied. The

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 82.

¹¹⁰ Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*, 69.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 82.

¹¹² Ibid., 83.

Civil Code proclaimed the husband as the head of the household, considered divorce as the right of the husband, and granted the custody of a child to the father; the mother was allowed to look after her children only on behalf of the father. It also forbade a woman to travel or take employment without her husband's consent and specified that a woman's place of residence is where her husband resides.¹¹³

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, customary laws also strictly controlled women's sexual relations. As Willem Floor explains in his book *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, in the nineteenth century, the sex-segregated society did not provide any opportunity for premarital sex because of the importance of a single women's virginity for the honour of the family and the marriage.¹¹⁴ Despite the desegregation of the sexes in the period under study, premarital and extramarital sex remained religiously and socially unacceptable and would cause dishonour. Honour is a social concept in traditional discourse that allows women's sexual relations exclusively with their husbands. In this value system, male members of the family, including a father, a brother, and a husband, control a woman's body, a woman's sexual relations, and her pregnancies. Therefore, premarital and extramarital sex would ruin the pride of the family, as well as the woman.

In fact, sexual honour as a social concept was legitimized in the new Penal Code of 1926:

Any time a man sees his wife in bed or in a similar situation with a strange man and kills, wounds or hits (either one of them or both of them) he is

¹¹³ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 110–11.

¹¹⁴ Floor, *Social History of Sexual Relations*, 16.

exempted from punishment. Any time somebody sees his daughter or sister in such a situation with a strange man to whom she is not married and he then kills (either one of them or both of them), he will be punished with up to six months of imprisonment. And if, according to the last part of this article, he injures or hits (either one of them or both of them) he will be punished with imprisonment for 11 days or two months.¹¹⁵

Not surprisingly, women's literature in this period remained modest when it came to sexuality. *Quenched Fire* borrows its title from its second short story, which tells the story of a young, single woman who refused to follow sexual norms, became despicable, and committed suicide. The story shows that despite the support for creating a modern woman, the loss of an unmarried woman's virginity remained a taboo. Daneshvar does not explain much about the "fault" of the main character, referring to it only as "stigma" and "slip," terms used for a girl's premarital sexual relationships and that blocked a woman's chance to marry a man.¹¹⁶ On the one hand, Simin Daneshvar, subject to her own mixed feelings, was fascinated by the changes in women's social status, but, on the other hand, she herself guarded traditional ideas concerning women's sexuality.

Aside from the virginity of the unmarried woman, the fidelity of the married woman was also a symbol of dignity during this period. In this section I examine Forough Farrokhzad's first collection of poems. I show how in her very first poems, the progressive poet challenged this belief. As Farzaneh Milani suggests, "searching for

¹¹⁵ The Archive of Majles Shoraye Melli [National Consultative Assembly archive], *Ghanoun-e Mojazat-e Omoumi 1304* [*The Penal Code of 1926*], Article 179. <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/91023?keyword=%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%20%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%AA%20%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C>. Translation is from Irene Schneider, "The Concept of Honour and its Reflection in the Iranian Penal Code," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 5 (2012): 48–49.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

independence yet attached to traditional ideals of femininity, Farrokhzad worked with conflicts from within and socio-cultural contradictions from without.”¹¹⁷ Her professional life as a poet started with the denouncement, by the conservative and traditional forces, of her immorality and her advocacy of promiscuity. In contrast, her female voice, which challenged the system of traditional values, was celebrated by intellectual and modern readers.

Through *Captive*, Farrokhzad was able to express her desire for a man and to challenge the traditional norm that only male poets portrayed men, masculinity, gender norms, and gender relations. Although there had been some inclusion of men in women’s poetry previously, male figures were either religious leaders and fathers who lacked uniqueness or erotic love.¹¹⁸ Sharing her personal experiences with her readers, Farrokhzad, in her poems, speaks about sexuality openly. *Captive* opens with a poem entitled *Shab va Havas (Night and Desire)*. In this poem she writes:

All over my neck and hair
to wander the breeze of his breath
to drink me, drink me up to the dregs,
as this bitter river joins the sea that is him.

Wild, hot, athirst and atremble
like unruly, dancing flames
to engulf me, to engulf me roaring,
leaving nothing but dust of me in my bed.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 133.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 138–39.

¹¹⁹ Forough Farrokhzad, *Asir [Captive]* (Tehran: Amirkabir, 1974), 3.

Farrokhzad, who expressed an erotic love in her poems, also dared to criticize the stereotypes of masculinity in a society in which women had been considered the inferior sex, the *Za'ifeh* (the weak one). She writes:

He was taught nothing but desire
to be interested in nothing but appearances
Wherever he went, he hears it whispered in his ears that
women are created for his desire.¹²⁰

In addition to traditional gender norms, the sex-segregated society limited women's knowledge of men. The impact of a sex-segregated culture, with its boundaries between men and women that resulted in weak gender relations, is evident in these words:

You, with a sincere hearth, woman
don't seek loyalty in a man
he does not know the meaning of love
don't ever tell him your heart's secrets¹²¹

In 1952 it was not only improper for a woman to show interest in a man but also forbidden for a mother or a wife to express her physical desire and sexual enjoyment. In her first collection, Farrokhzad calls herself "impure" repeatedly. At this stage, the poet expresses her passion for a man, but she considers her unconventional sexual experiences as "sins." Her internal conflicts between permitted and forbidden, purity and pollution, and honour and shame appear in *Captive*. The young, married female poet was caught between fear and feelings of guilt on the one hand, and passion on the other hand.

¹²⁰ Farrokhzad, *Asir*, 58.

¹²¹ Farrokhzad, *Asir*, 110. Translation is from Milani, *Veils and Words*, 145.

For example, in a poem entitled *Div-e Shab (The Night Goblin)* she portrayed herself as an inappropriate mother singing a lullaby for her baby boy sleeping on her lap. She created a discussion between her and a demonic darkness that approaches her son:

Suddenly the silence of the house was broken
The dark Demon screamed: “Enough you wretched woman!
I am not afraid of you!
You are the color of sin,
so full of sins you are!

I am a demon but you are more of a demon than me
A mother with sullied skirt
Oh, take his head off you lap!
Look where the pure boy rests his head!”¹²²

Farrokhzad was raised in and surrounded by a value system that revised women’s question but was nevertheless highly conservative regarding women’s sexuality. As Hamideh Sedghi suggests, “the Pahlavi method of gender reform was firmly based on a patriarchal model of the family, where the father assumed total control and initiative over the rights and responsibilities of the women in the family. The two Pahlavi Shahs saw themselves in the same light: as the father of the nation who had to have total control over the women of the nation.”¹²³

For instance, in the following decades, all textbooks began with pictures of the ruling Pahlavi family, including the Shah, the Empress, the Crown Prince, and the Shah’s sister, Princess Ashraf, who was head of the Imperial Organization for Social Services. Once students could read simple sentences, they repeatedly faced the following

¹²² Farrokhzad, *Asir*, 46. Translation is from Hamid Dabashi, *Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema* (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2007), 48.

¹²³ Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*, 142. See also Najmabadi, *Hazards of Modernity and Morality*, 60.

passage that contributed to the legal notion of patriarchy in the family and in the country:

Each of us lives at home. At home we love and respect our father. We also have a bigger house. This big house of ours is our country Iran. In this big house we are like one family. The Shah is like the father of this large family and we are like his children. The Shah loves all of us. We love our kind Shah like our own father. We respect our Shah.¹²⁴

Even in the progressive discourse about the need for women's social participation we can find roots of traditionalism. For example, Ahmad Kasravi, who supported women's unveiling and education, still did not recognize women's right to control their bodies, and he stated in his book that women should not wear makeup nor appear without their husbands in the public sphere. Furthermore, when it came to gender relations, he supported polygamy. Kasravi's point of view on women's participation in society represents a trend that was supported by male thinkers who advocated women's rights but still believed in gendered stereotypes. For example, he felt that women should occupy jobs that had a majority of female customers, and he considered housekeeping and child bearing as the most natural work for women.¹²⁵

While Farrokhzad could not free herself from what she had been taught regarding morality and proper behaviour, she reacted to public opinion:

I shun these people
who seem so sincere and friendly
and yet, in an excess of contempt,

¹²⁴ Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 128–29.

¹²⁵ Ahmad Kasrai, *Kaharan va Dokhtaran-e Ma* (Tehran: Payman, 1945), 5, 26.

charge me with countless accusations.

I shun these people who listen to my poems
and bloom like sweet-smiling flowers
but in their own privacy
call me a notorious fool.¹²⁶

A love theme forms the core of her poems, yet the very title of Farrokhzad's first collection, *Captive*, reflects the limitations placed on Iranian women in the 1940s and 1950s. The poetic persona of this collection is a confused woman, poet, mother, and wife, who says:

I think about it, and yet, I know
I'll never be able to leave this cage
even if the warden should let me go
I've lost the strength to fly away.

Every morning, from behind the bars,
my child's eyes smile at me
as I start to sing,
his kissing lips near mine.¹²⁷

Here, the image of the cage is a symbol of marriage, and the inequality of men and women in the law and within the institution of marriage is illustrated in *Captive*.

Looking for a bright future and struggling for her freedom and equal rights, the poet says:

Come here, o self-centred male creature,
come open the door of the cage
I am that bird, that bird who for a long time
has had thoughts in her head of flying...
Come open the door so that

¹²⁶ Farrokhzad, *Asir*, 20.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

I might spread my wings
towards the bright sky of poetry
If you allow me flight,
I will become a flower in the rose garden of poetry
.....
in that prison whose jailer you were¹²⁸

At the time *Captive* was written, it was taboo for women to ask for a divorce.

Captive is a literary expression of an Iranian woman who felt imprisoned in an unhappy marriage. As the title suggests, the poet identifies herself as a woman trapped in a life she doesn't enjoy. In this book, she likens herself to a caged bird, and the price of freedom will be to leave her son behind:

If O sky, I want one day to fly
Out from this silent prison, cold and stern,
What shall I say to the child's weeping eyes?
Forget about me, for I'm a captive bird.¹²⁹

In a poem entitled *Halgheh (The Wedding Ring)*, the gold ring that should signify the bride's happiness and love is transformed into a ring of enslavement.

Years went by, and there came a night
when a woman was brooding on the golden ring...
bitterly, the woman cried, "Woe!
Woe to this ring with its features
that glitter yet and glow, whose meaning
is slavery and near servitude."¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Forough Farrokhzad, "Esysan," in *Asir*. Translation is from Michael C. Hillmann, *A Lonely Woman: Forough Farrokhzad and Her Poetry* (Boulder: Three Continents Press, 1987), 12.

¹²⁹ Forough Farrokhzad, *Another Birth and Other Poems*, trans. Hasan Javadi and Susan Sallee (Washington, DC: Mage, 2010), 1.

¹³⁰ Forough Farrokhzad, *Asir*. Translation is from Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 231.

During this period in which women's physical mobility was extended and women began to appear more and more in public places, these women writers, as the examples I've given show, struggled for freedom and independence and protested against women's sexual oppression. In fact, women's literature brought women's private experiences out into the public sphere.

Conclusion

The study of the first story and poetry collections by Iranian authors reveals that these works were shaped under the influence of the process of the modernization of women and the transitional society that encompassed them. The first fiction writing by a female author, *Quenched Fire*, can be identified as part of a public process of modernization of women. It celebrates the state's politics concerning unveiling, women's education, women's independence, and companionate marriage. Furthermore, there is no account of the need for women's political participation in this book, as it was not part of the state's modernization plan at the time. In this book, Daneshvar creates the image of a progressive yet still traditional mother to illustrate what the modern Iranian woman looks like.

In *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*, Camron M. Amin states that prior to the 1940s:

The achievements of Iranian women were not—and perhaps could not be—celebrated in writing and in pictures as those of foreign women could be. Until Iranian women could be celebrated (and pictured) in the pages of the

Iranian press for their public service, their professionalism, their athleticism, and their overall ability, they would always appear to be standing still in comparison with their sisters around the world.¹³¹

However, *Quenched Fire* compares Iranian woman with a European example of modern womanhood and suggests that Reza Shah's gender policy was successful and positively changed the concept of womanhood among elite and educated women population in modern Iran.

At the time, Simin Daneshvar was single and possibly under the influence of the society in which the virginity of a not-married woman was a sensitive subject. In this regard, her writing remains modest when it comes to women's sexuality, and she criticizes women's premarital sexual desire. In contrast, the first collection by a modern female poet deals with the ignorance and suppression of women's sexuality in this period, as well as the discriminating laws concerning women's position in the family.

However, the 1931 Civil Code and its 1937 supplementary codified family laws did not secularize the law. As a result, the institution of marriage and women's sexuality remained under the control of Sharia laws and the traditional cultural system. If *Quenched Fire* is an appreciation of gender reforms expressed by a financially independent, educated female writer within the dominant discourse of gender reforms, *Captive* could be understood as an emotional representation of a talented married woman who felt trapped inside the institution of marriage and who demanded freedom. In the following chapter, I will show how the concepts within women's literature

¹³¹ Amin, *Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*, 94.

changed in the period of cultural transition in the aftermath of the 1953 coup and the beginning of the state-sponsored 1963 White Revolution.

CHAPTER 3

CULTURAL TRANSITION: FROM THE 1953 COUP D'ÉTAT TO THE 1963 WHITE REVOLUTION

Introduction

In the previous chapter I suggested that the emergence of women's literature in the 1940s and early 1950s reflected the legal and social changes in women's position that took place during the process of modernization of women. In this chapter, based on that same assumption, I argue that although the 1950s and early 1960s saw no changes regarding women's legal status, it was a period of transformation for women's social and cultural status, and in the absence of reliable studies on women's cultural status in this period, women's literature as a whole demonstrates this process of transition. I will show that women's literature in this period is focused on women's extended participation in the society, changing gender roles, and the understanding of women's sexuality.

The 1950s began with the nationalization of the oil industry as a result of the efforts of Mohammad Mossadegh, who was prime minister between 1951 and 1953. In 1953, a coup supported by the United Kingdom and the United States overthrew Mossadegh's government, and the Shah, who had left Iran during the conflict, was reinstated. The post-coup Iran witnessed the dictatorial regime of the Shah and the growth of his personal power. The state banned all activities of independent political parties and arrested religious and secular opposition.¹³²

¹³² Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*, 97.

The independent women's movement, too, was subjected to political oppression and once again replaced by state feminism. Between the 1953 coup d'état and the 1963 White Revolution,¹³³ some women's welfare organizations and professional associations were established by a new generation of women's rights activists. These organizations functioned under the administrative control of the state and supported state feminism, however, they demanded improvement of feminist reforms within the modernization program. Some of the well-known professional associations that came into being in this period were the Iranian Women's Medical Association, the Association of Women Lawyers, and the Iranian Nurses Association. However, most of the new Tehran-based organizations lacked effective contacts with the other parts of Iran.¹³⁴

At the time, the Charity Association of Soraya, headed by Soraya, the Queen of Iran between 1951 and 1958, was one of the main governmental organizations and contributed to the centralization of women's rights. Another organization with a similar function was the Welfare Council for Women and Children, which was founded in Tehran in 1956. In the 1950s, the number of women in the workforce increased as a result of economic development, and the Welfare Council made assistance to women workers its priority.¹³⁵

¹³³ In 1963, Mohammed Reza Shah used his absolute power to launch his White Revolution, whose aim was to construct "a modern and progressive Iran." The national reform program included land reform, the sale of government-owned factories to finance land reform, a new election law that included women's suffrage, the nationalization of forests, a national literacy corps mainly for teaching in rural areas, and a plan to give workers a share of industrial profits. Later other reforms were added to these, and the program was referred to as the revolution of the Shah and the people. See Keddie, *Modern Iran*.

¹³⁴ Hamed Shahidian, *Women in Iran: Gender Politics in the Islamic Republic*, vol. 2 (London: Greenwood Press, 2002), 45.

¹³⁵ Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*, 136.

However, the major event in this period that marks the state-sponsored women's rights movement occurred in 1959 when an umbrella organization called *Shora-ye Ali-ye Jamiyat-e Zanan-e Iran* (the High Council of Women's Societies of Iran) was established, with Princess Ashraf, the Shah's twin sister, as its president. The royal patronage of the main women's organizations during the Pahlavi era indicates the dependent nature of their activities. The High Council identified the expansion of women's education, the rehabilitation of female ex-prisoners, and international networking as its main objectives. The state strongly encouraged other women's organizations to stop their limited independent activities and join the High Council.¹³⁶

During this period, three female authors were active. Simin Daneshvar and Forough Farrokhzad, whose first books I discussed in Chapter Two, continued to produce and publish literary works in the post-coup period, and Simin Behbahani, one of the best-known female poets in the history of Persian literature, joined them.

Behbahani was born into a progressive middle-class family in Tehran in 1927. Her mother, Fakhro-Ozma Arghoun, was one of the founders of the Patriotic Women's Society, whose goal was the development of education and the awakening of Iranian women during Reza Shah's reign. Years later Behbahani remembered her mother:

An astonishing woman in her time. At a time when reading and writing were considered sinful acts for women, she had acquired ample knowledge available in those days. She had studied Persian literature, religious jurisprudence and principles, Arabic language, astronomy, philosophy, logic, history, and geography thoroughly with the prominent teachers at the time, who were also the teachers of

¹³⁶ Woodsmall, *Women and the New East*, 77–83.

her two brothers, and she had learned the French language from childhood from a Swiss lady who lived with the family as a governess.¹³⁷

Behbahani's father, Abbas-e Khalili, was a writer and journalist, and Behbahani's literary life was influenced by her parent's progressive ideas, although they divorced when she was three years old.¹³⁸ During high school and later midwifery school, Behbahani joined the Youth Organization of the Tudeh [Communist] Party.¹³⁹ From then on her poems remained concerned with social causes.

Simin Behbahani published three collections of poetry, *Ja-ye Pa* (footprint), *Chelcheragh* (lamp of many lights), and *Marmar* (marble), between 1954 and 1961. Her contemporary, the poet Forough Farrokhzad, had divorced in 1954 and in 1956 and 1957, she published her second collection, *Divar* (the wall) and her third collection, *Esyān* (rebellion) respectively.¹⁴⁰ Around the same time, in 1961, Simin Daneshvar introduced her second collection of short stories, *Shahri Chon Behest* (a city like paradise). In this chapter I will look at two specific themes in their works: the social participation of women and changes in gender roles, and the expression of sexual pleasure in the process of modernization of women. I will show that women's literature in this period is characterized by these two themes, which reflect the ongoing cultural transformation.

¹³⁷Simin Behbahani, "Ba Talash va Talatom" [With strife and tumult], in *Ba Qalb-e Khod Cheh Kharidam: Gozineh-ye Qessehha va Yadha* (Los Angeles: Sherkat-e Ketab, 1996), 11–12.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴⁰ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 134–35.

Women's social participation and changing gender roles

During the period between 1953 and 1963, the Shah used financial aid and technical assistance from the United States to embark in a series of economic plans and social programs, which also influenced the improvement of women's social participation. The growth of Gross National Product (GNP) resulted in spending money on health, education and welfare. The number of hospitals, health clinics, schools, technical colleges, and universities increased. Women working in the industry, education institutions, government, and social services led to the increment of women's social engagement and civic participation. Furthermore, a large number of women from well-to-do upper class families without special training in association with well educated social workers voluntarily took part in various projects on health, literacy, midwifery, community development, industry, home economics, childrearing, dressmaking and handicrafts.¹⁴¹

In the period under examination, women suffered from oppressive laws regarding the status of women in the family, and these laws also negatively affected women's participation in society. Semi-independent women's associations challenged the dominant-subordinate relationship between a husband and wife in the family structure and demanded abolishing of men's legal right to marry a second wife. Reforms in the laws concerning the position of women in marriage and divorce and reforms regarding the status of children in divorce were also central to debates over women's legal

¹⁴¹ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 135–36.

status.¹⁴² Women's legal rights in marriage remained however unchanged until the ratification of the Family Protection Laws in 1967. It was only from 1967 onwards that the identification of women with their primary role as wife and mother within the family unit started to change.

In this section, I will look at two specific themes in women's literature from 1953 to 1963: the metaphoric and realistic presentation of challenges urban women experienced to moving from domestic life into the city-social life. I also examine how women's expanded engagement in the city-social life challenged traditional gender norms in the family and in the society.

The repeated images of city and urban life in both poetry and fiction writing in this period reflect the realistic nature of narratives and challenges urban women faced to deal with the ongoing changes concerning women's engagement in the society. Daneshvar's second collection of short stories, *Shahri Chon Behesht* (a city like paradise), takes its title from one of the short stories in the collection. In a tradition of identifying women with domesticity, focusing on the concept of "city-social life" is something quite novel in a woman's work of literature. Behbahani and Farrokhzad also depict women in relation to the public sphere and social life in contrast to their private and domestic life. The metaphoric use of "city," and "wall" in Farrokhzad's poems also reveals her desire to live in a society in which she can enjoy freedom of movement and freedom of expression.

¹⁴² Ibid., 137, 138.

Farrokhzad's second collection, published in 1956, takes its title from a poem called "The Wall." This poem is a metaphoric manifestation of an Iranian woman's will to free herself from subordination. In this poem Farrokhzad speaks of her "dream city," which might be a city in which women are not second-class citizens. Presumably addressing a man, who represents a patriarchal society, "The Wall" starts as follows:

In the cold flurry of moments
your silent barbaric eyes
erect a wall around me
I flee from you through uncharted roads
...
I flee from you
so that far from you I can enter
my dream city, break
the weighty gold lock
to my fantasies' place

Although Iranian women's transition from subordination, which they had internalized, towards equal rights and independence was hard, the prospect of freedom was encouraging. Farrokhzad continues:

But the mute roar of your eyes
blurs all passages to my view
and in its cunning secret dark
erects a wall around me
But I will flee,
flee from the spell of doubts out like a flower's perfume in dreams
...
I will soft-slither into the bed of a gilded cloud
...
From there, uncaged and carefree,
I will gaze on where your shaman eyes
blur all passages to my view
and in their cunning secret dark

erect a wall around the world¹⁴³

Farrokhzad's poems which were influenced by her personal life demonstrate part of challenges women would face to expand their professional presence in the society during this period. Discriminatory family laws prevented women to gain custody of their children in case of divorce, even if the mother was economically independent. Thus, ambitious women like Farrokhzad somehow sacrificed their personal life in order to build their professional career and to get more engaged in social life.

During her divorce, Forough Farrokhzad lost custody of her baby boy and subsequently suffered a nervous breakdown; she spent a couple of months in a psychiatric clinic in Tehran.¹⁴⁴ In a poem called "A Poem for You" ("She'ri bara-ye To"), published in her third collection, *Esyān* (rebellion), she expressed the feeling of a mother who was forced because of suppressive laws to be separated from her son; she dedicated this poem to her son "with hopes for the future":

this is the final lullaby
at the foot of the cradle where you sleep
may the wild sounds of my screaming
echo in the sky of your youth.¹⁴⁵

In this poem, the separated woman who was at the beginning of her professional career was tired of discrimination, but still hopeful to build a better future. Farrokhzad

¹⁴³ Forough Farrokhzad, *Sin: Selected Poems of Forough Farrokhzad* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 12–13.

¹⁴⁴ Hillmann, *A Lonely Woman*, 25.

¹⁴⁵ Translation is from: <http://www.foroughfarrokhzad.org/collectedworks/collectedworks2.htm>

depicted herself at the entrance to a new life, tired of being controlled by her husband and the conservative society that surrounded her. She said:

against a dark door I have rested
my forehead tight with pain
I rub my thin, cold fingers
against this door in hope

that person branded with shame who used to laugh
at foolish taunts was I
I said I would be the cry of my own existence
but O, alas that I was a “woman”¹⁴⁶

The poet herself recognized *Rebellion* as “the hopeless thrashing of arms and legs between two stages of life . . . the final gasps for breath before a sort of release.”¹⁴⁷

Farrokhzad was not alone at that stage of struggling to reformulate her personal and professional identity. In fact, the 1950s was a decade of transition for Iranian women, when they moved from being second-class citizens to achieving some equal rights, including the right to vote in the early 1960s.

Another unique piece of women’s literature written during the 1950s, concerning ongoing transformation of gender roles in the family and in the society, is one of Daneshvar’s short stories, published in her second book. This story has been almost completely overlooked, and this is the first time its importance is discussed in the context of gender transformation. Daneshvar’s second collection of short stories, *Shahri Chon Behest* (a city like paradise), first published in 1961, clearly illustrates a society

¹⁴⁶ The emphasis is from the poet. Translation is from <http://www.foroughfarrokhzad.org/collectedworks/collectedworks2.htm>

¹⁴⁷ Hillmann, *A Lonely Woman*, 35.

engaged with gender and cultural transformation. The book comprises ten short stories and takes its title from its second story. The author added an acknowledgment in the second edition in which she clearly declared that the book was influenced by real-life stories. She wrote: “This book represents a society in which I have lived.” Most importantly, she emphasized that “almost all personas which are illustrated in this book come from the real world.”¹⁴⁸

To give a good example of the strong impact of women’s employment and their increasing social participation in challenging women’s domestic obligations, I analyze a seventeen-page short story from this collection, entitled “Sargozasht-e Kucheh” (“a history of the alley”). In this story an alley is a metaphoric representation of a historic passage in which both educated, employed, modern women and illiterate, unemployed, traditional women are living in the vicinity of each other.

In the very first page of the story, a street sweeper informs the main female character, an educated, employed, modern woman, about her neighbour who “has divorced his wife and remarried an Armenian (Christian) woman.”¹⁴⁹ However, as the story continues, it is revealed that the man did not divorce his first wife but married a second wife. The reader soon realizes that the central theme of this story is shaped in relation to dominant-subordinate gender relationships, family issues, and traditional-modern conflicts.

¹⁴⁸ Simin Daneshvar, *Shahri Chon Behesht* [A city like paradise] (Tehran: Kharazmi, 1983), 47.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

The street sweeper is chosen to open the story because usually street sweepers, who were responsible for collecting garbage door by door, knew all the inhabitants in a neighbourhood and told everyone the news when a change occurred in someone's house. Thus, this is a way that strangers could be informed about their neighbours' private lives. As the story continues, more details are revealed about the economic and cultural condition of the family: "The man came over to have a garden party on the weekend," and the sweeper criticizes the behaviour of the man and his guests, who wasted a lot of food.¹⁵⁰

Gradually the educated, employed, modern female character who is narrating the story gets to know Fati, the separated woman, whom the author calls "taciturn," and "veiled."¹⁵¹ Fati is a woman who is incapable of effective communication and of defending her rights. She is an illiterate woman whose daily life is limited to her domestic matters, and sometimes she is even incapable of solving her personal problems. In contrast, the modern female character who is living with his liberal husband is presented as a socially active woman who has been planning to contact the municipal organization to solve the transit issue that has occurred in the public area surrounding her house.

One day Fati comes to the narrator's house and asks to use her telephone. At the time, the telephone is a modern device, and not surprisingly the illiterate woman gets assistance from the modern woman to use it. An unfriendly phone conversation between

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ *Fati* is the abridged form of *Fateme*. It is a usual custom among religious families to name their daughters after Prophet Mohammad's daughter.

Fati and another woman reveals that Fati is a frustrated woman in a polygamy marriage. Apparently her daughter is ill, and she demands her husband's second wife, who is living with him in another house, to tell her husband that Fati needs his assist.¹⁵²

Feeling helpless, she says to her co-wife: "I don't mean to bother you, but I'm a frustrated, weak woman." The way she addresses her husband as "Sir" shows the subordinate position she has accepted. In fact, this traditional woman internalizes the subordinate position in the husband-wife relationship and now blames the second wife for her frustration, not her husband. She starts to tell her story to the narrator:

He is busy enjoying his new life with his new, young, wife . . . Years ago when we married, he had nothing, but now he is a doctor and he has remarried a typist girl. Now she is pregnant and I've been forced to live separately because she couldn't tolerate my presence in her home. We are living in such a strange time because previously the first wife had power over the second wife.¹⁵³

On the one hand the second wife is a modern woman who is employed and lives a new lifestyle, and on the other hand, she agreed to marry a married man. However, the difference between the second wife and the first wife is that the former does not accept to share her home with the first wife. *Towfiq* (1922-1970), one of the most popular satirical magazines of this period, routinely portrayed nurses and secretaries as sexual objects.¹⁵⁴ These evidences shows the threat traditional women who dedicated themselves to domestic life felt toward young generation of employed women who shared the workplace with married men.

¹⁵² Daneshvar, *Shahri Chon Behesht*, 48-49.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁵⁴ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 223.

For his part, the husband in this story remarried a young woman who could accompany him in his social life, but he has not freed himself from his traditional beliefs about marriage and divorce. One reason might be his responsibility to financially support his socially passive first wife, who could not adapt to social and cultural changes. The traditional mother remains subordinated in relation to all male members of her family; she says, “A boy needs to have his father; otherwise a mother can’t control her boy, and he will grow up to be badly behaved.”¹⁵⁵

This story also provides a vivid description of how the increasing participation of women in the society challenged gender roles and expectations around women’s domestic obligations. In a traditional family structure, child bearing and domestic labour were considered women’s principal responsibilities. In this story the modern character has no children, and in the absence of her domestic servant, she does not know how to cook. The modern lifestyle and the growing culture of consumption provide an opportunity for her and her husband to eat in cafés and restaurants. Once they feel they miss homemade food, she starts to look for a recipe in a cookbook. This is an important transformation of women’s roles.¹⁵⁶ Addressing the narrator, the traditional woman criticizes the lifestyle of modern women:

“The second wife of my husband is just like you. Please accept my apology. Employed women know everything but domestic work. She avoids household work and wastes eighty Toman¹⁵⁷ per month to pay for a household worker who does domestic work instead of her. Actually, she could not work even if she were

¹⁵⁵ Daneshvar, *Shahri Chon Behesht*, 51–52.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁵⁷ The official currency of Iran.

willing to, because her long polished nails prevent her from working. The only thing she does well is to bare her legs and her arms and go out with my husband, hand in hand. I guess she also drinks impure beverages.”¹⁵⁸

For a traditional woman who internalized traditional gender roles, all the behaviours mentioned here by the first wife were considered inappropriate. This is the first time in this story that the traditional woman expresses her opinion. On the one hand she criticizes modern women’s refusal to perform their traditional domestic obligations, but on the other hand she demands a modern woman’s assistance [the narrator’s assistance] to convince her husband’s second wife to let her share the house with them. The first wife confesses to the narrator that she does not know how to lead a conversation with the second wife because she is different from her. She insists: “Madam, what is the benefit of the knowledge you have if you refuse to help me and other fellow Iranian women who live in the same condition as me?”¹⁵⁹ The traditional woman understands that the subordinate position of women in the patriarchal family must be ended. However, she does not consider herself in a position to demand the end of her husband's second marriage and just want to live with the husband and the second wife. Finally, the modern woman agrees to take care of the situation and to try to convince the second wife.

The story ends with a scene in which the traditional woman is giving advice to the narrator to think about having a child because she believes that in case of trouble a

¹⁵⁸ Alcoholic drinks were not prohibited under the Shah’s rule; however all alcoholic drinks are prohibited in Islam, and based on customary laws it was even worse for women to drink them than for men. “Impure” is a conversational, traditional term for alcoholic drinks.; Daneshvar, *Shahri Chon Behesht*, 53

¹⁵⁹ Daneshvar, *Shahri Chon Behesht*, 53.

marriage can survive only if there are children.¹⁶⁰ For a traditional woman who identifies herself with her marital status, the failure of the marriage means losing everything. This story also shows the challenging work of convincing the part of the female population who were disinclined to abandon the old gender roles and who believed in men's authority within the family.

Changing position of women in gender relations also occurs in Simin Behbahani's work. Farzaneh Milani notes that although Behbahani "objected to being recognized as a 'woman poet,' she has challenged even the most subtle of gender inequality in her poems."¹⁶¹ In fact, Behbahani's first poems concerning gender equality explain her will to be equally treated with men. However, she is recognized as "Iran's national poet,"¹⁶² and her poems tackle more than one subject and deal mostly with socio-political matters. In a poem entitled "O Man," published first in *Marmar* (marble), she writes:

Don't think of me only as a person you sleep with,
I am also your companion who shares a same path with you
...
You've only had a one hand and you know you are disabled with only one hand
Now, I'm the other hand of your distinguished body
Out of the house, I'm consistently with you
Inside the house, I endear you and empathize with you when you feel bad¹⁶³

This poem is a good example of women's effort to reformulate gender roles and to remind men to support gender equality. Behbahani addressed her male contemporaries in

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 58.

¹⁶¹ Farzaneh Milani, "Simin Behbahani: Iran's National Poet," *Iranian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2008): 7.

¹⁶² For example, see Milani, "Simin Behbahani: Iran's National Poet," 3–17.

¹⁶³ Simin Behbahani, *Marmar* [Marble] (Tehran: Zavvar, 1961), 170.

society and created a poetic dialogue with popular poems, including the poem produced by Iradj Mirza (1874–1926), one of the male advocates of gender equality at the eve of gender reforms, which reads: “In other lands, wife is a companion of man; In this land of sorrow, she is his burden.”¹⁶⁴ Struggle for gender equality which started from the Constitutional Revolution turned into a new level in the 1960s. However, changing gender norms in the cultural structure of the 1950s was already well presented in women’s literature.

Expressing sexual pleasure versus sexual objectification

In the process of gender modernization, romantic relationships remained a central theme in literary works. In this section I will show that the period of cultural transition for the rural population in Iran not only provided a space for Forough Farrokhzad to develop a consciousness of women’s sexuality but also gave her a chance to share with her readers a woman’s personal experiences of reconnection with her body and her female sexuality and to challenge the traditional sexual morality. At the same time Simin Behbahani realized the necessity to make distinction between women’s sexual desire and women’s objectification for the public audience.

Farrokhzad’s second collection of poetry, *Divar* (the wall), comprises twenty-five short lyrics, starting with a poem entitled “Gonah” (“Sin”):

¹⁶⁴ Iradj Mirza, *Divan-e Kamel*, edited by Mohammad Jafar Mahjub (Los Angeles: Ketab Corporation, 1989), 84.

I have sinned a rapturous sin
in a warm enflamed embrace,
sinned in a pair of vindictive arms,
arms violent and ablaze

This is one of the most controversial poems not only in the history of modern Persian literature but also in the history of modern Iranian women. In “Sin,” Farrokhzad openly reveals a secret sexual intercourse in which the woman is not a passive sexual object. Unlike the previous “love” poems in the literary history of Iran, in which men were all active in the male-centred sexual relationships, in this poem, it is the woman who demands sexual pleasure.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, the poet, instead of addressing the lover to express her emotion, is addressing her audience and confesses to her audience:

In that quiet vacant dark
I sat beside him punch-drunk,
his lips released desire on mine,
grief unclenched my crazy heart.

I poured in his ears lyrics of love:
O my life, my lover it's you I want.
Life-giving arms, it's you I crave.
Crazed lover, for you I thirst.

Lust enflamed his eyes,
red wine trembled in the cup,
my body, naked and drunk,
quivered softly on his breast

As I mentioned in Chapter One, walls separated the worlds of men and women in pre-modern Iranian society. Ironically, the poem that visualizes Farrokhzad's exploration

¹⁶⁵ For the gender-marked Persian verbs concerning sexual activity, see Milani, *Veils and Words*, 142.

of her sexuality was published in a collection entitled *The Wall*.¹⁶⁶ This is a symbol that the walls had failed to limit women's freedom of movement and freedom of expression.

I have sinned a rapturous sin
beside a body quivering and spent.
I do not know what I did O God,
in that quiet vacant dark¹⁶⁷.

Milani believes that in this poem Farrokhzad not only violates traditional sexual morality but also “violates norms that define proper language for a woman.”¹⁶⁸ At the time, she was divorced and did not feel captive and trapped in an unhappy marriage anymore, but her writing reveals that she remained morally influenced by traditional beliefs. Even in a poem in which she humanizes nature when it comes to pleasure, Farrokhzad refers to herself and nature as “sinners”:

I shed my cloths in the lush air
to bath naked in the spring water,
but the quiet night seduced me
into telling it my gloomy story
...
Aroused, parched, and fevered, the water's lips
rippled trembling kisses on my thighs,
and we suddenly collapsed, intoxicated, gratified,
both sinners, my body and the spring's soul¹⁶⁹

Although she expressed her sexuality openly in her first three collections, significantly, she keeps on repeating the word “sin.” The metaphoric use of “night and

¹⁶⁶ The poet titles the collection *The Wall* after one of its poem with the same title.

¹⁶⁷ Translation is from Farrokhzad, *Sin: Selected Poems*, 3.

¹⁶⁸ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 143.

¹⁶⁹ Translation is from Farrokhzad, *Sin: Selected Poems*, 11.

darkness” also reveals the poet’s personal and social challenges of living in a male-dominated society that was not fully prepared for women’s participation in society. For example, one of the first biographers of the progressive female poet notes that “as Farrokhzad became more involved in poetry and literary circles, one of the most serious problems was the unfamiliarity men around her had in socializing with female compeers. In other words, she faced both constant, unsought sexual advances and obvious disapproval at her participation in arenas hitherto exclusively male.”¹⁷⁰ However, as her freedom of movement and independence increased, the metaphoric use of “lightless life” decreased in her poems.

Female’s sexuality also represented in Behbahani’s works. Kamran Tallatof, in his study of Behbahani’s *Ja-ye Pa* (footprint), suggests that in her work, social themes and female characters are occasionally featured, and her main concerns are those of social injustice.¹⁷¹ Even if we admit that Behbahani’s works are not gender-centred, it is important to examine how she illustrates female characters and gender issues in each period. For example, one of Behbahani’s best-known poems, “Raghaseh”¹⁷² (“dancing girl in a tavern”) concerns the presentation of women as sexual objects in the public sphere. The poet depicts a beautiful girl dancing in front of a drunk, male crowd in a tavern, presumably in Tehran. The poem’s opening scene is her seductive performance, which is met with continuous applause from the audience. As the poem continues, the narrator reveals that: “same as the night before, I remained upset and smile-less.” The

¹⁷⁰ Hillmann, *A Lonely Woman*, 12.

¹⁷¹ Tallatof, “Iranian Women’s Literature,” 539.

¹⁷² First published in *Ja-ye Pa* [footprint].

dancer regrets her life in which she gives pleasure to others but feels lonely herself.¹⁷³

The social issue the poet addresses in this poem is the sexual objectification of women in the shifting cultural pattern. In “Raghaseh,” Behbahani cautions the reader to distinguish female sexual objectification from female sexual desire.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed how women’s literature is influenced by ongoing developments in women’s social participation in the period between the 1953 coup d’état and the 1963 White Revolution. Based on the literary works of Simin Daneshvar, Simin Behbahani, and Forough Farrokhzad, we have seen how that the patriarchal structure of the Iranian family and gender culture started to change prior to the ratification of the Family Protection Laws in 1967. Not surprisingly, women’s involvement in social labour changed women’s domestic obligations and accordingly led to the transformation of gender roles and the structure of the patriarchal family. Traditionally, men participated in paid work, while unpaid activities, particularly household labour, were defined as women’s responsibility. Even the law assured women’s economic dependency on men. In addition to customary laws, the Marriage Act of 1931 discouraged women from living an independent financial life because the

¹⁷³ Simin Behbahani, *Majmue-ye Ash’ar* [The collection of poetries] (Tehran: Negah, 2005), 56–59. Translations are mine.

law proclaimed a husband's material obligation to provide food, clothing, and shelter to his wife or wives.¹⁷⁴

Women's empowerment also challenged the dominant-subordinate relationship between men and women in urban, middle-class families. In *Shahri Chon Behesth* (a history of the alley), Daneshvar considers the transformative impact of women's employment in challenging women's domestic obligations as well as women's understanding of traditional customs concerning marriage and the institution of the family. She shows how a man's right to marry additional wives without the consent of his first wife threatened the first wife's life in the traditional structure in which women were kept dependent on their husbands.

When it comes to gender issues, the works of Simin Daneshvar and Simin Behbahani in this period deal with the transformation of gender roles. Behbahani also considers issues around female sexuality; however, her approach is completely different from that of her contemporary, Forough Farrokhzad. While Behbahani focuses on having sex out of love, Farrokhzad visualizes a sexual relationship and expresses female sexual pleasure. In fact, the question of sexuality became central in social debates over gender modernization in the 1960s and 1970s. In the next chapter I will focus on the question of sexuality and popular culture as well as on legal reform during the 1960s and 1970s concerning women's rights and its influence on women's status in the family and in society, and on how it is reflected in women's literature.

¹⁷⁴ Banani, *Modernization of Iran*, 81–83.

CHAPTER 4

GENDER EQUALITY AND MODERN LIFESTYLE: FROM THE 1963 WHITE REVOLUTION TO THE 1979 ISLAMIC REVOLUTION

Introduction

The literature produced in Iran from 1963 to 1979 possesses certain characteristics that can be recognized in relation to the Iranian regime's attempt to create and portray the image of a reformist state. This period of modernization started with the White Revolution launched in January 1963 and ended with the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The White Revolution consisted of a six-point reform program that included land reform, the sale of government-owned factories and lands to finance the land reform, women's suffrage, the nationalization of forests and pastures, the creation of a national literacy and health corps, and a plan to give workers a share of industrial profits. Later, other reforms were added to these, and the program was referred to as "the Revolution of the Shah and the People."¹⁷⁵ The socio-economic policies of the state coupled with the growth of oil revenues in the late 1960s through to the mid-1970s on the one hand fostered a large increase in Iran's gross national product as well as industrial, agricultural, and infrastructure projects and social welfare programs and, on the other hand, led to both a decrease in the state's dependency on internal taxation for revenues

¹⁷⁵ Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 145–69.

and, subsequently, an increase in the state's control over civil society, accompanied by an increasing political repression.¹⁷⁶

During the state's modernization program, the Shah was convinced that reforms in women's socio-economic and political status would contribute to the construction of "a modern and progressive Iran" and would be economically beneficial.¹⁷⁷ After 1963, women's suffrage and marriage reform were considered two major progressive acts concerning women's rights. This period also saw an increase in the impact of the Western popular culture of the 1960s and 1970s on Iranian gender culture; in particular, Western pop culture influenced the changing image of female sexuality and women's lifestyles.

In this period, women's literature experienced two trends: literary works that embraced socio-political themes, and the literature influenced by popular culture and changing lifestyles.

In the previous chapters, I examined various works of Forough Farrokhzad and Simin Daneshvar. In this chapter I look at Daneshvar's masterpiece, *Savushun (A Persian Requiem)*, (1969) as well as the feminist aspect of Farrokhzad's most accomplished works, *Tavalodi Digar (Another Birth)*, (1964) and *Iman Biavarim be Aghaz-e Fasl-e Sard (Let us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season)*, (1974). I also examine the influence of pop culture, sexual politics, and changing everyday culture in the works of Mahshid Amirshahi and Kobra Saedi, two writers who started publishing

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Pahlavi, *Answer to History*, 102, 118; Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 167.

books in this period; their writings were banned in post-revolution Iran and have largely been overlooked by Persian literary scholars.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Simin Daneshvar was the best-known female writer in Iran for two reasons: First, Daneshvar published the first novel written by a female author in the history of Persian literature, and it has now gone through more than twenty editions in Iran and has been translated into various languages. Second, Daneshvar and her husband, Jalal-e Al-e-Ahmad (1923–1969), who was one of the most influential writers and social critics in pre-revolutionary Iran, not only were a famous couple in the intellectual circle but also were well known by the leftist and Islamist revolutionaries. During their marriage, the Organization of Intelligence and National Security prevented Al-e-Ahmad from working, and Daneshvar supported the household financially. During this time she translated many books from English into Persian to earn money. Years later she regretted that she had to spend so much time into translation rather than fiction writing. In 1969, the year her husband died, she published her first and most acclaimed novel, *Savushun*.¹⁷⁸

In the 1960s, Forough Farrokhzad, Daneshvar's contemporary, experienced a new life and successfully developed her artistic personality. In the late 1950s, Farrokhzad was hired as an assistant at a film studio owned by Ebrahim Golestan, a prominent writer and filmmaker and a well-known member of the Tehran intellectual community. In the fall of 1961, Farrokhzad produced a unique short documentary called *Khaneh Siyah Ast (The House is Black)* narrating the history of a leper colony in northwest Iran.

¹⁷⁸ Simin Daneshver, *Ghoroub-e Jalal [The sunset of Jalal's days]* (Tehran: Ravagh, 1981), 17; *Simin Daneshvar*, produced by BBC Persian, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPy5_O-44VQ.

During the 1960s, the poet, then in her twenties, expressed her social and political views more than ever in her interviews and works of art. In 1964, she published her fourth and most acclaimed collection of poetry, *Tavaloddi Digar (Another Birth/Rebirth)*. In comparison to her previous books, *Tavaloddi Digar* garnered much literary criticism that marked Farrokhzad as a talented contemporary Iranian poet. In the mid-1970s, seven years after her unexpected death in an automobile accident in 1967, Farrokhzad's last book and one of the best collections of poetry in modern Persian literature was published.¹⁷⁹

Another female author who established her literary career in the late 1960s is Mahshid Amirshahi, whose first works published under the Pahlavi regime are less known. She was born in 1937 into an upper-class family. Amirshahi completed her primary and secondary education in Tehran and then pursued a higher education in physics at Woolwich Polytechnic of London University. After graduating in 1963, she went back to Iran and pursued writing and translation as her professional career. She married twice, but both marriages ended in divorce. In a recent interview, she said her independent and professional life as a writer started after her second divorce.

Amirshahi's first collection of short stories was published in 1966. She developed a literary style different from Simin Daneshvar's, her contemporary. Amirshahi's literary

¹⁷⁹ Hillmann, *A Lonely Woman*, 37–71.

style is distinguished by its clarity, directness, simplicity, and sense of humour. She is also well known for the autobiographical nature of her writing.¹⁸⁰

The least-known female poet of the 1970s is Kobra Saeedi, who is also known by her artistic nickname in cinema, Shahrzad. Saeedi began her career performing in nightclubs and theatres and appearing in films. She is better remembered as an actress rather than as a poet.

Saeedi/Shahrzad was born in 1946 in Tehran. Unlike other female authors from the pre-revolutionary era, she was not raised in a progressive, educated family. Her father owned a coffee house in the southern part of Tehran, a place which was frequently full of drunk and addicted male customers. In her childhood, she suffered from domestic violence. She did not finish high school, and as a teenage girl, she found her way into dance clubs and cabarets. Her first marriage took place when she was seventeen but it did not last more than couple of weeks.¹⁸¹ Two more failed marriages followed. In an interview years later, she said that after her third divorce she “did not want to be a wife to any other man. They all would control and limit me.”¹⁸² Eventually, she entered into the film industry. Being in the cinema gave her “a chance to read literature.”¹⁸³ Although she is more famous for her cinematic career, she published two collections of poems,

¹⁸⁰ Mahshid Amirshah, “Honar Margpazir Nist” [Art is immortal: An interview with Niloofar Beyzayi] *Talsh: a special issue on Mahshid Amirshahi*, October 2003, <http://www.amirshahi.org/Biography/beizai.htm>; Hafez Farmayan, Introduction to *Suri & Co.: Tales of a Persian Teenage Girl*, trans. J. E. Knorz (Austin: The University of Texas at Austin, 1995), vii–x.

¹⁸¹ Kamran Talattof, *Modernity, Sexuality, and Ideology in Iran: The Life and Legacy of a Popular Female Artist* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 48–54.

¹⁸² Alireza Nurizadeh, “Interview with Shahrzad,” *Ferdosi Magazine*, special issue, “Year of the 2500th Kingdom Celebration,” Tehran (1971): 12–14, 35.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

including *Ba Teshnegi Pir Moshavim* (*Thirsty, We Age*, 1972), and *Salam Agha* (*Hello Sir*, 1978). Sharzad said of her literary work, “All my poems are memoirs, memories, and reminder and remembrance of the past. My poetry reflects my life.”¹⁸⁴

In this chapter I will look at legal reforms in women’s social, political, and private status and trace the influence of these reforms in women’s literature. I will consider Daneshvar’s novel *Savushun* (1969) and Farrokhzad’s collections *Another Birth* (1964) and *Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season* (1974) as reflections of improvement in gender equality in this period. I will analyze Amirshahi’s short stories, which are thematically related and were originally published in three different collections of her short stories: *Sar-e Bibi Khanom* (*Bibi Khanom’s Starling*, 1968), *Bad Az Ruz-e Akhar* (*After the Last Day*, 1969), and *Be Sigh-e naval Shakhs-e Mofrad* (*First Person Singular*, 1971). I will also examine the development of Farrokhzad’s notion of female sexuality and the symbolic image of romantic love in Shahrzad’s work.

Women’s legal and political rights

A significant step that transformed Iranian women’s social and political status from second-class citizens to first-class citizens took place in 1963 when Iran granted women the right to vote. This important measure was followed by the election of women to the parliament and eventually led to their appointment as judges and members of the cabinet. The White Revolution, and particularly women’s suffrage, also marks a turning

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

point in the conflicting relationship between the Shah and religious leaders, as well as between modernists and traditionalists. In the aftermath of the White Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini,¹⁸⁵ in association with some of the senior clerics, sent a telegram of protest to the Shah:

Women's entry to the parliament breaks all rules of propriety and is against the Sharia. Moreover, it is against articles 2 and 27 of the Supplementary Constitutional Laws. The evils of women's entry into society and interaction between men and women are well-known Islam has made it clear what ought to be done with people who advocate the equality of rights for women in inheritance, in divorce, and such matters, which are essential doctrines of Islam.¹⁸⁶

Despite the efforts of conservative clerics to present themselves as supporters of the constitution, the Shah denied their petition, and Khomeini's various violent and non-violent campaign organizations in the following year led to the Shah's decision to send him into exile in Najaf, Iraq. Janet Afary, a prominent historian of modern Iran, states that "women's suffrage and greater involvement in the public sphere were decisive in ending the close alliance between the Shah and the clerical establishment that had existed in the 1950s."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Ayatollah Khomeini (1900–1989), a religious and political leader in Iran, has been recognized as the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran. His political presence initiated in 1962 by his outspoken opposition to the pro-western policies of the Shah, as well as the White Revolution. He was arrested by the SAVAK (organization of intelligence and national security) and lived in exile from 1964 to 1979. He is an influential figure who mobilized the religious, revolutionary masses in the 1970s, which led to 1979 Islamic Revolution. When the Shah fled the country in late 1978, the Pahlavi regime collapsed, and Khomeini returned to Iran. He declared an Islamic Republic and became Iran's ultimate religious and political authority for life.

¹⁸⁶ *Asnad-e Enghelab-e Islami: Elamiye-ha, Etelaiye-ha, Bayaniyeh-ha, Payam-ha, Telegraf-ha, Name-haye Ayate Ozzam va Maraje'e Taghlid* [The documents for the Islamic Revolution] (Tehran: Markaz-e Enghelab-e Eslami, 1955), 66–67. This translation is from Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 204.

¹⁸⁷ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 204–7.

Besides women's suffrage, which opened the space for further involvement of women in politics, the religious traditionalists felt threatened by the possibility of changes in the legal status of women in the family, which had heretofore mostly remained based on Sharia laws and had only changed slowly.¹⁸⁸ However, the opposition failed to prevent changes to the family laws in 1967. This important move toward gender equality was linked to the founding of the Women's Organization of Iran (WOI). In 1966 the High Council of Women's Organizations was abolished in favor of the establishment of the WOI. Once again, the Shah appointed his twin sister, Princess Ashraf as the patronage of the central organization related to women's issues, this time with the vice-presidency of Mrs. Farideh Diba, the Queen's mother.¹⁸⁹ The supreme board comprised Mrs. Farrokhru Parsa, who became the first female minister in 1968, and nine men who held the higher governmental positions. Ten committees—health, literacy, education, law, social welfare, handicrafts, international affairs, provincial affairs, membership, and fundraising—shaped the organization. Following the familiar pattern of the state's ideology toward women, most decision-making positions in the WOI belonged to men, and women conducted most grassroots activities. Fifty-five women's associations that existed before 1966 affiliated with the WOI, and the newly established WOI became the principal instrument of state feminism in the following years.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 153.

¹⁸⁹ Sanasarian, *Women's Rights Movements in Iran*, 83–93.

¹⁹⁰ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 149–50; Mahnaz Afkhami, "The Women's Organization of Iran: Evolutionary Politics and Revolutionary Change," in *Women in Iran: From 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, eds. Lois Beck and Guity Nashat, 107–35.

Mahnaz Afkhami, who became the secretary-general of the WOI in 1970, defended the independence of the organization and claimed that the demands and interests of the WOI did not always coincide with those of the Shah and that the organization faced challenges in responding to women's issues:

One phase of legal action always involved convincing the Monarch, whose national role was the essence and symbols of patriarchy. Since he was regularly briefed by Queen and Princess Ashraf (both intelligent, active, professional women), constantly exposed to international opinion and attitudes, and possessed by a vision of Iran as a "progressive" nation, it would sometimes suffice to demonstrate to him the importance of the proposal to national development.¹⁹¹

In 1966, a debate was raised in the newspapers criticizing deputies who were "elected with women's votes" but who had not paid attention to women's matters. In 1967, the WOI co-drafted the Family Protection Law (FPL) with the New Iran Party¹⁹² and presented a bill to the parliament. Amendments in the bill targeted arbitrary divorce, polygamy, and men's right to child custody. The parliament, with the Shah's permission, passed the bill.¹⁹³

Under the Family Protection Act of 1967, a divorce could be granted only by family protection courts, and only after the court was convinced that reconciliation was impossible. Five years of imprisonment or disappearance of the spouse also made the wife eligible to submit a divorce application to the court. In the case of polygamy, for

¹⁹¹ Afkhami, "A Future in the Past: The Pre-revolutionary Women's Movement," 333.

¹⁹² In 1963 the Shah introduced a two-party system consisting of the *Iran-e Novin* Party (New Iran Party), and the *Mardom* (People) Party.

¹⁹³ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 153.

the first time a wife was granted the right to initiate a divorce if her husband married an additional wife without her consent. In addition to his first wife's consent, a man needed the court's permission to marry an additional wife. Fathers were no longer automatically granted custody of children, and a couple wanting to divorce were obliged to reach an agreement on maintenance and custody of children. In any case of conflict between parents over child custody, the court was obliged to solve the problem based on the welfare of the child.¹⁹⁴

Between 1967 and 1975, the Association of Women Lawyers and the WOI recommended various amendments. Eventually, in 1975, the parliament passed an amended Family Protection Act. This act raised the age of marriage from thirteen to eighteen for women and from eighteen to twenty for men. Both wife and husband could apply equally to the family protection courts to stop the other spouse from applying for a job that was considered detrimental to the family. Not surprisingly, in practice, stopping a man from working was more difficult than stopping a woman because the family's financial security still depended largely on the man. The 1975 Family Protection Act also added some conditions to the 1967 legislation regarding polygamy. Under the previous law, if the wife consented and the husband was financially able, the court could not prevent him from taking second wife. With the 1975 amendments, however, the husband also had to convince the court that his first wife was mentally ill, refused to

¹⁹⁴ The Archive of Majles Shoraye Melli [National Consultative Assembly archive], *Ghanoun-e Hemayat-e Khanevadeh 1346* [Family Protection Act 1967]; Ali Reza Naqavi, "The Family Protection Act of Iran," *Islamic Studies* 6 (September 1967): 242–49.

have sex, was infertile, or had disappeared. The new law also permitted the woman to ask for a divorce even if the court permitted the man to take a second wife.¹⁹⁵

In 1977, the parliament passed yet another significant law—the abortion law—and legitimized abortion under specific circumstances. Under the abortion law, a physician was allowed to perform an abortion if the physician thought that the abortion was necessary and if the fetus had not yet reached three months.¹⁹⁶ According to the new abortion law, for the first time, the rights of unmarried pregnant women were respected, and female sexuality was acknowledge outside the institution of marriage.

Parvin Paidar, a historian of Iranian women in the twentieth century, suggested that the purpose of the abortion law was to benefit the state's political, economic, and population plans, and not to revolutionize women's position in the family. She admits, however, that one cannot ignore the positive consequences of gender reforms for women who had access to the new laws. A longer pre-marriage life for many women increased their chances for education and employment. Women's choice of the type of marriage and the possibility of their refusing to remain in a unwanted marriage were important improvements in women's rights. The new laws also extended women's control over their own bodies.¹⁹⁷

Reforms in women's legal status in the 1960s and 1970s were influential vehicles for the transformation from the traditional gender culture to a modern one and aided in

¹⁹⁵ Sanasarian, *Women's Rights Movements in Iran*, 96–100.

¹⁹⁶ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 155.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 155–56.

the development of women's awareness, as well as their influence in the social and political life of Iran. However, at the same time, these reforms did not fundamentally transform the gender hierarchy. Afsaneh Najmabadi, a leading historian of modern Iran, makes a clear distinction between the symbolic significance of women's rights' issues under Reza Shah from the state feminism of this later period: "In the first period, women's status was seen as a symbol of modernity of the new nation and the new state. In the second period, it became the symbol of the modernity of the monarch and his progressive benevolence toward women."¹⁹⁸

Indeed the Shah was a central figure in the process of reconstruction of the institution of the family and gender roles. The Shah himself married three times. His first marriage to Princess Fawzia, sister of King Farugh of Egypt, ended in divorce in 1948. Three years later, the Shah married his second wife, Soraya Esfandiari, the daughter of an Iranian father and German mother. Despite his passion for Soraya, the Shah divorced her in 1958 because she was deemed infertile. In the early 1960s, the Shah eventually married his third wife, Farah Diba, to whom he remained married until his death in 1980. The last Queen of Iran gave birth to four children, including Crown Prince Reza. The queen was a French-educated, progressive woman whose influence on culture and social welfare matters in Iran was undeniable.¹⁹⁹

During the 1960s and 1970s, the presentation of the royal family as the ideal model for the family in Iran was part of the process of cultural transformation and state

¹⁹⁸ Najmabadi, "Hazards of Modernity and Morality," 63.

¹⁹⁹ Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 141.

modernization. As Parvin Paidar states, in this model the Shah/father was presented as “powerful, masculine, single-minded, moralistic, protective, and the undisputed head of his family,” who supported the idea of women’s participation in society but opposed women “who tried to imitate men,” and who “respected women as long as they were beautiful, feminine, and moderately clever.”²⁰⁰

Under this model, Queen Farah was portrayed as an ideal Iranian woman. As a woman she was beautiful, feminine, and elegant; as a wife she was loyal, subservient, and caring; as a mother she was devoted and conscientious. She believed that her prime responsibility in life was looking after her husband and children, but her role as a queen required her to take an interest in extra-familial affairs. She left the “serious” business of the state in the hands of her husband and took up “feminine” pursuits, such as social welfare, education, art, and culture.²⁰¹

In *Savushun*, Simin Daneshvar on the one hand uses this model to depict the life story of a happy couple, Yusof and Zari, and on the other challenges this order by narrating Zari’s internal conflicts. This is the first time in the history of Persian literature that a female author writes a historical novel. The story is set in Shiraz, during the last year of World War II. Unlike her first and second collections of short stories, in *Savushun* Simin Daneshvar does not refer to specific gender inequalities in law, but there is a clear call in this story for a woman’s self-emancipation. Literary criticism of this novel has largely overlooked the relationship between the reforms in women’s legal

²⁰⁰ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 148–49. The quotation is from the Shah’s interview with the journalist Oriana Fallaci in 1976.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 149.

condition and social status in the 1960s and the creation of the first and one of the most acclaimed novels of Persian literature written by a woman.

As in Daneshvar's previous stories, the central character in *Savushun* is a woman. Zari is an educated woman, the mother of three children, living in a well-off companionable marriage. Gradually her life is influenced by her husband's political activities in the aftermath of the occupation of southern Iran by British forces. The opening chapter describes the presence of Yusof and Zari at the marriage ceremony of the daughter of the governor of Fars province. In contrast to the governor, who is allied with the British conquerors, Yusof clearly opposes the presence of occupying forces and starts to criticize the indecency of local opportunists. From the very first page, Daneshvar gives clues to illustrate Zari's conflicting beliefs. While in her mind Zari admires her husband's belief, in reality she "took Yusuf by the hand and, with pleading eyes, said: For God's sake, can't you let me breathe in peace?"²⁰² The story continues with Yusuf's activities and Zari's internal conflicts, and ends with Yusuf's death and Zari's final decision to raise her voice against social injustice.

From the beginning pages we see the potential in Zari to be socially active. She is a sophisticated, unveiled, non-traditional mother, fluent in English, who accompanies her husband and interacts with men in social gatherings but does not dare to express her beliefs openly as her husband does. Even when she thinks about injustice privately, she does not take a position of her own regarding socio-political events, instead repeating

²⁰² Simin Daneshvar, *Savushun: A Novel About Modern Iran*, trans. M. R. Ghanoonparvar (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 1990), 19.

Yusof's thoughts and beliefs.²⁰³ The whole story depicts Zari's journey to seek a new identity for herself. In the first chapter, Zari and Yusof reveal their defined gender roles when they talk sympathetically with one another about the occupying forces. While Yusof identifies himself as a man who is cautious about his country's sovereignty and can't watch his peasants suffering, Zari does not identify herself as a citizen, and with a crying sound she complains that "this home is my city, my country, but they even drag the war to my home."²⁰⁴ She has not yet believed that she is an independent citizen whose household might be influenced by socio-political events. In the period during which the story is set, the Civil Code does not give women the right to vote and prevents women from taking part in the policy-making process. Not surprisingly, Zari limits her world to her house and her domestic life and has not identified herself as an Iranian citizen.

Zari's dissatisfaction with her current situation and her internal conflicts occur when she repeatedly blames herself for being passive. For example, at the governor's daughter's wedding, the bride's sister borrows Zari's emerald earrings and does not give them back. Even though they are her favourite earrings and are of great sentimental value to her, Zari avoids asking for their return. Instead, she blames herself for not saying anything, and "in her heart, she cursed herself for being such a coward," saying "spineless women like me get what they deserve."²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Ibid., 20.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 35.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 56.

Yusof frequently spends time in villages because of the nature of his work as a landowner. In his absence, Zari is in charge of the household, which includes taking care of her teenaged son, Khosrow, her little twin daughters, and her sister-in-law. On one occasion, her brother-in-law, Abol-Ghasem Khan, who is sympathetic to the governor, wants to buy Khosrow's favourite colt for the governor's daughter. Zari's sister-in-law angrily opposes Abol-Ghasem Khan's demand and asks Zari why she didn't tell them that Khosrow's father had gone to the winter pastures and that they should wait for his return the next week "to ask his permission." The sister-in-law continues, "Don't you know that my sister-in-law won't move a step without Yusof's permission?" Actually, Zari moves a step without her husband's permission, but not a step to defend her right and to reject their request. Disappointed, she decides to give the horse as is being demanded of her, and she persuades her son that the horse died.²⁰⁶ Zari's reaction to this event shows how she refuses to solve a problem or to defend a right she thinks might challenge her domestic peace. However, her attempt to keep her household away from conflict is not appreciated by her husband and her son, and she is accused of being weak and cowardly.

The Shah once claimed that he was not "influenced by any woman in his life."²⁰⁷ The way Yusof and Khosrow behave toward Zari represents the cultural milieu in which the author lived. On the one hand, Yusof admires his wife's beauty, intelligence, and English language skills, and he encourages her to be more active in society; and on the

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 82–84.

²⁰⁷ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 149. The quotation is from the Shah's interview with the journalist Oriana Fallaci in 1976.

other hand, when he becomes aware of her decision to give the colt to the governor's household, he blames her violently. For the first time he slaps his wife and says, "Shut up. In my absence, you are spineless." Zari is shocked; she did not know that this would "also be the last time she would be harassed by such harsh and patriotic behaviour."²⁰⁸ From this point on, Zari is more aware of her male relatives attitudes toward her. She notices that her son is losing confidence in his mother's strength. When Khosrow understands that his mother lied to him, he goes without her permission to steal back the colt and says aggressively, "What cowards and liars women are! All they can do is dig graves, bury, and then weep."²⁰⁹

It is beyond Zari's tolerance to see how her male relatives allow themselves to humiliate her. Annoyed, she responds to her son:

Yes, dear. In your opinion and that of your father . . . I am a coward, a weakling. I am always afraid that something might happen to one of you. I can't bear the thought. But I, too . . . when I was a girl, I, too, was brave in my own way.²¹⁰

Zari revolts toward her beloved husband and reveals her opinion. She addresses her husband and says, "Do you want to hear more truths? Then listen. It is you who have taken my courage away. I have put up with you for so long that it has become a habit with me."²¹¹ Yusof is shocked at this outburst, but Zari is not ready enough to continue

²⁰⁸ Daneshvar, *Savushun*, 159.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

the debate, and she backs down. However, that same night before falling asleep, she notices that something has changed in her life.

In bed . . . despite Yusof’s cool hand that caressed her hot belly, and despite his kisses, Zari seemed to have forgotten all about coquettishness and playfulness. She kept wondering whether she had always been a coward or had become one, and whether Yusof was to blame. For one instant, she even concluded that marriage is wrong in principle.²¹²

Zari starts to review her life experiences—her childhood and her years in a British missionary high school—to retrieve her confidence and develop her independence.

Because of her improved self-awareness, her reaction to the next challenge she faces is different. This time, one of her corrupt female relatives requests an illegal action from her to save a smuggler’s life. Zari has a new standard now to help her decide whether to accept or refuse. Before accepting or refusing what she has been asked to do, she wonders, “What would be courageous, if I did this or not?” Eventually, she says, “No, I won’t do it. I’m sorry.”²¹³ This is the first time she decides confidently to defend what she thinks is fair, even if the position she takes might threaten her situation. Eventually she attempts to express her own opinions, which might be different from her husband’s.

As the story develops, Zari’s political consciousness increases. For example, once when Yusof led a political debate in his house with his guests, Zari was “politely asked

²¹² Ibid., 175.

²¹³ Ibid., 223–25.

to leave, even though she very much wanted to stay.”²¹⁴ She did not insist on participating in political debates, and she thought,

Coward or courageous, with her kind of life and upbringing, it would be impossible for her to engage in anything that would disrupt the normal flow of life. A person must be physically and psychologically prepared for things that smell of danger, and she had been prepared for peace and tranquillity, not danger. She had neither the courage nor the endurance. If she weren’t so much attached to her children and her husband, things might be different.²¹⁵

Her husband’s eventual death because of his political activities provides a space for Zari to present another aspect of herself. One day after Yusof’s death, she accepts the bitter reality of her loss. Her older brother-in-law, who is sympathetic to the governor and the British forces, in favour of his political interests tried to convince Zari to remain silent and attempts to prevent a public funeral ceremony for Yusof to avoid a mass demonstration. In response, Zari says, “Today, I have come to the conclusion that one must be brave while alive and for the living. Unfortunately, I realized this too late.”²¹⁶ Zari insists on holding a burial procession, which turns into a conflict between government troops and Yusof’s supporters. Finally, she finds a purpose beyond the traditional roles dictated by her gender. A political cause moves Zari from being the dependent wife of a political activist to being an independent woman who takes action toward social justice.

As I mentioned before, in the period during which *Savushun* was written, the political authority of women was developing. In addition to women’s suffrage and

²¹⁴ Ibid., 247.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 364.

women's entrance into parliament, the 1967 amendment to the Constitution of 1906 permitted Queen Farah to take the monarch's office under two conditions: if the Shah were dead and if their son were under twenty.²¹⁷ Simin Daneshvar wisely illustrates this irony of the situation in which a woman's political rights and her equal rights in the family were improved, yet neither an ordinary woman nor the queen could gain absolute political power unless her husband were dead and her son had not yet reached the legal age of majority.

In the post-1963 period, another female writer - Forough Farrokhzad - paid attention to gender equality. Hamid Dabbashi believes that Farrokhzad's *Tavalodi Digar* can best be defined as a "second birth" because it demonstrated the poet's celebration of a new life consciousness.²¹⁸ Surprisingly, most scholars and even the poet herself have neglected the influence of cultural and legal gender reforms in the development of self-confidence and life consciousness in individual women. In 1962, Farrokhzad wrote in a letter:

Whatever I have, I've gotten from and by myself. And all the things that I do not have, I could have had. But mistaken paths and lack of self-awareness and dead-ends in life have not allowed me to attain them.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 158.

²¹⁸ Hamid Dabbashi, "Forough Farrokhzad and Formative Forces of Iranian Culture," in *Forough Farrokhzad: A Quarter Century Later*, ed. Michael C. Hillmann (Austin: Literature East and West, 1988), 29.

²¹⁹ Amir Esmaili and Abolghasem Separate, eds., "Az Chand Name-ye Forough" [From several of Forough's letters], *Javdane-ha, Forough Farrokhzad* [Immortal, Forough Farrokhzad] (Tehran: Marjan, 1972). Translation is from Hillmann, *A Lonely Woman*, 64-65.

However, Farrokhzad's understanding of gender equality is evident in her explanation of the feminine voice of her poems. In a radio interview in 1964, she declared:

If . . . my poem contains a degree of femininity, well it is quite natural owing to the fact that I am a woman. I am glad I am a woman. But if the criterion used is artistic value, then I do not think sex can be propounded (as a determining factor). Discussing this matter is not right in the first place. Naturally because of her physical, emotional and psychological qualities, a woman focuses on problems that are perhaps not apt to be scrutinized by a man, and a feminine 'vision' relates to problems that differ from those of a man.²²⁰

In her fourth collection, Farrokhzad challenges the notion of the happiness of middle-class and upper-class women who have remained socially and politically passive:

You can be like mechanical dolls,
gazing at your world with glassy eyes.
Your straw-stuffed form
can sleep through the years in its velvet case,
dressed up with sequined voile.
To the pressure of any pressing hand,
you can squeak inanely,
"Oh, how happy I am!"²²¹

In another poem, "Ey Marz-e Por Gohar" ("O Bejewelled Land"), she declares her individuality, saying:

I did it
I got myself registered
dressed myself up in an ID card with a name
and my existence was distinguished by a number

²²⁰ Forough Farrokhzad, *Harfha-yi ba Forough Farrokhzad: Chaharr Goft o Shenood* [Conversations with Forough Farrokhzad: Four Interviews] (Tehran: Morvarid, 1977), 21–22. Translation is from Hillmann, *A Lonely Woman*, 64–65.

²²¹ Forough Farrokhzad, *Bride of Acacias: Selected Poems of Forough Farrokhzad*, trans. Jascha Kessler and Amin Banani (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1982), 45.

So long live 678, issued by precinct 5, resident of Tehran.²²²

This poem also provides an example of her social critiques of the 1960s, such as the unemployment issue. For example, she writes:

And at the bottom of six-hundred seventy-eight IOU's
atop six-hundred seventy-eight job applications, I wrote
Forough Farrokhzad²²³

It can be concluded that a woman is no longer pictured only inside the house, dealing with domestic life; instead she is now a citizen, involved in the social, political, and economic structure of her society.

Modern lifestyle, popular culture, and women's sexuality

In the late 1960s and the 1970s, bars, restaurants, and nightclubs mushroomed in large cities throughout the country. The state's propaganda which pushed for the adoption of a Western lifestyle, coupled with the increasing growth of relationships between Iranians and Westerners through tourism and professional travels, transformed the daily life of urban Iranian families. The modern lifestyle of upper-middle-class citizens was both established through and reflected by modern architecture, sophisticated shopping malls, designed parks, and wide boulevards filled with shiny American cars.

²²² Translation is from Farrokhzad, *Another Birth and Other Poems*, 99.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 99.

This transformation was most obvious in the entertainment sector. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, Iranian popular culture dealt with erotica and the representation of sexuality in media and popular publications. By the 1960s, the urban middle classes were demanding television sets to purchase and television programs to watch on them. Sex and erotica became the central subjects of the movie industry and popular magazines.²²⁴ In this period, popular arts included commercial movies, entertaining dance, television shows, serialized stories in popular magazines, and pop music.²²⁵

During this period, the production and popularity of FilmFarsi, the most important type of commercial movies, influenced the presentation of female sexuality in popular culture. Some critics have compared FilmFarsi movies to Bollywood films and American soap operas, with weak plots and simplistic messages. The dominant themes of this genre included the simplistic representation of social class conflicts, such as the challenges a poor young woman had to face to build a relationship with the rich family of her lover, or the struggle of a poor young man to attract a rich young woman; the repentance of a prostitute; conflicts between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law; honour killing; and the emotional relationship between an Iranian woman and a foreigner. Ironically, while female nudity was presented in this genre, it encouraged young women to follow traditional rules of chastity and modesty.²²⁶

²²⁴ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 221–22.

²²⁵ Talattof, *Modernity, Sexuality, and Ideology in Iran*, 40.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 12, 42, 111.

Erotica and pornography were criticized by both Islamic and secular groups. *Towfiq*, a secular, popular satirical magazine, regularly criticized the development of erotica in the society by showing semi-pornographic pictures of a student, a secretary, a nurse, a police officer, or a newly married woman as a sex object.²²⁷ Jafar Shahri, a popular describer of contemporary Tehran, claims that in the 1960s “the streets, towns, cities and villages were all filled with such prostitutes. The offices had become almost whorehouses to the point where only willing women were employed. Television and radio programs provided guides to such immoralities.”²²⁸ In fact, Shahri claimed, not only could sex be purchased in Tehran’s red-light districts and in the streets surrounding sex workers’ neighbourhoods, but the culture of sex had spread into public places.²²⁹

However, the negative messages of FilmFarsi and the objectification of women’s bodies in the film and advertising industries were not reflected in women’s literature. In fact, the changing sexual norms and the improving situation of women in the society provided a space for female poets to express their sexuality in a more confident way than they had in previous decades. In contrast to the image of women in pictured in media, the different approaches women’s literature took to deal with sex and sexuality is evident in the works of Forough Farrokhzad and Kobra Saeedi. Women’s literature also reflects the ongoing changes in the lifestyle of the new generation of Iranian women.

²²⁷ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 223.

²²⁸ Jafar Shahri, *Tarikh-e Ejtemai Tehran dar Gharn-e Sizdahom*, vol. 6 [A social history of Tehran in 20th century] (Tehran: Rasa Publication, 1990), 297.

²²⁹ In the mid-1970s, a huge walled zone for prostitution within Tehran was known as *Shahr-e No* (new city).

Mashid Amirshahi more than any other female author of pre-revolutionary Iran depicts the daily life of modern, upper-class, urban families during the 1960s and 1970s. In her three collections of short stories published in pre-revolutionary Iran, she developed a sophisticated, young, humorous, confident female character named Suri whose story also reflects the author's own life story and depicts the daily life experiences of the new generations during the 1960s and 1970s. In Amirshahi's *Sar-e Bibi Khanom (Bibi Khanom's Starling, 1968)*, *Bad Az Ruz-e Akhar (After the Last Day, 1969)*, and *Be Sigh-e Aval Shakhs-e Mofrad (First Person Singular, 1971)*, there are eight short stories in total about Suri, a seventeen-year-old high school student. Suri's observations about life are sometimes exaggerated but still valid. J. E. Knörzer collected, translated, and published these short stories in an English volume under the title *Suri & Co.: Tales of a Persian Teenage Girl*.

In a short story entitled "Big Brother's Future In-Laws," published in Amirshahi's first collection of short stories in 1968, the author uses humorous language to illustrate some challenges a family faces in relation to a new generation of teenage girls who adopt a new 'modern' lifestyle. The story is set in an elegant restaurant in Tehran. The opening sentence of the story suggests dramatic changes in the gendered, hierarchal value system. The teenager is about to order her food, and although she says she "really wanted orange juice" to drink with her food, she decides to get whiskey instead, thinking she might be considered "adult" in this way.²³⁰ The whole story is shaped around Suri's

²³⁰ Mahshid Amirshahi, *Suri & Co.: Tales of a Persian Teenage Girl*, trans. J. E. Knörzer (Austin: The Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, 1995), 11.

challenging decision to drink alcohol in a public place and in the presence of her family and her brother's new family.

Although alcohol use was permitted in pre-revolutionary Iran, even moderate alcohol consumption for young women in the presence of older family members was considered an inappropriate behaviour. In this story Suri represents a new generation of young Iranian women who adopted a new lifestyle and challenged the patriarchal, hierarchal family structure that gave the male members of the family the authority to control women's bodies and behaviour. Suri is the rebel girl in these stories, but she, too, is wondering about her brother's reaction to her decision. She confesses, "I was afraid that while the waiter was still at the table, my brother's amazement would reach the point where he would give my ear a hearty smack."²³¹

Big Brother's reaction presents the changing patriarchal order. Not surprisingly, he reacts to his sister's decision, but there is an obvious change in the traditional patriarchal brother-sister relationship in which the elder brother was previously in charge of his sister's body and behaviour, particularly if the father was absent. Although he is not sympathetic to her sister's decision, he has lost the power to prevent her from drinking alcohol because the new social life provides an opportunity for her to drink alcohol in public places. Suri says, "The only person who took me seriously was the waiter. He asked, 'With ice and soda?' I replied, 'Yes.'"²³² Suri describes her brother's reaction in these words:

²³¹ Ibid., 11.

²³² Ibid., 12.

*Dadash*²³³ said softly and angrily: “You’ve really wasted good stuff. If you have to drink whiskey, at least drink it like a man!” He spoke so softly that—what can I say?—not only our table but literally everybody in the restaurant heard it.²³⁴

Suri is annoyed that her brother does not acknowledge her as a grown-up, independent person who is responsible for her life and her decisions and who is capable of taking care of her body and her life. Disappointed because she can’t persuade him to respect her independence, Suri thinks of revealing a secret she knows about her brother’s romantic relationship with his fiancé in order to challenge his hierarchal, patriarchal position. However, the fiancé’s family interrupts her and does not let Suri to go beyond saying, “That day under the trees, it was all . . .”²³⁵

In the last pages of the story, Suri gets drunk and tries aggressively to emerge from invisibility. Her brother cannot tolerate her behaviour, and having never learned to communicate with her effectively, once again harasses her, saying, “Shut up for a minute, or I’ll give you one in the mouth and knock your teeth down your throat!”²³⁶ This may be only verbal violence, but it shows what challenges a young man in an upper-middle-class family who accepted a new lifestyle could face in his daily life. In contrast, the young woman, who is portrayed as a confident character, the next day

²³³ Big Brother

²³⁴ Ibid., 13.

²³⁵ Ibid., 15.

²³⁶ Ibid., 17.

proudly tells her girlfriend, “Last night was Big Brother’s engagement party. You should’ve been there, we really hit the whiskey.”²³⁷

In another short story, “My Grandfather, the Grandson of this Gentleman’s Aunt,” Amirshahi creates another plot to illustrate the sophisticated young woman’s relationship to the changing patriarchal structure. In this story Suri is looking for a part-time job. Her uncle, who has his network in the bureaucratic system, conditionally accepts her decision and offers to find an “appropriate job” for her. The day she goes to apply for a job, she feels annoyed to see how middle-aged male strangers seem to feel that it is okay to interfere in her life. On this occasion, a distant relative of Suri’s, without her permission, takes away her cigarette and her cigarette case to prevent her from smoking. Suri complains, “I can never get away from this one or that one. Whoever you can imagine, he will be lording it over me.”²³⁸ The story “Interview” is also about Suri’s desire to work. In opposition to Big Brother, Suri’s grandmother, who supported the Unveiling Act during Reza Shah’s reign, takes Suri’s side. Her sister-in-law, also a supporter of gender equality, defends Suri and tells her husband, Big Brother, “She is no way inferior to any boy of her age!” Finally, her uncle again volunteers to find an “appropriate job” for her.²³⁹

Amirshahi also sheds light on young people’s everyday entertainment during the late 1960s and the 1970s. In a short story called “Party,” Suri is invited to a party at a

²³⁷ Ibid., 19.

²³⁸ Ibid., 20–25.

²³⁹ Ibid., 58–59.

classmate's house. The author depicts the influence of Western culture in the everyday life of the young generation. She also uses the English word "party" as distinct from *mehmani*, the Persian equivalent. In this story, the Western form of social gathering involves drinking alcohol, dancing to popular Western music, and smoking. Young men and women are described as open-minded and sophisticated individuals who enjoy their relationship with members of the opposite sex and chat about Hollywood. However, the continuing influence of traditional culture is obvious. For example, there is no male guest whose sister is not at the party. Furthermore, a girl and boy who like each other do not feel comfortable kissing each other in places they might be seen by others.²⁴⁰

"Peyton Police" is another story that shows young people's passion to watch Hollywood movies on television and talk with family members about the romantic love depicted in movies. However, in reality, when Suri talks about the romantic love of a couple in their family circle, an elderly woman reacts: "What's to be done with the young people of this generation, I ask you?! They've no respect for anything!"²⁴¹

What is assumed here to be disrespect is actually a sign of the culture's changing view of sexual morality and the expression of romantic love by young females. As I mentioned before, one of the characteristic of the 1960s and 1970s is the increasing presence of nudity and sex-objectification of women in advertisements, cinema, and TV series. Although women's literature, and particularly the female poets, opposed the sexual objectification of women and provided an artistic and symbolic image of

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 31–36.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 69.

sexuality and love, they at the same time benefited from the open space to build a new understanding of sexuality.

Forough Farrokhzad, in her fourth and fifth collections of poetry, freed herself from her internal feelings of embarrassment and guilt regarding her sexual desire, which was evident in her earlier works, and confidently expressed:

All night something was telling my heart
How excited you are to see him
....
My body burning beneath your touch
My hair abandoned to your breath
I blossomed in love²⁴²

In another poem called “Vasl” (“Union”) she provides a poetic description of love-making and orgasm. In this poem the wind, which is a symbolic representation of movement and freedom, takes away the curtain to uncover windows and to connect her private life to the public life and makes her sexual romance visible. She writes:

I saw him breaking over me in waves
like the red glow of fire
like a watery reflection
like a cloud terminal with rains
like a sky breathing summery warmth
toward infinity
spreading
beyond the life here
...
The curtain blew off on the wind
I had pressed him
in the aura of the flames
...
I saw myself released
I saw myself released

²⁴² Translation is from Farrokhzad, *Bride of Acacias*, 22.

...
Crying out in one another
that whole, shifting instant of union we madly lived
in one another²⁴³

In *Another Birth* and *Let us Believe in the Oncoming Season of Cold*, the images of “cage” and “captivity” are replaced by “window” and “connection.” In one of her last poems, “Window,” Farrokhzad talks about “a window for seeing,” “a window for hearing,” “one window is enough for me,” and “a window for a moment of awareness.”²⁴⁴ She is no longer an isolated woman, captive in her unhappy marriage, who feels sinful to have sexual desire. In her last poems she moves away from her thirst for romance and experiences a multi-faceted life with a deep intellectual and emotional awareness.

Even for a FilmFarsi actress, Shahrzad, the erotica and pornography pictured in cinema turns into a confident romantic relationship in poems. In a poem entitled “To Mehman-e Chashman-e Man Hasti” (“You Are the Guest of my Eyes”), published in *Slam Agha* (Hello, Sir), she writes:

There is a rose in my left eye,
and my right eye
is a flower
...
and
I became a rose
your powerful chest
your powerful head
Wrapping me inside the bouquet of your arms
We stood in the middle of a garden:

²⁴³ Ibid., 34–35.

²⁴⁴ Translation is from Farrokhzad, *Another Birth and Other Poems*, 141–43.

wealth
jasmine
in morning light
I wore a garland of roses
your teeth
fruits to my lips²⁴⁵

Shahzad's poetry often features symbols of her own design. This makes the interpretation of her poems in a social context more difficult. For example, Kamran Tallatof, a biographer of Shahzad, reads the poem "Zan Budam" ("I Was a Woman") in the context of masculinity and femininity:

I was a Woman
Darling
I broke your guitar
When you played, you did not need me
I broke your guitar
Darling
Darling
Oh when playing your guitar
I was a woman²⁴⁶

Talattof gets "the man's guitar" as his "instrument," which refers to his sexual organ and his masculinity. She portrays a sexual intercourse in which the man assumes the woman as a sexual object, which was against her wish. In this interpretation the woman revolts against the man's sexual abuse and breaks his "instrument." However, this phallic image was not common in Iran. Talattof believes that Shahzad created many

²⁴⁵ Kobra Saeedi. "To Mehman-e Chashman-e Man Hasti," in *Salam Agha: Majmue Sher [Hello, Sir: A Collection of Poetry]*. (Tehran: Donyaye Ketab, 1978). Translation is from Talattof, *Modernity, Sexuality, and Ideology in Iran*, 138–139.

²⁴⁶ Kobra Saeedi, "Zan Budan," in *Salam Agha*. Translation is from Talattof, *Modernity, Sexuality, and Ideology in Iran*, 139.

metaphors in her poems and the meaning of her metaphors and symbols becomes clear only if the reader looks at the body of her work as a whole, in other words, all her poems.²⁴⁷

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed how important reforms in women's legal status from the 1963 White Revolution to the 1979 Islamic Revolution influenced the content of women's writing to challenge gender equality. In tracing the relationship between legal reforms and women's writing, the fact that three of the most acclaimed fiction and poetry collections in the history of modern Persian literature in general and women's literature in particular were published in this period should not be ignored. These works include Simin Daneshvar's masterpiece, *Savushun (A Persian Requiem)*, 1969, and Fough Farrokhzad's *Tavaloddi Digar (Another Birth/Rebirth)*, 1964 and *Iman Biavarim be Aghaz-e Fasl-e Sard (Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season)*, 1974). However, Farrokhzad and Daneshvar do not refer directly to these changes in women's status in their work; they conceptualize the changing place of women in the political and social structure of Iran.

Daneshvar in contrast to her previous work, which focused predominantly on unequal family laws and conflicts between traditional and modern women, emphasized in her first novel, which was published five years after women's suffrage and two years after the ratification of the Family Protection Act, the importance of women's

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 139.

participation in politics and decision-making processes. She portrayed an unveiled, educated woman who did not suffer from discriminatory gender laws in her marriage but who had not been successful in moving from her traditional, inferior position and remained a follower of her husband. While gender relationships remained central in all of Daneshvar's pre-revolutionary work, Farrokhzad in her last works, which were published in the 1960s and 1970s, focused on women's individuality. The name of her fourth work, *Tavaloddi Digar*, published two years after women's suffrage, symbolizes the new age of gender equality and women's success in gaining an equal right to vote.

Women's literature also reflects the changes in lifestyle that were characteristic of the 1960s and 1970s in Iran. Mahshid Amirshahi could be named as the observer of upper-middle-class daily life in Tehran in this period. She distances herself from the socio-political trends of this period and intelligently uses a humorous tone to describe daily events in her short stories. However, the subjects she writes about are linked to the larger socio-political context of this period and mirror the surrounding society. In this period the entertainment industry was an essential inspiration and instigation of the dramatic changes that appeared in the presentation of female sexuality. Interestingly, female poets refused to adopt or disseminate the sexual politics spread by the media. The increasing presentation of nudity and female sexual objectification found its expression in women's literature in the confident expression of sexuality in the works of Forough Farrokhzad and Kobra Saeedi, known as Shahrzad. In fact, the development in women's legal rights in this period was instrumental in creating one of the most productive periods for women writers under the Pahlavi regime.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding analysis, I argued that, as a cultural phenomenon, the literature produced by Iranian women during the modernization period under the Shah reflected the reality of women's lives from the perspective of women authors. I explored women's literary works to illustrate the way female authors approached in their works women's issues and gender reforms from within the cultural context. Moreover, to show the origins of women's expression, I also examined Female Plays, a popular form of oral literature among women in the nineteenth century. The shift from women's oral literature to written literature was marked by improvements in women's participation in the society and developments in women's literacy that took place during and after the Constitutional Revolution. I explained how women's writing in modern Iran began with women's journalism in the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution and under Reza Shah's rule in the early twentieth century. In fact, women's journalism bridged the gap from women's oral literature to women's written literature and paved the way for female authors to publish literary books in the ensuing decades.

I also argued that, counter to the common assumption about the passivity of women in the sex-segregated society of nineteenth-century Iran, Female Plays as a popular form of women's oral literature during the nineteenth century indicates that pre-modern Iranian women were not voiceless. In fact, the central themes of Female Plays are similar to those of women's written literary works since they also deal with women's domestic issues and female sexuality. Indeed, the main difference between the Female Plays and women's later works is that the modernization of women and the sex

desegregation policy of Reza Shah and his successor, the Shah, provided a space for women to express their feelings and opinions not only to female audiences but also to readers in the general public. As well, while the authorship of the Female Plays was for the most part anonymous, during the Shah's reign individual female writers began to appear and to be known by name.

Furthermore, I suggest that the position female authors took in relation to the Pahlavis' gender policies was neither to protest nor to support, but rather to reflect shifts in women's daily experiences. An examination of the collections of short stories and poems that were produced in the 1940s and early 1950s shows that in this period female authors were concerned with the unveiling policy of Reza Shah, women's education, marriage, and female sexuality. Simin Daneshvar, the first female author to publish a collection of short stories in Iran, in her first book, *Atash-e Khamoush (Quenched Fire)*, (1948), presented a new generation of young, educated, unveiled women who experienced more open gender relations. These women objected to arranged marriage and attempted to practise some independence in their personal lives. *Atash-e Khamoush (Quenched Fire)* suggests that improvements in economic opportunities for educated women gave them the confidence to not approach the institution of marriage based on their economic dependency on men, as was the case for traditional women. However, inequality in family laws and traditional gender norms in the 1940s and 1950s prevented women from balancing a professional life with their roles as wife and mother. In her first collection of poems, *Asir (Captive)* (1951), Forough Farrokhzad depicts herself as a

“slave” and a “captive” bird in a “cage”— a metaphoric representation of the limited life of a married woman at the time—.

Another central theme in women’s literature during the Shah’s era was female sexuality. In fact, tracing the changes in how women’s sexuality was approached and portrayed in women’s literature in the period from the 1940s to the 1970s reveals the cultural transformation the society experienced. From the two published literary collections prior to the 1953 coup d’état, it is evident that female sexuality in that period was still under the strong influence of traditional gender morality. A woman who engaged in pre-marital sex might kill herself because the dominant culture highly valued women’s virginity prior to marriage. My analysis of both a female character’s life in stories and a female poet’s sexual expression supports this idea that at the time a young woman still felt vulnerable regarding the experience of sexual pleasure.

From the coup d’état of 1953 to the 1963 White Revolution, no legal changes occurred regarding women’s position in the society and in the family. However, the presentation of the concept of “city-social life,” either in the title or in the content of women’s literary works, clearly reflected cultural transitions the society was experiencing during this period. Improvements in women’s participation in the society and in the labour force enhanced gender relations and also challenged women’s domestic obligations. Thus, based on women’s literature, one can conclude that the patriarchal family structure and gender roles were challenged prior to the ratification of new family laws in the late 1960s and the 1970s.

Through the portrayal of a powerless traditional woman versus a powerful modern woman, Simin Daneshvar, in her second collection of short stories, published in 1961, suggested that the life of a modern woman was no longer limited to child bearing and cooking. In one story a traditional woman's husband left her and married a second wife, a literate, employed, sophisticated woman. The second wife, a modern woman, is a positive model of a woman not limited to the roles of wife and mother. At the same time, perhaps she is a sign that the appearance of a new generation of women who were more visible and active in the society threatened the place of traditional women in the family, because a group of modern men appreciated women who could accompany them in their social and economic life. In the same year, Simin Behbahani in a well known poem, "O' Men," addressed her fellow countrymen and reminded them of the changing position of women who refused to remain in a subordinate position in gender relations and declared that women would accompany men in various aspects of social life as well as in private life.

The growth of women's participation in society also changed women's expression of sexual desire. How women's literature reacted to changing gender culture shows the progressive position female poets took to define female sexuality. One of the most controversial poems concerning gender and sexual relations in the history of modern Persian literature was published in 1956. In a poem called "Sin," Forough Farrokhzad carved her name in the history of modern Persian literature as the first female artist who dared to publicize a romantic sexual intercourse. In the same period, Simin Behbahani from a new perspective portrayed female sexuality for her readers. In a transitional

society with a more open space for gender relations she distinguished between female sexual pleasure and the sexual objectification of women.

In the following years, as women's status in law changed significantly, the focus of women's literature shifted from domestic issues to more social and political issues. After 1963, women's suffrage, the enhancement of women's participation in higher political decision making, and improvements in women's legal position within the institution of marriage were reflected in women's literature with a sense of a movement toward greater gender equality. Women's literature in this period did not deal with women's education, arranged marriage, polygamy, or loveless marriage. Instead women's political awakening and women's self-confidence became the central themes. Women's literature shows that legal reforms in the 1960s and 1970s took women's issues to a new level. As the title of Farrokhzad's most accomplished book—*Tavalodi Digar (Another Birth, 1964)*—suggests, women's position in Iranian society after 1963 was a new beginning, and the result of a lengthy process of growth and transformation.

The influence of the entertainment industry on popular culture during the 1960s and 1970s is also undeniable, and Mashid Amirshahi more than any other author during this period presented changing city life. Young people, girls and boys, met each other at parties, bars, cinemas, theatres, concerts, and other urban public places. In this period of significant transformation in gender norms and gender relationships, Amirshahi, with great humour, depicted the internal family conflicts created by the development of a new generation of young, educated, sophisticated, and confident women who grew up during and after the period of gender modernization and who, unlike their mothers and

grandmothers, did not need to struggle for their basic rights. The ubiquitous representation of female sexuality by the entertainment industry, together with the less-discriminated-against position of women in the family and in the society, also created a space for women to more confidently present their own sexual desire in literature.

What is remarkable is that the subject matter of women's literature changed significantly from the 1940s and 1950s to the 1960s and 1970s. While the early women's literature was concerned with unveiling, women's education, marriage, and polygamy, in the post-1963 era, the focus shifted to individual women's political and social identity and capturing deeper gender equality. No associations of women writers existed during the Shah's era, and even some of the female authors who started to work in Iran before the revolution met for the first time only after the revolution in Iran.²⁴⁸ Modern women's literature was not a product of ideology; rather, by communicating their ideas, modern female authors participated in a collective action to mirror interactions between Iranian woman, gender policies, and transitional culture. This study was an attempt to show how examining the literature female authors produced under the Shah's rule contributes to our understanding of the history of women during the process of changing gender policy.

²⁴⁸ Simin Daneshvar and Simin Behbahani, for example, both lived in Tehran but first met in the 1980s.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Amirshahi, Mahshid. *Suri & Co.: Tales of a Persian Teenage Girl*. Translated by J. E. Knörzer. Austin: The Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, 1995.

———. “*Honar Margpazir Nist*” [*Art is immortal: An interview with Niloofar Beyzayi*]. Talsh: A special issue on Mahshid Amirshahi. October 2003. <http://www.amirshahi.org/Biography/beizai.htm>.

Bazihaye Namayeshi [dramatic games]. Edited by A. Anjavi-Shirazi, Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1974.

Bamdad, Badr al-Moluk. *From Darkness into Light*. Translated by F. R. C. Bagley. Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1977.

Behbahani, Simin. *Majmue-ye Ash'ar [The collection of poetries]*. Tehran: Negah, 2005.

———. “Ba Talash va Talatom” [With strife and tumult]. In *Ba Qalb-e Khod Cheh Kharidam: Gozineh-ye Qessehha va Yadha*. Los Angeles: Sherkat-e Ketab, 1996.

———. *Marmar [Marble]*. Tehran: Zavvar, 1961.

Daneshvar, Simin. *Atash-e Khamush [Quenched fire]*. Tehran: Ali Akbar Elmi, 1948.

———. *Ghoroub-e Jalal [The sunset of Jalal's days]*. Tehran: Ravagh, 1981.

———. *Savushun: A Novel About Modern Iran*. Translated by M. R. Ghanoonparvar. Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 1990.

———. *Shahri Chon Behesht [A city like paradise]*. Tehran: Kharazmi, 1983.

Eshghi, Mirzadeh. “Women in Shrouds.” Translated by Eliz Sanasarian, in *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini*. New York: Praeger, 1982.

Farrokhzad, Forough. *Another Birth and Other Poems*. Translated by Hasan Javadi and Susan Sallee. Washington, DC: Mage Publisher, 2010.

———. *Asir [Captive]*. Tehran: Amirkabir, 1974.

———, “Az Chand Name-ye Forough” [From several of Forough’s letters]. *Javdane-ha, Forough Farrokhzad [Immortal, Forough Farrokhzad]*. Edited by Amir Esmaili, and Abolghasem Separate. Tehran: Marjan, 1972.

———. *Bride of Acacias: Selected Poems of Forough Farrokhzad*, translated by Jascha Kessler and Amin Banani. Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1982.

———. *Harfha-yi ba Forough Farrokhzad: Chaharr Goft o Shenood [Conversations with Forough Farrokhzad: Four Interviews]*. Tehran: Morvarid, 1977.

———. *Sin: Selected Poems of Forough Farrokhzad*. Translated by Sholeh Wolpé. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007.

Iradj Mirza. *Divan-e Kamel*, edited by Mohammad Jafar Mahjub. Los Angeles: Ketab Corporation, 1989.

Kasrai, Ahmad. *Kaharan va Dokhtaran-e Ma*. Tehran: Payman, 1945.

Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza. *Answer to History*. New York: Stein and Day, 1980.

Saeedi, Kobra. *Salam Agha: Majmue Sher [Hello, Sir: A Collection of Poetry]*. Tehran: Donyaye Ketab, 1978.

Shamlu, Ahmad. “She’ri keh Zendegist.” In *Hava-ye Tazeh [Fresh Air]*, 87–99. Tehran: Nil, 1975.

Archival Sources

The Archive of Majles Shoraye Melli [National Consultative Assembly archive], *Ghanoun-e Hemayat-e Khanevadeh 1346 [Family Protection Act of 1967]*

[http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/96054?keyword=
%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%20%D8%AD
%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA%20%D8%AE
%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%87](http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/96054?keyword=%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%20%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA%20%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%87)

———, *Ghanoun-e Mojazat-e Omoumi 1304 [The Penal Code of 1926], Article 179.*

[http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/91023?keyword=
%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%20%D9%85%D8%AC
%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%AA
%20%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C](http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/91023?keyword=%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%20%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%AA%20%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C)

———, *Ghanoun-e Raje be Ezdevaj 1310 [Marriage Act of 1931]*

[http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/92288?keyword=
%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AF
%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC](http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/92288?keyword=%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC)

Asnad-e Enghelab-e Islami: Elamiye-ha, Etelaiye-ha, Bayaniyeh-ha, Payam-ha, Telegraf-ha, Name-haye Ayate Ozzam va Maraje'e Taghlid. [The documents for the Islamic Revolution]. Tehran: Markaz-e Enghelab-e Eslami, 1995.

Secondary Sources

Books

Abrahamian, Ervand. *Iran between Two Revolutions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.

Afary, Janet. *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

———. *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Amin, Camron Michael. *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman: Gender, State Policy, and Popular Culture, 1865–1946*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002.

- Bamdad, Badr al-Moluk. *Zan-e Irani: az Enqelab-e Mashrutiyat ta Enqelab-e Sefid* [Iranian women from the Constitutional Revolution to the White Revolution]. Tehran: Ebne Sina, 1968.
- Banani, Amin. *The Modernization of Iran, 1921–1941*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984.
- Beiza'i, Bahram. *Namayesh dar Iran* [Theatre in Iran]. Tehran: Kaivan Press, 1965.
- Chelkowski, Peter, and Hamid Dabashi. *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran*. New York: New York University Press, 1999.
- Floor, Willem. *The History of Theater in Iran*. Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2005.
- . *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*. Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2008.
- Ghanoonparvar, M. R. *Prophets of Doom: Literature as a Socio-Political Phenomenon in Modern Iran*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1984.
- Milani, Farzaneh. *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voice of Iranian Women Writers*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992.
- Mirabedini, Hasan. *Sad Sal Dastan Nevisi dar Iran* [One hundred years of fiction-writing in Iran]. Vols. 1 and 2. Tehran: Cheshmeh, 2001.
- Moghadam, Valentine. *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2003.
- Motlagh, Amy. *Burying the Beloved: Marriage, Realism, Reform in Modern Iran*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012.
- Keddie, Nikki R. *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Hillmann, Michael. *Lonely Woman: Forugh Farrokhzad and Her Poetry*. Boulder: Three Continents Press, 1987.
- Najmabadi, Afsaneh. *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

Paidar, Parvin. *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth Century Iran*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Sanasarian, Eliz. *The Women's Rights Movements in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini*. New York: Praeger, 1982.

Sedghi, Hamideh. *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Shahidian, Hammed. *Women in Iran: Gender Politics in the Islamic Republic*. London: Greenwood Press, 2002.

Shahri, Jafar. *Tarikh-e Ejtemai Tehran dar Ghran-e Sizdahom*. Vols. 4 and 6. Tehran: Rasa, 1990.

Shamim, Ali Asghar-e. *Iran dar Doreh Saltanat-e Qajar [Iran during the Qajar Dynasty]*. Tehran: Zaryab, 1995.

Talattof, Kamran. *Modernity, Sexuality, and Ideology in Iran: The Life and Legacy of a Popular Female Artist*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011.

———. *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000.

Woodsmall, Ruth Frances. *Women and the New East*. Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, 1960.

Articles

Afkhami, Mahnaz. "A Future in the Past: The Pre-revolutionary Women's Movement." In *Sisterhood in Global*, edited by Robin Morgan, 330–338. Garden City: Anchor Books, 1984.

———. "The Women's Organization of Iran: Evolutionary Politics and Revolutionary Change." In *Women in Iran: From 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, edited by Lois Beck and Guity Nashat, 107–35. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

Bolukbashi, Ali. "Namayesh-ha-ye Shadi-avar-e Zananeh-ye Tehran" [Women's comic plays in Tehran]. *Honar o Mardom* 27 (Tehran, 1964): 26–28.

Boyce, Annie Stocking. "Moslem Women in the Capital of Persia." *The Muslim World* 20, no. 3 (1930): 265–69.

Dabashi, Hamid. "Forugh Farrokhzad and Formative Forces of Iranian Culture." In *Forugh Farrokhzad: A Quarter Century Later*, edited by Michael C. Hillmann, 7–35. Austin: Literature East and West, 1988.

———. "The Poetics of Politics: Commitment in Modern Persian Literature," *Iranian Studies* 18, no. 2–4 (Spring-Autumn 1985): 147–88

Ettehadieh, Mansoureh. "The Origins and Development of the Women's Movement in Iran, 1906–41." In *Women in Iran from 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, edited by Lois Beck and Guity Nashat, 85–106. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

Farmayan, Hafez. Introduction to *Suri & Co.: Tales of a Persian Teenage Girl* by Mahshid Amirshahi, vii–x. Translated by J. E. Knörzer. Austin: The Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, 1995.

Fathali-Beigi, Davoud. "Taghlid-e Zananeh, Yek Sonat-e Namayeshi" [Female imitation, a theatrical form]. *Faslname Theater*, no. 42–3 (Tehran, 2008): 211–32.

Haag-Higuchi, Roxane. "Modernization in Literary History: Malek al-Sho'ara Bahar's Stylistic." In *Culture and Cultural Politics Under Reza Shah*, edited by Bianca Devos and Christoph Wener, 19–36. London: Routledge, 2014.

Katouzian, Homa. "Modern Persian Literature: From the Constitutional Revolution to the Revolution of 1979." In *Iran: Politics, History and Literature, 180–201*. London: Routledge, 2013.

Kazemipour, S. "Educational and Vocational Activities of Iranian Women. Progress or Regress?" *Farzaneh* 1, no.1, (1994): 27-44.

Mahdavi, Shireen. "The Structure and Function of the Household of a Qajar Merchant." *Iranian Studies* 32, no. 4 (1999): 557–71.

Milani, Farzaneh. "Niloofar-e Abi dar Mordad ham Mirouyad." *Nimeh Digar* 1 (Fall 1988): 5–24.

———. “Simin Behbahani: Iran’s National Poet.” *Iranian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2008): 3-17.

Najmabadi, Afsaneh. “Education xxv. Women’s Education in the Qajar Period.” In *Encyclopedia Iranica*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/education-xxv-womens-education-in-the-qajar-period>.

———. “Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran.” In *Women, Islam and the State*, edited by Denis Kandiyoti, 48–76. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991.

Naqavi, Ali Reza. “The Family Laws of Iran.” *Islamic Studies* 7 (June 1968): 129–163.

———. “The Family Protection Act of Iran.” *Islamic Studies* 6 (September 1967): 241–265.

Nashat, Guity. Introduction to *Women in Iran from 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, edited by Lois Beck and Guity Nashat, 1–36. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

———. “Marriage in the Qajar Period.” In *Women in Iran from 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, edited by Lois Beck and Guity Nashat, 37–62. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

Nurizadeh, Alireza. “Interview with Shahrzad.” *Ferdosi Magazine*, special issue, “Year of the 2500th Kingdom Celebration.” Tehran (1971): 12–14, 35.

Rahman, Munubar. “Movement for the Emancipation of Women in Persia.” *Bulletin of the Institute of Islamic Studies* 1 (1957): 85–106.

Saeedi, Kobra. “To Mehman-e Chashman-e Man Hasti.” Translated by Kamran Talattof, in *Modernity, Sexuality, and Ideology in Iran: The Life and Legacy of a Popular Female Artist*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011.

Safa-Isfahani, Kaveh. “Female-Centred World Views in Iranian Culture: Symbolic Representations of Sexuality in Dramatic Games.” *Signs* 6, no. 1, “Women: Sex and Sexuality, Part 2” (Autumn 1980): 33–53.

Sanasarian, Eliz. “Characteristics of Women’s Movement in Iran,” in *Women and the Family in Iran*, edited by Asghar Fathi, 86–106. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985.

Schneider, Irene. "The Concept of Honour and its Reflection in the Iranian Penal Code." *Journal of Persianate Studies* 5 (2012): 43–57.

Shahrokhi, Mahasti. "The Biography of Forough Farrokhzad." In *Kasi ke Mesl-e Hich kas Nist*, edited by Poursan Farrokhzad, 5–23. Tehran: Karoon, 2004.

Shay, Anthony. "Bazi-ha-ye Namayeshi: Iranian Women's Theatrical Plays." *Dance Research Journal* 27 (Fall 1995): 16–24.

Talattof, Kamran. "Iranian Women's Literature: From Pre-revolutionary Social Discourse to Post-revolutionary Feminism." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29 (November 1997): 531–58.

Films

Simin Daneshvar. Short film produced by BBC Persian. Published on March 30, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPy5_O-44VQ