

SELECTIVE OMISSION:
INSERTING FARAH PAHLAVI AND JEHAN SADAT INTO THE
WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS OF IRAN AND EGYPT

By

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ABSTRACT

Farah Pahlavi and Jehan Sadat have both been described as leaders' wives who were Westernized. While this premise is not untrue, to label them as only demonstrating Western actions and having Western ideas denies Iran's and Egypt's women's movements from having any influence upon their lives. The premise of this work is that Farah Pahlavi and Jehan Sadat engaged the historical legacies of the debates concerning women's role in society. Both women have been omitted from the historical narrative because of their identification as a Westernized element in society. This work explores the legacies of the construction of womanhood in Iran and Egypt (via a discussion of the women's movements) and how Farah Pahlavi and Jehan Sadat interacted with their particular countries experiences during their tenure as leader's wives.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Scholars have undervalued the contributions of Farah Pahlavi and Jehan Sadat to the women's movements in their respective countries. In Iran, scholarship examining the women's movements is restricted to events before the Women's Awakening, 1936-1941 and after the 1979 Revolution.¹ In Egypt, the analysis of these movements has been limited to discussions of the pre-1952 usurpation by the government and the post-1980 rise of Islamic feminism.² The disregarding of these women's contributions to their respective women's movements was the result of a number of occurrences. Both Farah Pahlavi and Jehan Sadat were socially active during a particularly tumultuous time in the Middle East as a whole, when the discourse of the previous hundred years, secular modernism, was being questioned and deemed inauthentic.³ The 1970s in Iran and Egypt saw the decline of secular politics and the rise of Islamist politics. Both women engaged the traditions and legacies of the movement whose concepts were in decline and whose ideas were being interrogated by a new generation of intellectuals. This led to negative

¹ Lois Beck and Nikkie Keddie, "Introduction," *Women in the Muslim World*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 1-34.

² In Egypt, the chronicles of the feminist movement jump from Huda Sha'rawi who was active until 1948 to Nawal Al-Sa'adawi who began her work in the late 1970s. Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) and Badran, "Independent Women: More Than A Century of Feminism in Egypt" *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 129-148.; Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society and the Press* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1994), Mary Ann Fay, "Women and Waqf: Toward a Reconsideration of Women's Place in the Mamluk Household," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 29:1 (February 1991), 33-51, Azza M. Karam, *Women, Islamisms and the State: Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1998).

³ While I acknowledge that Farah Pahlavi began her philanthropic work prior to the 1970s, it was her work that occurred within the 1970s that garnered the most praise and disdain due to the increasingly visible role Iran took during that decade.

characterizations of both women as Westernized puppets, alienated from their populations. Further, in both Iran and Egypt, a discontinuity occurred when scholarship shifted its contextual focus: from discussions of the achievements of larger movements to the contributions made by individuals to women's advancement. At approximately the same time, scholars broadened their scope of inquiry: instead of solely studying the actions of the elite, they began to analyze non-elites.⁴ These two shifts in scholarship resulted from the appropriation of the women's movements by the governments in the twentieth century and political shifts in the atmosphere of the study of the Middle East. Despite this silence in academia there were women in both Iran and Egypt, including Farah Pahlavi and Jehan Sadat, who remained active during these intervening periods. While I do not pretend to believe that either woman advanced the women's movement in their country, they did contribute to it, if only as negative examples of Westernized women.

Few public figures in twentieth century Iran and Egypt were safe from allegations of being too Western, that is not being authentically Iranian or Egyptian. While insults such as these were ignored by most male figures, these charges were serious when directed at women. For a woman, the charge of being too Western was more than simply a condemnation for adopting Western ideas of secularization and/or materialism.

⁴ Israel Gershoni argues that academics increasingly studied the lower classes in the later decades of the twentieth century believing that the elite contribution to society was primarily an inauthentic one. Israel Gershoni, "The Theory of Crisis and the Crisis in a Theory: Intellectual History in Twentieth-Century Middle Eastern Studies" *Middle East Historiographies: Narrating the Twentieth Century* eds. Israel Gershoni, Amy Singer, and Y. Hakan Erdem (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), page numbers tba

Women's westernization implied an added layer of impropriety and moral laxity that was absent from similar criticisms regarding men.⁵

Farah Pahlavi, wife of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, Shah of Iran and Jehan Sadat, wife of Anwar Sadat, President of Egypt, were two women who were charged by their respective opposition groups in the late twentieth century with being too Westernized.⁶ As leaders' wives they held a prominent social position and by necessity were known by the public, however their decisions to increase their own public visibility and to act autonomously of their husbands, even if only in a philanthropic capacity, led to questions of their morality and propriety as well as uncertainties regarding their identity. Both Jehan Sadat and Farah Pahlavi exhibited aspects of Westernization; however, they should not be evaluated based upon the binary of Western/non-Western. These women were not simply Western carbon copies that denigrated their national identity in lieu of some inauthentic European one. Their experiences and actions reflected more upon the complex exchange that accompanied their countries' encounters with the modernity and the construction of women's role in society than upon their singular, independent adoption of Western ideas.⁷

⁵ See Samer Shehata's work, "The Politics of Laughter: Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak in Political Jokes" *Folklore*, Vol. 103, No. 1. (1992), 75-91. This work illustrates the various jokes aimed at Jehan Sadat. These jokes revolve around the idea of her promiscuity.

⁶ They were increasingly identified by opposition groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Islamists in Iran as more Western than native, especially after they took on more visible roles.

⁷ Although this contention, that a given country's context dictates its social movements, is not new, applying it to these women is. Juan Cole, Beth Baron and Nikkie Keddie and Lois Beck argue in a similar vein regarding the origins of the feminist debate in Egypt. Please see Cole "Feminism, Class and Islam in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 12(1981), 387-407.; Baron *The Women's Awakening in Egypt*, Lois and Keddie, *Women in the Muslim World*, Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation* for more information.

Westernization is concerned with the adoption by a non-Western society of non-indigenous, Western ideas that conflict with indigenous morals and values. It often involves a systematic denigration of indigenous ideas and institutions in lieu of Western ones.⁸ Edward Said develops this concept in his work, *Orientalism*. His book focuses on the negative constructions of the East (in his case the Arab Middle East) by the West (the colonial powers). He also discusses the problems associated with viewing a non-Western identity through the lens of Western concepts. Said argues that it is necessary for scholars to recognize that there was an indigenous identity in any given area in the East in existence prior to colonial contact. In his view, to believe that the East was created wholly out of the West is folly.⁹ Similarly, to deny Egypt's and Iran's ideologues their own agency in reforming their countries, is to recreate the distortion and inaccuracy of generality, developed by Said in *Orientalism*.¹⁰ However, it is equally problematic to discuss the twentieth century in the Middle East without acknowledging the impact of Western ideas. Both Iran and Egypt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries searched for a new way to interact with the Western powers, Britain and Russia in this case.

Farah Pahlavi

Farah Pahlavi was born in Teheran, Iran in 1939 to Sohrab and Farideh Diba.

Although both of her parents were Iranian by birth, her upbringing was focused upon

⁸ Brad Hanson whose article discusses the implications of the theorizers of Westoxication, Jalal al-e Ahmad, Ali Shariati and Samad Behrangi, explains that westernized Iranians were described by each of the three authors as idle, superficial, and alienated from authentic Iran. Brad Hanson, "The 'Westoxication' of Iran: Depictions and Reactions of Behrangi, al-e Ahmad, and Shariati" *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 15:1 (Feb. 1983), 1-23.

⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 2-9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

Europe. Her father studied in and was ambassador to Russia from Reza Shah's Iran. He died when she was nine years old and with his death came a drastic change in Farah's lifestyle. She and her mother moved in with relatives and vacationed with family in Azerbaijan and Gilan instead of in the fashionable Shemiran district. However, she was never poor. Her family was part of the bureaucratic and technocratic class that fueled the movement for "modernity" in Teheran. This is important, because while she was not royal by birth, she was a part of semi-elite society.¹¹

While her lifestyle changed with her father's death, her upbringing did not. Her mother became the dominant influence in her life and upheld the importance of education instilling in her the need to strive for excellence.¹² She was educated in French lycées in Teheran and attended a co-ed high school. When she graduated, her mother "refused to hear of an arranged marriage" for her preferring she continued her education or married a man of her choosing, creating tensions for both of them within the context of her extended family.¹³ When it was time for her to choose her career, she chose architecture, noting that Iran had only one female architect at the time, 1957.¹⁴ She chose to study architecture at the École Spéciale d'Architecture in Paris and her extended family funded her education.¹⁵ She was in Paris for a year before she was brought to the

¹¹ I am referring here to a headline in the *Los Angeles Times*, "Shah Marries Commoner Today" and "Shah Takes Commoner as Third Bride in Teheran" from the *Chicago Daily Tribune* that ran December 21 and 22 1959 respectively. "Shah Marries Commoner Today," *Los Angeles Times*, December 21, 1959, 1; "Shah Takes Commoner as Third Bride in Teheran" *Chicago Daily Tribune* December 22, 1959, 2.

¹² Farah recalls her terror at failing a spelling exam remembering that her mother "worked herself up into such a state, telling me over and over again that with everything she had done for me, I had no right to do that [fail a test] to her, that I soon felt I was a disgrace to the family," and spent the day in tears in her room. Farah Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah* (New York: Hyperion, 2004), 46,

¹³ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

attention of Muhammad Reza Shah; they were married in 1959 at an elaborate wedding that captured the imagination of the Western newspapers. They had four children, Reza (1960), Farahnaz (1963), Ali Reza (1966), and Leila (1970).¹⁶

Farah participated in a number of organizations and institutions, however, her contact with authentic Iran was limited; it occurred through the gates of her childhood compound, in visits to Gilan and Azerbaijan in the summer, and the inspections of the institutions which she funded after her marriage to Muhammad Reza Shah. She was more content to delegate responsibility for daily activities of her institutions than was Jehan. The emphasis of her social work was visiting, inspecting, and delegating responsibility to those who knew better than she did how to run a charitable organization. Farah's impact on Iran had less to do with physical institutions and more to do with the organization of committees to undertake social work as well as with, in her mind at least, the promotion of Iranian culture within and outside of Iran's borders.¹⁷

Because Farah's focus from a young age was Europe, there is a disconnect between her recollections and the reality of Iranian life. However, her Western-centric view was not completely due to her upbringing and reflects a larger belief in Iranian society throughout the twentieth century.¹⁸ Iran in the late nineteenth century increasingly felt the need to modernize in the face of British and Russian pressures upon

¹⁶ Ibid., 108-110, 132, 151.

¹⁷ The only institution that she endowed was Beh Kadeh, a leper colony. Although the Shiraz festival could be considered an institution, in that it occurred in a similar place, because it was an annual event, I do not consider it an institution.

¹⁸ Guity Nashat note that during the late Qajar era there was "changed perception of gender roles and a modification or replacement of traditional views by a new European-inspired paradigm among a small but growing elite. It took another century for the new paradigm to be put into practice, but it became a dividing line between those who considered themselves progressive and those who maintained earlier notions about women's traditional roles." Guity Nashat, "Introduction," *Women in Iran From 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 8

the country. To this end, many elites were educated in Europe and returned with a new vision for the country.¹⁹ This new vision was characterized by an emphasis on education in the Western style and upon a more bureaucratic system of government and led to the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 and eventually Reza Shah's rise to power in the 1920s.

Farah Pahlavi was rarely criticized directly because of her position and because of strict censorship in Iran during her time as Shahbanou. After the fall of the Shah, however, criticisms began to be published. Some focused on her lack of understanding of Iran's authentic identity, as defined by Ayatollah Khomeini and the new Islamic Republic.²⁰ Others criticisms focused upon her role in the promotion of Muhammad Reza Shah's policies, merging her influence with that of others in the government. One Iranian newspaper in 1999 explained for its reading public exactly who Farah was saying

Who is Farah Diba? She is the last consort of the ousted Shah who, during the era of dictatorship, repression, dependence on interventionist powers and suppression of popular struggles and the Islamic movement by the Shah and his American masters, was his accomplice in all arenas and played a main role in plundering the nation's wealth, squandering the country's resources, promoting corruption, cheapening and destroying culture and fighting against Islam. In other words, Farah Diba was one of the ringleaders of the rule of Taghut [Persian word for idol - pejorative term, used to describe the former Shah] and one of the frontline defendants of the anti-popular and anti-Islamic Pahlavi [Shah's dynastic name] regime.²¹

By including her as a "ringleader" in the Shah's government, the writer was not singling her out for any particular offense, but for the offenses of the entire regime. This quote reflects the indirect forms of criticism garnered by Farah throughout her tenure as Shahbanou and after the fall of the Shah.

¹⁹ I will return to this idea in Chapter Two. For an illustration of this concept, see Sattareh Farman Farmaian's work, *Daughter of Persia: A Woman's Journey from Her Father's Harem Through the Islamic Revolution*, (New York: Crown Publishing, 1992).

²⁰ These will be discussed in Chapter 4.

²¹ "Publication of Shah's widow's message anti-revolution offence, says daily" *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, April 13, 1999 translated from *Jomhuri-ye Eslami*, Tehran, April 10, 1999.

Jehan Sadat

Jehan Sadat was born in 1933, on Roda Island in Cairo, “the third of four children, and the first girl.”²² Her father was an Egyptian bureaucrat and her mother was English.²³ She credits her mother with instilling in her a sense of independence and patriotism. She recalled that her mother would send her into the backyard at night to demonstrate that they had nothing to fear from the dark and nothing to fear from being alone. Of patriotism, she recalled her mother’s loyalty to her British traditions, her mother would only eat British food and celebrated Christmas, but she also recalled her mother’s encouragement of her children to perform their Egyptian identity.²⁴ Jehan met Anwar Sadat at age 15 and they were married shortly after in 1949. They had four children, Loubna (1954), Noha (1958), Gamal (1956) and Jehan named after her mother (1961). Shortly after the birth of her last daughter, Jehan began to do charity work.

Jehan’s activities broadly focused upon improving women’s access to an autonomous existence either financially or politically, as seen in her work with the clothing cooperative at Talla, the Munufiyya District Council and the Personal Status Laws of 1979, and upon the rehabilitation of the weak, as seen in her work with the Wafa’ wal Amal Rehabilitation Center, the SOS Orphans Village. It is through these charitable works and her characterization of her role within them that her attitude towards motherhood, rural Egypt and her ideas about an authentic Egyptian identity can be examined. Her works illustrate her emphasis of ruling by example and change by

²² Jehan Sadat, *A Woman of Egypt*, (New York: Pocket Books, 1987), 35.

²³ There is controversy over whether Jehan’s mother was British, as she claims or Maltese, as others have claimed. Earl L. Sullivan, *Women in Egyptian Public Life*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 88.

²⁴ Sadat, 38, 40, 41-42.

emulation, as well as a belief that the inferior status of women is socially constructed, not dictated by religion and therefore subject to change.

In suggesting that gender categories were flexible Jehan opened herself up to criticism. The main criticisms were that she was too political, too outspoken and too “western-oriented.”²⁵ Doreen Kays remarks that Jehan was posited by the Western press as an educated, beautiful activist, while in the Egyptian press, she was “the Imelda Marcos of the Middle East; a power behind the throne; too ambitious, too vocal, too active and too shrewd a businesswoman for Egypt’s own good.”²⁶ She was “flamboyant,” and her fidelity to Anwar Sadat was questioned in a number of jokes.²⁷ She was portrayed and criticized for being “the power behind the scenes, the unofficial but real decision-maker” in Anwar Sadat’s presidency.²⁸ Jehan Sadat’s tenure as First Lady of Egypt is viewed contentiously because she concerned herself openly with challenging her husband’s authority and exerting her own will upon government, although she defends herself saying she only did so in relation to social issues.²⁹

Although both women came from different contexts, Jehan from mixed parentage with an Egyptian upbringing, Farah from homogenous parentage with a fondness for Europe, each woman developed similar ideas upon their accession to the position of leader’s wife in their country, both wanted to ease the burden of society’s poor,

²⁵ Dalia Baligh, “Egyptians Approve of First Lady’s Work” *Associated Press*, October 6, 1991.

²⁶ Doreen Kays, *Frogs and Scorpions: Egypt, Sadat and the Media* (London: Frederick Miller Limited, 1984), 259-260.

²⁷ Mini Mann, “Egypt’s First Lady Works in Slums of Cairo” *Associated Press*, December 11, 1990, Samer S. Shehata, “The Politics of Laughter: Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak in Political Jokes” *Folklore*, Vol. 103, No. 1. (1992), 75-91.

²⁸ Fayza Hassan, “Jehan El-Sadat: Destinies Forged Anew,” *Al Ahram Weekly*, August 3-9, 2000.

²⁹ Carla Hall, “Jihan Sadat in her Own Defense,” *The Washington Post*, October 14, 1982, D13 (A2, D13), Karen De Witt, “Egypt’s Jihan Sadat: Filling a Role in Social Reform,” *The Washington Post*, April 6, 1977, D3.

particularly of the women. However, while their ideas were similar their approaches were completely different. Jehan favored a hands-on approach that put her in the center of her institutions both physically and mentally, to the degree that the similar institutions did not arise in Egypt because there was no template to follow. Farah favored a hands-off approach, but recognized the value as a Shahbanou and then Empress of visiting and inspecting her institutions. These varied approaches are not simply reflective of their attitudinal differences, but reflect the deeper notion that reflects their different contexts.

Both women had similar views regarding charity work and for both of them they took their privileged position as the impetus to engage in philanthropic activities. Both women stressed the idea of utility in their views towards charity. Farah noted that “a thin, scattering of aid was useless...if I wanted to be useful, I had to concentrate my energy on a few matters that needed the most attention and bring them to fruition” and second, she realized that she needed to go to the people because they could not come to her.³⁰ She explained to Lesley Blanch that she could not “be everywhere” but she realized that her “being somewhere in person gives an impetus to the people to help themselves, which is, sometimes all that is needed.”³¹ She concerned herself with that which was of greatest utility for the people she met.³² She notes that freedoms of speech and the press were secondary to most people in Iran.³³

³⁰ Ibid., 148-149, Lesley Blanch, *Farah, Shahbanou of Iran, Shahbanou of Persia* (London: Collins, 1978), 63.

³¹ Ibid., 112.

³² This can be seen in her translation of children’s books into Persian as well as her work with the leper community of Beh Kadeh that will be described in the following chapters.

³³ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 109.

Jehan's attitude towards charity is similar to Farah's although her challenges were slightly different. Earl L. Sullivan explains that Jehan did not do charity work initially because she felt that "women involved in such work were doing it 'just for show.'"³⁴ Yet ironically, charity work was how Jehan entered public life and her charge that it was "just for show" was one leveled against her in the end.³⁵ Her second view was that "Women who are working have confidence in themselves, they don't rely or depend on their husbands too much, because they have their own salary. They feel secure."³⁶ Her belief in the adage "God helps those who help themselves" combined with her desire to make a difference to make her a genuine participant and not a superficial overseer of her charitable works.³⁷ Both women felt that empowerment was the first goal of charitable works and both expressed a need for their works and organizations to outlive them.

To deny Farah Pahlavi and Jehan Sadat a role in the women's movements of Iran and Egypt is to overlook a period of history. Their works and attitudes do reflect a degree of Western influence, but by ignoring their contribution to their country, we as scholars ignore the history of the women's movement and the articulation of women's role within society, as well as the historical context of each country. Their contributions and works are neither fully Western nor fully indigenous, but reflect the larger trend of synthesis that occurred when the ideas of modernity entered their respective countries.

³⁴ Sullivan, 88.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 89.

³⁷ Sadat, 202-206.

The Women's Movements in Iran and Egypt

In order to understand how women's role in society was constructed a brief overview of the women's movements must be discussed. Women's movements in the Middle East generally follow a loose pattern—mobilization of the educated classes via writing, political action including protest that briefly unifies classes and an attempt by the government to control this new opposition group that is demanding certain freedoms. Although both countries' movements follow this loose pattern, their experiences differ greatly. Although many scholars have studied Egypt's women's movement, Iran's is practically unknown to Western scholars. Egypt's women's movement created a number of famous women activists, Iran's did not create a single unifying figure of feminine liberation.³⁸ Iran's government co-opted the women's movement in 1936, Egypt's in 1956. With the Women's Awakening 1936-1941, women in Iran were declared able to participate in public, participate in higher education and work outside of the home. Their independent groups were incorporated into the governmental apparatus, reflected the Shah's desires (be it Reza Shah or Muhammad Reza Shah) and were "window dressing" for larger modernization campaigns. Egypt's women's movement managed to maintain its autonomy until 1952 when Gamal Abd al-Nasser's government integrated them with their ideological equivalent political parties. In the intervening years between 1941 and 1952, Egypt's women's movement achieved a degree of political power sufficient to oppose Gamal Abd al-Nasser's government and some Egyptian women's groups

³⁸ While there might have been local heroines, a single Huda Sha'rawi-like character that a majority of Iranian women can emulate and/or look up to, was absent from the Iranian context.

campaigns ardently for equality. Clearly different forces were at work in both contexts and this is reflected in the way their women's movements evolved.

The women's movement in Iran was not a feminist undertaking in that the women involved campaigned for gender parity, not gender equality. Its incorporation into the government was compounded by Iran's tendency towards monarchy, and the lack of a clearly defined enemy to unify nationalist sentiment to limit the physical and ideological reach of the women's movement in Iran.³⁹ In Egypt, British colonialism gave the women's activists the opportunity to translate their accepted role as mother to children into a new role as mothers to the nation and to engage the discourse of nationalism for their own purposes. There was a clearly defined entity that these women were fighting for, Egyptian independence, and against, British colonialism. Further, Egyptian activists for women had a clearly defined goal in undertaking their nationalist stance—they wanted to link women's and the intelligentsia in Egypt was stronger than in Iran. In Iran,

³⁹ Farzin Vadhat argues in his work, *God and Juggernaut: Iran's Intellectual Encounter with Modernity* that the whole of the modernity movement in Iran was preoccupied with the notion of the self and subjectivity, along with the tension between emancipation and domination of the subject to a greater power, be it God or the Shah. This contradiction between the individual and the collective is illustrated in Erika Friedl's *Women of Deh Koh*, an anthropological study of a pseudonymed village in Iran. In this book, Friedl, among other things identifies the ways in which individuals exist within the context of a community and the negotiation of the need for individualism against the need for inclusion into the community. This is seen in the story of Simin, who upon marriage is forced to forge a new identity within a new family structure. She is able to work within the communal structure to gain power within the family, but is unable to disavow the family structure completely because she requires the support and protection of that structure. This contradiction is neither inherent nor limited to Iran. Lila Abu-Lughod's work with the 'Awlad 'Ali Bedouin tribe exhibits the same contradictory notions of subjectivity and the necessity of negotiating the same notions of subjectivity and negotiation of boundaries by women as Friedl's work examines. However, in Abu-Lughod's work, the notion of subjectivity is site specific to the rural context of her subjects. Abu-Lughod's study cannot be transposed into an urban context as she specifically examines tribal relations. In this way, the question of subjectivity in Egypt highlights the urban/rural tensions described by Lockman rather than the tensions involved in role of the individual within the collective as described by Vadhat. Farzin Vadhat, *God and Juggernaut: Iran's Intellectual Encounter with Modernity*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), Erika Friedl, *The Women of Deh Koh*. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

these boundaries were not as well defined as in Egypt. In Iran, the reformers were fighting against the somewhat legitimate rulers of their country, the Qajars, who had been in power for over a century. It was not until the concessions of the late nineteenth century that Iranian intellectuals, fueled by travel and study abroad in Europe and Russia began to question the policies of the Qajar Shahs and the Qajars lost their legitimacy. There was an inability of the Iranian intelligentsia to provoke the same nationalist feelings within the population as the Egyptian intelligentsia did in Egypt due to the high level of illiteracy in Iran and the low level of rural/urban interaction.

The Qajar Shahs lost their legitimacy in the late nineteenth century in two ways, first by granting concessions to foreigners and second by allowing themselves to be manipulated by the harem.⁴⁰ It is this second category that we will be concerned with here. Abbas Amanat argues that the Qajar harem (women's quarters and the women contained within it) had the power to influence politics at a number of occasions in the late nineteenth century. Premiers seemed, from Amanat's characterization, to be the targets of women's ire and he gives two examples of this. He notes that Malek Jahan Mahd 'Olya (d. 1873) managed to convince Naser al-Din Shah to dismiss his premier, Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir (Amir Kabir) by mobilizing "the aristocracy, the court, and the competing factions within the government" against him.⁴¹ At another point, he notes that Jayran, a favorite of the Naser al-Din Shah "had managed successfully to organize the opposition against Nuri's [Aqa Khan Nuri succeeded Amir Kabir] monopoly of

⁴⁰ These concessions such as the Tobacco Concession led directly to the calls for a constitution in Iran and the limiting of the Shah's powers.

⁴¹ Amanat, Abbas, "The Changing World of Taj Al-Saltana" *Crowning Anguish: Memoirs of A Persian Princess from the Harem to Modernity, 1884-1914*, trans. Anna Vanzan and Amin Neshati, Washington, D.C.: Mage Publishers, 1993, 24-28.

power.”⁴² Because Jayran was a favorite of the Naser al-Din Shah, Amanat questions whether she acted independently or was a pawn in a larger power play.⁴³ Whether the harem had any autonomous power, as is implied in Mahd ‘Olya’s case or was a pawn as Jayran’s experience suggests, is irrelevant in this discussion. What is important is that the harem was an influential force in the daily politicking in Qajar life. The harem’s importance indicates that there was a legacy of both women’s participation in politics and that this legacy was not always positive and created a legacy of fear regarding women’s political participation.

As noted above, women’s political participation was not always positive. For this reason, the women’s movement was slow to develop in Iran and was without “superstars,” women who were accepted by Iranians as symbols of women’s rights and advancement. Many female reformers in Iran remained anonymous in their writings for this reason.⁴⁴ This is largely because the woman regarded as the mother of the women’s movement by feminists in Iran today was a Baha’i, Qurrat al-Ayn.⁴⁵ Baha’ism is a sect of Islam that arose in the nineteenth century in Islam and was persecuted as heretical.⁴⁶ Therefore any idea associated with them was rejected by the majority of Iranians as un-

⁴² Ibid., 28.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ This is not to say that locally there were not women known for their work with women’s liberation, only that there was not a Huda Sha’rawi-type figure to which Iranian women could cling to from this era. Mansoureh Ettehadieh, *The Origins and Development of the Women’s Movement in Iran, 1906-1941*” *Women in Iran From 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, eds. Lois Beck and Guity Nashat, (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 88.

⁴⁵ Nashat, 15.

⁴⁶ This idea is heretical as regards mainstream Islam (Shi’i Islam included) because Muhammad, the founder of Islam, is believed to be The Seal of the Prophets. Baha’is believe that their spiritual leader, the Bab, was a prophet and the Mahdi, the twelfth Imam of Shi’ism returned from his occultation. Therefore they were mercilessly persecuted in the nineteenth century and have been periodically persecuted since then.

Islamic.⁴⁷ The identification of the discourse of women's equality with the Baha'i sect of Islam tarnished the reputation of those who championed women's advancement and limited its chances of acceptance by the majority of the population. Further inhibiting individual women's actions in Iran was the prevalence of veiling and seclusion of upper-class women until the Constitutional Revolution of 1906.⁴⁸

Eliz Sanasarian argues that the Iranian women's movement was largely composed of urban intellectuals. She explains there was initially a feeling of understanding between the reformers and those they wished to reform in urban Iran because the female reformers "were exposed to degrading conditions similar to their counterparts in the lower classes such as child marriages and divorce."⁴⁹ By the 1920s, this mutual understanding had collapsed as independent women's groups were unable to coordinate their policies between themselves, let alone reach out to groups that were not convinced of the necessity of social change.⁵⁰ According to Sanasarian the women's movement in Iran was weak due to a lack of general support, fear of reprisal from Reza Shah's government if the women's groups spoke out against governmental policies, the inability to convince the majority of women that social change was necessary, and the desire to not be identified with the initial Baha'i reformers and finally the degree of disorganization

⁴⁷ Eliz Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900-Khomeini*, (New York, Praeger Publishers, 1981), 57.

⁴⁸ For an example of this change, see Sattareh Farman Farmaian's memoir *Daughter of Persia*. She recounts the changing expectations of elite women and their own changing desires for themselves.

⁴⁹ Sanasarian explains, "in a society where ignorance, superstition, disease and illiteracy were rampant, addressing political issues would have been absurd, hypocritical and irrelevant to the great majority of women. Although Iranian feminists were conscious of political issues they first had to direct themselves to the crucial issue of mere literacy for women." This idea is also upheld by Guity Nashat who notes that the element of continuity of women's experiences between the Qajar era and the twentieth century enable scholars to extrapolate from the present into the past. Sanasarian, 46, 48 and Nashat, 11.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

experienced in the late 1920s and into the 1930s.⁵¹ These weaknesses led to the ease with which Reza Shah's government commandeered in the late 1930s. Mansoureh Ettehadieh notes "the major obstacle to the [women's] movement's fundamental development was that the women's question was politicized and subsumed as government policy by the modernizing Iranian state."⁵²

However, in 1942, Reza Shah abdicated and his son, Muhammad Reza Shah came to power. Muhammad Reza's youth and relative weakness allowed for a short-lived renaissance of political thought and action that applied to all groups including those concerned with women's rights into the early 1950s.⁵³ Throughout the later 1950s Muhammad Reza Shah consolidated his power and by the 1960s women's organizations were again brought under complete government control. This was symbolized by the consolidation of the various autonomous women's groups in 1961 into High Council on Women (HCW) and then again in 1967 into the Women's Organization of Iran (WOI).⁵⁴ Sanasarian notes that the "women's organizations did not make demands that could not

⁵¹ Sanasarian explains that the disorganization of the women's groups was due to their inability to coordinate an agenda, a problem that was compounded by the groups being in the middle of a leadership generation change. *Ibid.*, 48,69.

⁵² Ettehadieh, 101.

⁵³ This was also the period when Muhammad Mossadeq became Prime Minister of Iran and was ousted in favor of the Shah by a joint American and British coup.

⁵⁴ Both organizations were under the auspices of Ashraf Pahlavi, Muhammad Reza Shah's twin sister. Sanasarian evaluates this organization because of its importance until the Revolution, noting that the WOI's legacy was mixed. On the positive side, it lobbied the government for changes in social and legal policies for women; on the negative side, it was directly associated with the government, and therefore not trusted, power flowed between individuals and not institutions, and the international claims it made did not match its domestic reality. Again, we are brought back to the major criticisms and weaknesses not only of the women's organizations, but of the Iranian government as a whole—centralized power and image versus reality issues. Sanasarian, 79, 91.

or would not be met; their activities were quite compatible with the government's stand."⁵⁵

To summarize, the trends that emerged from the period of the women's movement in Iran included a tendency against individual action; there were no "big names" in the movement as there were in Egypt, as well as a tendency against unity between social, ethnic, or religious groups. Sanasarian notes that the fundamental problem throughout the history of the Iranian women's movement until 1979 was women's groups' inability to coordinate independent action between organized women's groups or to unify various religious, ethnic or socioeconomic groups with each other.⁵⁶ It further demonstrated the incompatibility of social reality with legal reality. The Women's Awakening included reforms to personal status laws—divorce, marriage, inheritance—but did not substantially alter social relations in any way, reflecting a larger pattern within Pahlavi rule of Iran.⁵⁷

In contrast to Iran was Egypt. Egypt had a number of famous women leading its movement. Further, there was not an unbearable social stigma attached to female activism in Egypt as there was in Iran. Due to these two factors, the movement was able to grow, evolve, and diversify in Egypt until well into the 1950s.

⁵⁵ This phenomenon is also discussed by Kamran Talattof in his work, *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature*, as regards the literary movements of the mid-twentieth century. He argues that feminist thought did not arise in Iranian literature until after the 1979 Revolution and most female writers identified with wrote about political ideological issues such as Islamism, democracy and communism rather than writing about women's social condition. *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), Sanasarian, 75.

⁵⁶ Sanasarian, 69.

⁵⁷ Muhammad Reza Shah's White Revolution of the 1960s reflected this trend and was an attempt to regulate more equal class disparities that did little to change the social reality of Iran as a whole.

The women's movement in Egypt began, as it did in Iran, with a period that focused upon women's writings. Focusing on the mid-nineteenth century, Margot Badran argues that educational reforms combined with increased foreign travel to stimulate women to write about their condition and social reality, among them, 'Aisha Taymuriyya (Taymur discussed above by Hatem) and Zaynab Fawwaz. These two women wrote for mainstream magazines calling for men to "wake up" and realize the problems of keeping women secluded and illiterate. According to Badran, these writings found an audience, as evidenced by the rise of "Men's Feminist Discourse" of Qasim Amin and his contemporaries.⁵⁸ However, they also upheld the discourse of domesticity and motherhood, arguing for women's education in order for them to be better mothers and wives.

As in Iran, elite women's participation in the advancement of the women's movement's agenda was crucial in Egypt. Although Egypt had inherited a dynamic tradition of women's political participation from the Ottomans, this ambition was absent by the time the Khedives ruled Egypt.⁵⁹ By the late nineteenth century, women's activism in Egypt was limited to philanthropy.

Privately initiated social work was a tenet of elite women's lives. However, this work was limited to funding projects and rarely involved royal participation in direct action.⁶⁰ Margot Badran characterizes this period as an era of "discreet public

⁵⁸ Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation*, 16-19.

⁵⁹ For information on the women's harem in the Ottoman Empire see Leslie Pierce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁶⁰ Mary Ann Fay, "Women and Wafq: Toward a Reconsideration of Women's Place in the Mamluk Household," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 29:1 (February 1991), 33-51.

activism.”⁶¹ With the single exception of Djavidian Hanim, wife of Khedive ‘Abbas Hilmi II, who attempted to organize elite women to aid refugees from the Balkans, most elite women remained aloof to direct action in charitable work.⁶² The *noblesses obliges* and elite women’s patronage of literary salons did not imply that these women contributed to the articulation of feminism or the women’s movement, merely that they provided the support for other women to do so. Other individuals, such as Huda Sha’rawi, Malika Hifni Nassif, Nabawiyah Musa and Safiyeh Zaghlul participated in and became the articulators of the Egyptian feminist movement. However, both groups of women, those who financially supported and those who articulated the movement, contributed to the understanding that the altering of Egyptian social order was something to be achieved not by governmental decree, but by increasing social pressure.

By the 1920s, the acceptance of women as actors, financiers or articulators, of women’s role in society was secure in urban Egypt. Evidence of this is that as revolutionary men formed the Wafd as an Egyptian political party to counter the British, their wives formed the Wafdist Women’s Coordination Committee (WWCC). The WWCC coordinated communication between the various Wafd members by visiting the

⁶¹ Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation* 47.

⁶² She explains that Princess Nazli Fazil, a niece to Khedive Ismail in the late 1880s opened a literary salon for women that was attended by men, intellectuals and politicians and wherein various subjects, including the position of women in society were discussed. Although “Djavidan Hanim, the wife of Khedive ‘Abbas Hilmi II” attempted to organize relief efforts for refugees from the Balkan Wars, she “was unable to elicit the support of upper-class women.” These aid operations were for “when refugees from the Balkan Wars streamed into Alexandria.” Badran notes that the elite could not be mobilized, so “lower-class women were mobilized as paid helpers.” Yet, Huda Sha’rawi, in her autobiography, is quick to note the valued support that many princesses gave to the women’s movement. She argues that the princesses funded educational institutions for girls but they “essentially remained aloof from social change.” In the twentieth century, Sharawi notes that Princess Ayn al-Hayat, Princess Nazli Halim and the wife of Khedive Abbas Hilmi, helped support the *Mabarat* Muhammad Ali, a dispensary and domestic school. Huda Sharawi, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1979-1924)*” (New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1987), 7, 12, 94-98, Badran, *Feminsists, Islam and Nation*, 50-51.

wives of these politicians, subverting the British attempt to keep them from communicating.⁶³ After independence in 1923, the Wafd did not continue its commitment to gender equality as stipulated in the constitution and passed a law that disenfranchised women. With the disenfranchisement of women by the Wafd, Huda Sha'rawi formed the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) to continue to lobby for women's political equality against the Wafd government. Badran argues that although the EFU undertook social work, they did so only with an eye towards a political agenda, making them a political organization in her eyes, distinguishable from those organizations providing social services alone.⁶⁴

In order to be more inclusive and increase the EFU's power, Sha'rawi began to focus the EFU upon rural women beginning in 1924. Their outreach attempts included a number of philanthropic works, health care, schools etc. As Badran explains, "The feminists contended that alleviating the hardships of poor women was a first step towards creating conditions that would make it more possible for them to gain their full rights as women."⁶⁵ By acknowledging the importance of including both rural and urban women in their campaign to change women's social reality, Sha'rawi and the EFU developed a pattern for future feminists to follow.

⁶³ Ibid., 209.

⁶⁴ These two interpretations of women's activism grew into what Kathleen Howard-Merriam describes as the two types of feminism that has arisen in Egypt, social and political. The social feminists concentrated on the development of women's access to the institutions of modernity—education, bureaucracy, working in public—while the political feminists focused on the alteration of the country's legal system, identifying the points of contention between the law and reality. In her work, Howard-Merriam sets up social feminism as a positive and acceptable form of women's participation in the public sphere, while political feminism was not an acceptable form of participation. Kathleen Howard-Merriam, "Egypt's Other Political Elite," *The Western Political Quarterly*, 34:1, March 1981, 174-187.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 111.

By the 1950s, a new generation of feminists emerged characterized by Doria Shafiq who attempted, as Fazya Hassan noted, to succeed “where Huda Sharawi’s EFU had not dared to venture,” to demand the eradication of illiteracy and “demand full political equality for women.”⁶⁶ While Sha’rawi and the EFU campaigned to reform personal status laws, they were not successful because of their divided notions about womanhood and class as will be discussed below. While in the previous generation, women were content to use domesticity and the discourse of motherhood to exit the home, the second generation of feminists worked for actual alteration of the social order.⁶⁷ However, they built upon the foundations of the women’s movement in order to call for equality. They included rural women and campaigned to alter personal status laws regarding women. The realization that women were not socially accepted in public by all Egyptians contributed to yet another division within Egypt’s women’s movement, those who looked to the Western model and those who looked towards a model based more firmly in Islam.⁶⁸

As in Iran in the 1930s, the Egyptian women’s groups were unable to resist co-optation by the government of Gamal Abd al-Nasser due to their inability to unify between groups and the fact that they were in a generation change as well. Huda

⁶⁶ Fazya Hassan, “Women’s Destiny, Men’s Voices,” *Al Ahram Weekly*, February 3-9, 2000.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ This split is important in that much of Jehan’s critics came from the latter category. By calling this stage the “Western” feminist stage, I could be criticized as engaging in orientalizing and deauthenticizing the evolution of Egyptian feminism. Egyptian feminism, while it can be argued that it was inspired by the “West” and the desire of many rulers to be “Western,” it ultimately was articulated by indigenous intellectuals who shaped it into a number of phases. Chandra T. Mohanty criticized the entire non-indigenous scholar apparatus in her work, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” for creating a monolithic category of “woman” and for essentializing the nature of indigenous feminisms as being introduced from the “West.” Chandra T. Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” *boundary 2*, Vol. 12, No. 3, Spring - Autumn, 1984, 333-358

Sha'rawi died in 1948 and shortly after political unrest engulfed the country and Doria Shafiq was consolidating her popularity. Further, in 1952, the Free Officers seized power from the puppet-king Farouq and proceeded to consolidate their power by eliminating opposition groups and all groups critical of their policies. Many of the women's groups became subsumed into the political parties that reflected their larger ideological leanings, for instance the leftist women with the mainstream leftist party and the conservative women with their corresponding parties as well.

In both countries, the incorporation of the women's movements into the governmental apparatus stifled independent women's political activism. Women's issues were incorporated and subsumed into the larger political goals of the country. In Iran, this meant that women's liberation became a pawn in the larger narrative of modernization that occurred after the 1940s. In Egypt, the women's organizations and parties' agendas were suspended indefinitely as Egypt prepared for a series of three conflicts/wars with Israel in 1956, 1967 and 1973.⁶⁹ In both countries the emphasis for advancing society was placed upon secular government and the use of technology. These two factors were discredited in the 1970s, having not delivered on their promises of greatness and social equality, and a new discourse emerged with various radicalized versions of Islam at their centers. In Iran this was symbolized by the increasing support for Islam leading eventually to the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979. In Egypt, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981 by an Islamist serves as evidence.

⁶⁹ I say conflicts/wars to convey the idea that the political crises began long before fighting and ended long after the wars had officially ended.

Each of these countries' women's movements had a distinct pattern and features that distinguish them. In Iran, the lack of individuals attaining fame as activists, the inability to unify and early incorporation by the government led to a women's movement that stalled its advancement after the 1930s and never became a full fledged feminist movement. In Egypt, the presence of individual women who attained fame as feminists provided icons for scholars and Egyptians to evaluate and emulate. Some women, in the later periods, attained a degree of political power and formed political parties beyond official governmental control, leaving a legacy to be acted upon. These different circumstances are reflected in the differing arrangement of chapters three and four. In Chapter Three, Farah Pahlavi will be evaluated upon the basis of her interactions with the ideological aspects of the women's movement and the notions of authentic Iranian identity. In Chapter Four, there will be direct correlations made between Jehan Sadat's approach and the actions of Huda Sha'rawi and the EFU.

The next chapter will discuss the features of modernity and the women's movements in Iran and Egypt. It will include an examination of how each society constructed the social category of woman and how each country's women engaged the movements from their inception to their co-optation by the government.

Chapter three will discuss Farah Pahlavi and how her words and charitable works reflected her country's experience with the women's movement and the modernity movement.⁷⁰ The early co-optation by the government of the women's movement along

⁷⁰ Farah was married to Muhammad Reza Shah in 1959 and shortly after, in the early 1960s began her charitable activism; Jehan's entrance into charity work did not begin until 1967 and it is for this reason that I have organized my chapters thusly.

with the initial small population of educated intellectuals in Iran contributed to the main disparity in the women's movements. In Iran, Farah's interactions with the legacies of Iran's women's movement will be evaluated in terms of her application of the theories surrounding the women's movement and women's participation such as domesticity, motherhood and how she was able to transfer her mothering role into an acceptable political role.

Chapter four will discuss Jehan Sadat and how she interacted with Egypt's experiences with women's participation and modernity. Because more is known about the concrete actions of certain activists, this chapter will focus not only upon the theoretical constructs of women's participation in Egypt such as the discourses of motherhood and domesticity, but also upon the many similarities between Jehan's and Huda Sha'rawi's approaches to advancing women's rights, such as the founding of institutions, war relief work and the alteration of Personal Status laws for women.

Chapter five will be the concluding chapter where a general comparison between the two countries and their women will be offered as well as some tentative conclusions from this work.

CHAPTER TWO

THE REDEFINITION OF AUTHENTICITY AND WOMEN'S ROLES

As the reform movements gained momentum in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the question of the definition of authentic identity arose. The political turmoil in this period and the search for national identity created a need for nationalists to formulate their agenda in terms of true national identity. The women's movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Iran and Egypt are linked to the reform movements of the same period that called for governments to modernize. Modernity is the belief that society can evolve in a positive way through implementing ideas such as progress, technology, and independence.⁷¹ The decision of a given country (or its ideologues) towards adopting the philosophical tenets of modernity, such as social equality, reflected the realization by a section of society that an alteration of the social and political balance needed to occur in order for a given country to survive as an autonomous unit.⁷² A cornerstone to the modernization debate in the late nineteenth century in both Iran and Egypt was the persistent problem of defining women's role in society. This chapter will discuss the factors that informed both Iran's and Egypt's experience with its articulation of authentic identity and how this affected the women's movements in both countries.

⁷¹ For the purposes of this study, I will be concerned not with the definition of modernity itself, but in those aspects of society that were altered in its name. Throughout this text, I will refer alternately to modernity, the modernity movement, and the movement for modernity as interchangeable synonyms meaning the attempt to reform society as an independent entity against outward pressures. For the purposes of this work, I will focus upon secular modernity as it was the main discourse that Jehan Sadat engaged, but will acknowledge Islam where necessary.

⁷² See Kamran Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 21 for a discussion of this concept as it relates to Persian literature.

The nationalist ideologues' attempts to combine the modern and the traditional led to a reformulation of authentic identity. They created a new version of authentic identity. Eric Hobsbawm argues that all traditions are "actually invented, constructed and formally instituted...emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and datable period."⁷³ He goes on to explain that tradition is invented "between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least parts of a social life within it as unchanging and invariant."⁷⁴ He argues that traditions are invented "when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not applicable" and that this spurs on the process of adaptation.⁷⁵ The process of adaptation is inherently imprecise. Hobsbawm argues that a major aspect of inventing traditions is that the new traditions are "unspecific and vague as to the nature of the values, rights and obligations of the group."⁷⁶ The most apparent way that identity was reformulated in Iran and Egypt at the turn of the twentieth century was the fight to reformulate women's social position.

In both Iran and Egypt activists for women's rights reformulated women's role and women were imagined to be domestic goddesses, queens of their homes, nurturers to their families. This hearkened back to the accepted role for women in society. However, with the advent of the women's movement in the late nineteenth century, men and then women intellectuals began espousing the idea that women's roles could be transferred

⁷³ Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 10.

into the public arena and women could become symbols of the nation by becoming mothers to the people.

Bases for Identity in Iran and Egypt

In Iran, identity and women's role in society was affected by a number of issues. Women's influence in politics was not appreciated, as noted in the Introduction in the discussion of Malek Jahan Mahd 'Olya and Jayran. Beyond the legacies of women's negative impact upon politics was the overall ambivalent relationship of Iran to the process of modernization. Iranian elites were divided, particularly in the late Qajar era and into the early twentieth century, between a desire for the technology of the West and a rejection of its morals. Monica Ringer argues that the reforming elite attempted to legitimize modernization by fusing it with Islam and tradition. Ringer also notes that from this early period there were a number of centers of contention providing infinite arenas for synthesis and debate-

by proposing to synthesize tradition with modernization, Islam with constitutionalism, and religious instruction with sciences and foreign languages; by orienting Iranians' loyalty towards the nation and not the monarch; by rebuking the religious establishment which sought to reach directly to the public, these theorists [the reformers] usurped the moral and cultural authority of the traditional elites and effectively ended their monopoly on the creation and interpretation of [Iranian] culture.⁷⁷

These contentions and the attempts to appease them created an ambivalent and confused attitude towards modernization in Iran. The contradictions inherent in not choosing one path or the other, Islam or secularism, monarchy or democracy, were a significant force in shaping the women's movement in Iran. Because of this inability to define the terms

⁷⁷ Monica Ringer, "The Discourse on Modernization and the Problem of Cultural Integrity in Nineteenth-Century Iran," *Iran and Beyond: Essays in Middle Eastern History in Honor of Nikki R. Keddie*, Rudi Mathee and Beth Baron, eds. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2000, 68.

of the modernization process ideologues and leaders of the women's movement were never quite certain of the limits of their political participation. This hesitation combined with the existence of strong leadership after the 1920s to end any coordination or unified opposition to the incorporation efforts of Reza Shah.

The contradicting goals of the modernity movement in Iran, the desire to accept technology but not the morality of the West, and the rejection of women's participation in politics, combined to make altering women's status in society difficult.⁷⁸ Both male and female reformers were unclear in how to combine tradition with modernity, what was acceptable, and what was unacceptable. Just as Hobsbawm argued above, the Iranian activists were unclear as to the limits of their societal role. Part of this vagueness regarded how women were constructed and viewed within the larger context of modernizing society. Further, Azar Tabari notes that women's emancipation was not the focus of the early women's movement in Iran, but that increasing literacy, health and hygiene were priorities for women's activists.⁷⁹ This inability to coordinate agendas and agree on how to combine the traditional with the modern and the pragmatic with the ideological meant that the project of liberating women in Iran was undertaken without a great deal of unity between women's groups.

In Iran the debate regarding authentic identity occurred largely within the urban centers, and did not necessarily include the rural and lower classes until well into the twentieth century. Iran did not have a legacy of having a fully integrated bureaucratic

⁷⁸ In referring to the rejection of women's participation in politics, I am referring to the previous chapter and the problems of the harem.

⁷⁹ Azar Tabari, "The Women's Movement in Iran: A Hopeful Prognosis," *Feminist Studies*, 12(2) Summer 1986, 344.

system such as was in existence in Turkey and its provinces. The Qajar government's hold upon the outlying areas of Iran was tenuous at best and they consistently relied upon religious authorities to collect taxes and act as governmental representatives in the rural areas.⁸⁰ Because these duties were performed by religious officials or absentee landlords; bureaucrats, when introduced into rural Iran in the early 1900s, were mistrusted by the populace and viewed with suspicion. Further contributing to the divide between urban and rural inhabitants in Iran was the differing education styles. As educational reforms were taking shape in the cities of Iran, the rural areas depended upon religious schools to educate their children.

The struggle to define authentic Iranian identity occurred between elites in Teheran. Mansoureh Ettehadieh in her overview of the early Iranian women's movement explains "women who became involved in women's affairs were in general daughters, sister, and wives of well-known constitutionalists. Others came from less prominent backgrounds" but all were educated, a commodity for women in Qajar Iran.⁸¹ Afsaneh Najmabadi and Farzin Vahdat agree with Ettehadieh's assertion explaining that tensions in Iran at the turn of the twentieth century occurred between the Qajar elite and the Teherani intellectuals, approaching it from two angles. According to Najmabadi, in Iran backwardness was "an internally generated problem" that stemmed from the

⁸⁰ Guity Nashat notes this in relation to the experiences of women saying "the lives of women in towns and rural areas, as compared to those of a small minority in large cities, were hardly touched by these changes in perceptions about their roles. Iran during the first quarter of the twentieth century remained a primarily agrarian country; more than half of its population lived in rural areas." Guity Nashat, "Introduction," *Women in Iran From 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 20.

⁸¹ Mansoureh Ettehadieh, "The Origins and Development of the Women's Movement in Iran, 1906-1941" *Women in Iran From 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, eds. Lois Beck and Guity Nashat, (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 88.

unwillingness of the Qajars “to diversify from commerce and land to industrial ventures.”⁸² This explanation of discontent illustrates Najmabadi’s idea that authentic Iran needed an independent identity. To achieve this, Iran needed to be capable of competing with Europe and engaging in industrial ventures without compromising its autonomy.⁸³ Vahdat in his summarization of the detractors and promoters of modern thought in Iran offers a different approach to Etehadiieh’s statement, arguing that the different educational styles available in Iran led to the alienation of the elites from each other. The two educational styles he identifies are religious and Western. While Najmabadi argues that the government and its inability to remain independent of European investors was the problem, Vahdat classifies the Qajar elite as a group within the Western educated elite of Iran. He points out that the fragmentation of the elites within Teheran was not simply a difference of economic opinion or a struggle over the direction of the country, but related to a more fundamental issue. This issue is the question of authentic identity. While Najmabadi connects authentic Iranian identity to the feeling of autonomy over the country’s economic future, Vahdat argues that this struggle was essentially a conflict between Western and religious understandings of Iran’s place in the world.

⁸² She goes on to note that there was a major shift in the reasons intellectuals and the opposition gave in trying to answer the question, “why is Iran backward?” Initially the answer was preoccupied with the structures of government, then in the mid-20th century it shifted to being the “economic structure of international capitalism” that held Iran as an inferior state and by 1979, the reason was shifted internally, to the erosion of traditional Iranian values through the education system that did not include Islam. Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Iran’s Turn to Islam: From Modernism to a Moral Order,” *The Middle East Journal*, 41:2 (Spring 1987), 205, 207.

⁸³ See Najmabadi, “Is Our Name Remembered?: Writing the History of Iranian Constitutionalism As If Gender Mattered” *Iranian Studies*, 29:1-2 (Winter/Spring 1996), 86-109 and *The Story of the Daughters of Quchan: Gender and National Memory in Iranian History* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998.

Clearly, the definition of authentic identity in Iran was complex. While the reforms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries affected the larger cities in Iran, they had little impact in the rural areas as these remained outside of state control. Therefore, in Iran, the question of authenticity was defined as an essentially urban authenticity with little consideration for the population.

By the 1920s and Reza Shah's rise to power, Teheran was modernized at a frantic pace and Western schools opened with increasing frequency. The elites chose to send their children to these schools rather than to Europe or to the religious schools in Teheran. The religious schools became relegated to the fringes and poorer sections of Teheran, but they remained until well into the middle of the twentieth century the main arena for education in the rural areas. This created a disconnect between Teheran (and other large Iranian cities to some extent) and the rural areas. The alienation of the urban from the rural populations is important to understanding the development of the reforms that accompanied modernity and the women's movements, because the reforms did not often reach rural Iran and those that did were viewed with suspicion.⁸⁴ The difference between urban and rural mentalities in Iran was vast, generally speaking. Intellectuals as a group were largely alienated from the realities of daily life in rural Iran. Their mental distance from the population of Iran meant that their focus was in the larger cities,

⁸⁴ Perhaps the best example of this is the literacy corps developed by Muhammad Reza Shah in the 1960s to travel to the outlying villages. The problems the corps-people faced were two-fold. First, the corps did not have an impact beyond the villages surrounding Teheran. Second, there were cultural clashes that occurred as more liberal students of Western style universities entered the more conservative, religious areas. Guity Nashat also supports this saying the rural areas were "hardly touched" by the reforms of Teheran until well into the twentieth century. While Nashat is referring in her article to a time prior to the formation of the literacy corps her essential argument that the rural areas were excluded from the influence of the urban areas is still valid. Nashat, 20.

particularly Teheran and their ideas reflected a different understanding of Iranian identity.⁸⁵ Authentic identity as Teherani elites and intellectuals understood it was very different, therefore, from the rural understanding of the same concept.

In Egypt, the question of cultural authenticity was linked to similar tensions that characterized Iran. However, because of a higher degree of bureaucracy and bureaucratic reach into the rural areas (via the use of district leaders, etc.) ideas and reforms that occurred in Cairo impacted the lives of rural inhabitants. The tensions within Egypt are discussed by Zachary Lockman, who explains how the exclusion of the lower classes' narratives from the canon of historical literature has led to a skewed view of Egyptian society and from Juan Cole, who examines the role of the middle class in the articulation of the modernity movement.

Although the focus of Lockman's work is the importance of researching the lower classes, he articulates the impetus and impact of the modernity movement in Egypt, noting how the elite constructed the non-elite. Lockman's article concludes that the exclusion of lower classes from the modernity debate was due to their inability or unwillingness to participate in it in the same ways that the educated classes did.⁸⁶ He explains,

members of the educated elite encountered certain initially alien ideas, tried to make sense of them in terms of their own cultural preconceptions, and ultimately deployed

⁸⁵ This is not to say that *all* intellectuals were *always* liberal and westernized, but as a group they reflect a trend towards misunderstanding rural Iranian identity as backwards and those who lived in the rural areas as being in need of guidance.

⁸⁶ He notes "the question that most crucially informs [Egyptian] intellectual history is how members of the Egyptian elite grappled with, and eventually adopted in whole or in part, concepts and ideas that originated in Western Europe." Zachary Lockman, "Exploring the Field: Lost Voices and Emerging Practices in Egypt, 1882-1914," *Histories of the Modern Middle East: New Directions* eds., Israel Gershoni, Hakan Erdem and Ursula Woköck (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002, 137.

them in their own society through their writings or embodied them in new or ‘reformed’ institutions.⁸⁷

Lockman argues that the Egyptian elite adapted the Western European values they believed would best help their country in its attempt to become autonomous. Lockman then highlights the danger to historians who accept upper class accounts without question, noting that

As a result, the history of this period has usually been written not only ‘from above,’ from the perspective of elites linked to or seeking to influence the state, but also as a narrative of modernization whose central drama is the struggle of the enlightened (i.e. Europeanized) middle and upper classes to assimilate and transplant Western-inspired ideas and institutions.⁸⁸

In this “drama” the elites are the protagonists while the non-elites are the antagonists.

Lockman concludes that a defining factor of this negotiation was that this period’s ideologues constructed

traditionalism...and unruly rural and urban masses as a key obstacle to progress, which requires that those masses be remolded into a body of self-disciplined and self-motivated Western-style individuals fit to be citizens of a newly reawakened Egyptian nation ready to assume its rightful place in the modern world.⁸⁹

Unlike Lockman who argues that the problem of defining modernity occurred between an undefined upper and lower class, one who dictated and those who were the subjects of the dictates, Juan Cole examined the middle class, situating the major impacts of modernity upon it. Cole argues that the modernity movement in Egypt caused a schism within the middle class, whom he constructs as the movement’s interpreters. He argues that the middle class divided into the merchant class and the rising bureaucratic class. This second class is where he situates the main proponents of modernity. He

⁸⁷ Ibid., 137.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 138.

argues that while Egyptian men and intellectuals desired women's seclusion (as a nod to traditional social mores) they increasingly desired educated women as well.⁹⁰ Cole explains that middle-class Egyptian men,

On the one hand, wanted their wives to share in their own European culture and education so as to be better company. On the other, they faced a tight job market and did not want competition for jobs from their female relatives. They therefore supported the liberal ideal of greater education for women, while simultaneously arguing for strict veiling and seclusion practices.⁹¹

Further, this division in *their* (the middle class') understanding of modernity—as a primarily capitalist, monetary concept versus an intellectual, theoretical ideal—gave rise to a somewhat schizophrenic understanding of modernity in Egypt torn between economic considerations and altruistic ideals.

As in Iran, the tension in Egypt was situated not only within the urban class, but occurred between the rural and the urban dwellers as well. The persistence of the idea of the individual was antagonistic to the collective identities found in the rural regions, thus the ideologues of modernity constructed rural Egypt as something to be modernized but simultaneously as a place in need of preservation.⁹² Egypt constructed its rural areas as authentic, in opposition to the urban areas contaminated with British colonial customs and morals.⁹³ In Tawfiq al-Hakim's novel, *Return of the Spirit*, authentic Egypt is

⁹⁰ Juan Ricardo Cole "Feminism, Class and Islam in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 12(1981), 391.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 391.

⁹² Lila Abu-Lughod in her work with the Awlad 'Ali Bedouin Tribe in Egypt demonstrates the difficulties faced by individuals within the collective of the tribe noting that women's work was often devalued, yet their voices were often heard because they were able to subvert the system of patriarchy and male dominance. Lila Abu-Lughod, "A Community of Secrets: The Separate World of Bedouin Women," *Signs*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 637-657 and "The Romance of Resistance; Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women." *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 17, No. 1, (Feb. 1990), 41-55.

⁹³ This idea that rural Egypt is the keeper of tradition and the "real" Egypt is upheld in a number of "modern" Arab novels, including Tawfiq al-Hakim's *Return of the Spirit*, for example William M.

simultaneously rural and female. The young protagonist Muhsin learns upon his visit to the country side that real Egypt resides in the hard work and diligence of the peasants, who have been kept by invading (Turkish or British, in this case) forces as slaves and who are in need, like Egypt, of liberation.⁹⁴ Authentic identity was an unidentifiable concept, something to be exalted and protected, modernized but not necessarily changed.

The negotiation of authentic identity and the role of the individual in Egypt indicate a number of contradictions and divisions within Egyptian society that occurred as a result of the modernity debate. Lockman's argument, that the lower classes have been used as objects and not subjects in the debate and narration of Egypt's encounter with modernity, demonstrates the bias not only of scholars but also of the contemporary ideologues against the participation of the lower classes in the project of modernization. Cole's argument, that the middle class was divided between those who supported and rejected the modern reforms and those who accepted and rejected the challenge to social order that women's public role played, illustrates the practical concerns associated with the modern reforms. Despite these urban class tensions, the urban/rural divide has persisted as Egyptians have tried to construct what their authentic identity is.

Iran's and Egypt's intellectuals constructed authentic identity through the experience of the urban educated elite. Iran, because of its initial inability to reach bureaucratically its outlying areas confined its reforms largely to its cities. By doing this, Iran's ideologues created an ideology that resonated with urban dwellers whose

Hutchins, *Return of the Spirit: Tawfiq al-Hakim's Classic Novel of the 1919 Revolution* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1990).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 170-173.

experiences and attitudes were vastly different from those who lived in rural areas. In Egypt, this same question of authentic identity led to a feeling articulated by the ideologues in the urban areas that rural Egypt should be ignored and/or dictated to. While in the Iranian context the rural areas were a non-issue for intellectuals who focused their attention upon the shortcomings of the Qajar elite, in Egypt, the rural areas were non-entities whose alteration would accompany the changes that occurred in the urban areas. This difference in the Iranian intellectuals' views towards the rural areas was related to the rural areas' developing a separate identity beyond the government's control (until the 1920s and the beginning of Reza Shah's rule and to some extent into the twentieth century). In Egypt, the ambivalent relationship between the urban intellectuals and rural dwellers is apparent as they simultaneously constructed the rural areas as authentic Egypt and in need of change.

In both contexts, the construction of a new identity was deemed necessary for the nationalist movements. In Iran, urban intellectuals developed a discourse for modernizing that overlooked the peasantry; similarly, it overlooked women as well, envisioning them more as canvases to demonstrate the governments' modern outlook rather than as individuals contributing to the movement in their own right. This view was particularly strong in Iran after Reza Shah took control during the 1920s. In Egypt, the intellectuals viewed women in much the same way as they viewed the peasants as well, as simultaneously useful and in need of change. Both countries' ideologues viewed women and women's increased visibility in public as a necessary condition for becoming modern, however, they undertook measures to do it with ambivalence.

Both Juan Cole and Camron Amin acknowledge the apprehension that accompanied women's public participation. In Cole's discussion of the middle class' division, women were central to the contradictions that accompanied the redefinition of authentic identity in Egypt: women took men's jobs once they were educated, but they needed to be educated so that Egypt could achieve its independence. Camron Amin notes in his work regarding the women's movement in Iran that "as a matter of cultural history, it is completely clear that women in the office place created anxiety regarding public morality, women's fundamental competence as workers, the security of men's privileges in modern Iranian society."⁹⁵ As Hobsbawm noted above, the turbulent political situation led to the necessity of reinventing identity and adapting it to the contemporary situation. The increased visibility and public role for women was deemed crucial in the intellectuals' desire to reinterpret identity.

In both contexts, women symbolized a threat to the social order by challenging men's dominant public position. The emergence of women into the public and political context was alien to both Iran and Egypt initially. There was a need on the part of both groups of intellectuals to capture the essence of women in order to legitimize women's political participation and their new role in society. In both Iran and Egypt, this was done by seizing onto the concepts of domesticity and nurturing in an attempt to graft old traditions, women's role as mother, with the new inventions, women's role as public figure.

⁹⁵ Camron Michael Amin, *Making of Modern Iranian Woman* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2002), 27.

Constructing Woman in Iran and Egypt

The basis for many studies about the early women's movements begins with an evaluation of Qasim Amin's works, *The Liberation of Women (al-Tahrir al-Mara')* and *The New Woman (al-Mara' al-Jadida)*.⁹⁶ In secular discourses, evidenced by Qasim Amin's work *The Liberation of Women (al-Tahrir al-Mara')* women were constructed as domestic goddesses, whose childbearing abilities were exalted, and who needed to be educated in order to raise educated children. Women, in Amin's construction, were not civic equals and he upheld their inherent inferiority. Similarly, in Sayyid Qutb's *Social Justice in Islam*, a new view of a modern Muslim woman is introduced emphasizing modesty, domesticity, male authority and the idea that there is a division of labor on earth. In his view, women are spiritually equal but physically and mentally inferior.⁹⁷ While their work was not the first to articulate these ideas, they are representative of both sides of the discussion.

A number of contemporary authors have attempted to define the category of woman in the context of the 20th century and the modernity movement. Zohreh T. Sullivan notes that the impact that modernity had upon women's role in Iranian society was "the coexistence and tension of each in a dialectical...relationship with its alterity."⁹⁸ Mouinne Chelhi argues that the secular interpretations of women's role in the Middle

⁹⁶ For a complete evaluation of Qasim Amin's works, see Juan Ricardo Cole. "Feminism, Class, and Islam in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol13, No.4 (Nov., 1981), 387-407.

⁹⁷ Sayyid Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam*, trans. John B. Hardie and Hamid Algar, (New York: Octagon Books, 1970) and Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women and The New Woman: Two Documents in the History of Egyptian Feminism*, (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2000).

⁹⁸ Zohreh T. Sullivan, "Eluding the Feminist, Overthrowing the Modern?: Transformations in Twentieth Century Iran," *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, Lila Abu-Lughod ed., (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 215.

East pulled women between civic equality (the ability to participate in public) and male authority.⁹⁹ The Islamist interpretations, according to Fouad Zakarias, created another contradiction that simultaneously praised and degraded women and their abilities, constructing them as spiritually equal yet physically inferior.

Yvonne Yazbek Haddad, while accepting the above broad characterizations as a starting point, proposes three models that further explain the construction of woman. The first model constructs woman as a victim and inadequate whose work is devalued yet who is simultaneously exalted for her physical and emotional mothering abilities.¹⁰⁰ This first model is similar to the Qasim Amin interpretation of womanhood. The second model is the Conservative Islamic profile where woman is simultaneously spiritually equal and physically inferior, similar to the Sayyid Qutb understanding of woman while the third is the Islamist model which constructs woman as a partner and “incorporates into its ideology a combination of religious commitment, moral indignation, and political participation” which corresponds to the Muslim Brotherhood understanding of woman.¹⁰¹ Each of these models proposed by Haddad, Zakarias, and Chelhi, serve to demonstrate the complex nature of women’s role in the Middle East and the contradictions within various interpretations. While Haddad, Zakarias and Chelhi analyzed and classified the historical trends in the region, none acknowledges the interconnectivity of these categories. By proposing static categories for women’s role in society—woman as

⁹⁹ Yvonne Yazbek Haddad, “Islam and Gender Dilemmas in a Changing World,” *Islam, Gender and Social Change*, eds. Yvonne Yazbek Haddad and John Esposito, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, 11.

¹⁰⁰ Haddad quotes Mustafa Hijazi who argues that this model leads to different ends depending upon class. In the working classes, it leads to a “macho myth” which requires a weak feminine, while in the middle classes it is manifested in feelings of being trapped by tradition and modernity and in the upper classes to women being a tool for preserving family status and privilege Ibid., 11.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 12, 19.

domestic goddess, woman as pious, modest, being, woman as civic inferior, woman as civic equal—they do not allow for the multiplicity of identities that are present in any given human being to be examined.

Perhaps the most important feature of the women's movement in Iran and the one that differentiates it from the Egyptian most clearly, is that although it began as an attempt to achieve parity with Europe regarding public participation, it was never (or perhaps was never allowed to become) a call for complete gender equality.¹⁰² A second feature was its superficiality. The reforms were applied unequally throughout society and throughout the government itself and were more of a publicity stunt than a whole-hearted attempt to alter social relations in Iran; the decreed unveiling exemplifies this. The third feature of it is the distance between the reformers and the masses. The features of the women's movement in Iran are not specific to the movement itself, but apply more broadly to the Iranian government as a whole. This is largely due to the government's adoption of the women's movement as an indicator of its own ability to compete as an equal with Europe and this, the willingness of the women's activists to work within the government structure and not challenge policy is in itself a corollary feature.

The category of "woman" was constructed in Iran in terms of dualities. The traditional Iranian woman was, according to Amin, constructed negatively and in opposition to the Modern Woman. The traditional woman was "trapped in poverty,

¹⁰² Part of this thought has been taken from Amin, in that he argues that the Women's Awakening (1936-1941) was not a movement for gender equality and that any change in social reality was in service to the image of modernity. Yvonne Haddad notes that in Egypt, the early feminists saw women's liberation as a way to achieve parity with Europe. Amin, *Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*, 247-250, Haddad, 4.

ignorance and superstition...she was a burden to her husband.”¹⁰³ Further, traditional women, as constructed within the discourse of modernity in Iran, faced futures of “child marriage, polygynous marriage, temporary marriage and prostitution with only empty superstitions to console her.”¹⁰⁴ The goal of modernity in Iran, therefore, was to reconstruct “woman” as a category based not in superstition, but reason, not in ignorance, but knowledge.

In opposition to this ignorant, unhappy creature was the image of the “modern” woman. This category was predicated on four main features: marriage, and motherhood, women’s education, employment, and her civic participation.¹⁰⁵ This woman was educated and a mother. Amin notes that “women who did more [those who worked outside of the home] could be noted and praised but the modern Iranian woman was ultimately to be judged by what kind of mother she was.”¹⁰⁶ A shortcoming of the reconstruction of woman as a social category is illuminated here, in this initial construction of the Modern Iranian Woman. The Modern Woman in this construction was not an individual but lives to serve others. She was no more individualized than was the ignorant, traditional woman; the Modern Woman was only less self-centered.

To a large degree, women’s journals accepted and supported this idea of woman as nurturer. According to *Danesh* (Knowledge), the first women’s journal in Iran, published from 1910 to 1911, education was important for women because “education would make possible a more secure, affectionate, and *monogamous* relationship with a

¹⁰³ Amin, *Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*, 24.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 203.

man.”¹⁰⁷ This statement reflects a feeling of coercion—that women needed to be convinced that by becoming educated they would be better wives for their husbands and would no longer need to fear their taking a second wife. It also confirms the centrality of the male in a marriage. Women were not educated in order to better their position, but in order to be better partners to men. In Iranian magazines devoted to women’s issues, the highest desire for a modern woman was to be a domestic goddess whose individual identity stemmed from the males in her life. This illustrates further Vahdat’s notion included above that male authority was central and fundamental to Iran’s social order.

In debates of the twentieth century, men discussed women’s suitability for civic participation. Despite women’s participation in politics, as evidenced in their participation in public protests against the Qajar regime, there continued to be lingering questions about women’s suitability for public participation that upheld the principle of male authority and dominance.¹⁰⁸ Included below are two periods of debate regarding the position of women in society that are exemplary of two distinct ideas regarding women’s participation in civic society and politics, a debate regarding women’s suffrage just after the adoption of the Iranian Constitution of 1906 and one regarding women’s role in society thirty years later. These debates, initially undertaken only by men, focused in the first case upon the practicalities of women’s participation. In the second, the debate is between a man and a woman, focusing upon the translation of women’s “natural” abilities, that is, their nurturing abilities, onto the public and political spheres.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 45, Eliz Sanasarian, *The Women’s Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900-Khomeini*, (New York, Praeger Publishers, 1981), 32.

¹⁰⁸ Women participated in the Tobacco Concession protests in the 1890s and were active in supporting the Constitutional Revolution in 1906.

Article 4 of the Iranian Constitution of 1906 delineated the groups ineligible for voting, and first among them were women.¹⁰⁹ Sansarian notes “along with the insane and the criminal, the female population of Iran was denied the right to vote.”¹¹⁰ Although there was only one dissenting voice on the committee, his thought represents one extreme of the spectrum regarding women’s civic participation and is included here. Amin notes that only “Hajj Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Vakil al-Ra’aya, questioned the ban” on women asking, “How long should these creations of God be forbidden and how long must a group loved by God suffer because something that is a sign of their humanity is forcibly taken?”¹¹¹ In response to this, Muhammad ‘Ali Foroghi Zoka al-Molk, head of the commission that drafted the law, explained,

This is a very great dispute, but we did not anticipate that it would come up here. Perhaps I am, more than anyone, a partisan of women having their main rights, having a proper way of life, and having the basic, fixed rights they do have [sic]. . . . I am also very eager that the situation of women in this country improve and progress, and that they come out of this life that is in fact a life of imprisonment. There is no one who is not sorry about the fact that their conditions of life are not good. That we negated their right [to vote] does not require reasons or demonstrations from me. *Whenever it becomes possible* for women to participate in the elections and to vote, we will immediately approve it.”¹¹²

Amin then quotes the most conservative view, that of Seyyed Hassan Modarres, who “was a respected cleric and teacher in Isfahan who had been sent by the religious establishment not as an elected deputy but so serve as a member of the Hayat-e ‘Elmiyeh (Learned Council),” the predecessor of today’s Guardian Council.¹¹³ Modarres noted regarding women’s suffrage,

¹⁰⁹ Sanasarian, 38.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 19.

¹¹¹ Amin, *Making of the Modern Iranian Woman* 39.

¹¹² Italics mine. Ibid., 38-39.

¹¹³ Ibid., 38.

First, women must not be named as those who have the right to vote, because they are women. The example of saying ‘they are not insane’ and ‘they are not idiots’—that is a matter for the committee. But our answer *must be out of reason*...no matter how much we deliberate, we will see that God has not given them the capacity so that they might merit the right to vote. They and the feeble minded are among those whose intellects are not as capable. Never mind that, in truth, women in our religion of Islam are under guardianship...Our religion is Islam. They are under guardianship. They will never have the right to vote. Others must protect the rights of women because God has ordered in the Koran that they are under guardianship and will not have the right to vote.¹¹⁴

Amin then notes, “and with Modarres’s comments, the issue of women’s suffrage was effectively sealed for thirty-three years.”¹¹⁵

What is notable here and the reason I quote these passages at length, is that each of these men use simultaneously the discourses and vocabulary of modernity and religion to defend their views. Clearly there were multiple identities and constructions of women occurring within a given conversation regarding women’s role in society. Each of these arguments has to do with the concept of subjectivity—is a woman a subject, meaning is she an autonomous being as capable as any other of making informed decisions or is she an object to be owned, cared for and guided? Al-Ra’aya, upholding the notion of equality between individuals, uses Islam’s edict regarding women’s spiritual equality to support his call for their equality in this issue, while al-Molk appeals to the paternalistic notion that women need to be educated before they can participate, and Modarres uses the concept of reason to “reason” that Islam has placed women under male protection, this is inviolable, therefore women cannot vote on equal footing with men. These reactions correspond roughly to Haddad’s notions noted above. The interaction of reason, equality, education, and Islam in this small exchange, illustrates the diversity of

¹¹⁴ Italics mine. Ibid., 39-40.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 40.

opinion in 1906 Iran, but also sets up the major arguments regarding women for the next hundred years.

Thirty years later, in another debate, the President of the Parliament, Hajj Mohtashem al-Saltaneh Esfandiyari outlined four “moral duties of women,” in a speech to the Women’s Society.¹¹⁶ These duties were “obtaining an education...governing their entrance into society, housekeeping, ‘husbandkeeping,’ ...and child raising with utmost circumspection and attention to protocol...work...simplicity.”¹¹⁷ In response to this, the director of the Women’s Society, who Amin names only as Mrs. Tarbiyat responded by characterizing women’s role as nurturer in the home but extending to society at large.¹¹⁸ The major issue in this exchange is not necessarily the role of woman as subject or object, although that certainly is a factor, but can and should woman’s domestic role as nurturer be translated into the public sphere without her losing her femininity or diminishing her ability to care for the family. By advocating the translation of women’s domestic role into the public sphere, she hoped that women would become integrated into civil society.¹¹⁹

Although Camron Amin does not quote the 1935 speeches at length, as he does the 1906 ones, the excerpts indicate a change in tactic on both sides. While the initial questions regarded women’s civic equality, the later ones accepted women’s public role as an extension of her familial role. By maintaining her role as a nurturer, a woman

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 92.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 92-93.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 93.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 93-94.

could participate in politics, as long as it was possible to relate her cause to the condition of women.

In the intervening period between the above debates (1906-1935), both Sanasarian and Amin observe that elite women increasingly participated in the public forum and debated women's role in society.¹²⁰ Both also recognize that the arguments being produced by women were not completely in favor of liberation. Amin argues that they "associated themselves with the progressive spirit of constitutionalism and tacitly accepted an unequal voice in the new order."¹²¹ He explains that although women's publications varied widely in view, but many put forth the view of Iranian womanhood that "was simultaneously broadened and restrained" in that it advocated access to education insofar as women should become helpmeets to their spouses.¹²² Sanasarian too noted that with the Women's Awakening (1936-1941); the government suppressed independent liberatory thought and writing subsuming it into the state-sponsored reinterpretation of women's role in society.¹²³

Amin remarks,

At first glance, the Women's Awakening would seem to have been a poor bargain. It increased state control of women's bodies, education and public image rather than increasing professional acceptance by male colleagues...Indeed, the regime may have been more interested in the image of modern Iranian womanhood than its reality.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Sanasarian, 28-78.

¹²¹ Ibid., 42.

¹²² Ibid., Camron Amin, *State Policy, and Popular Culture, 1865-1946*, (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2002), 42-43.

¹²³ Sanasarian notes that along with fear of reprisal, their inability to garner support outside of educated circles, they were in the middle of a generational leadership change and each of these contributed to their inability to form a unified opposition to the collectivizing policies of Reza Shah. Sanasarian, 48.

¹²⁴ Amin, *Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*, 188.

The Women's Awakening as noted above, there was an emphasis in modernity as interpreted by Reza Shah, upon superficiality. It amended marriage and divorce laws, abolished religious courts, included education reform, and outlawed of the veil.¹²⁵

Although it was one in a number of reforms, the unveiling decree was the most publicized and for many, the least well received. Camron Amin argues that the goal of the Women's Awakening in Iran was not to unveil women, unveiling being symbolic of true liberation, but that the unveiling of women was a means to display Iran's "modernity" focusing it upon the bodies of women. Amin notes, "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."¹²⁶ Because the subject of unveiling was only important in so far as it could be exported and diplomats largely only went to the larger cities, it was therefore only important for urban women to be unveiled. This is not to say that the unveiling decree was not enforced outside the capital, but that the focus of the reform was to display and publicize Iran's modern image at home and abroad.¹²⁷ The best way to achieve this, therefore, was to display it in the cities.

¹²⁵ According to Sanasarian, the Women's Awakening reforms amended the marriage laws and outlawed religious courts, but very little changed in reality as personal status was still governed by *shari'a* (Islamic law). They raised the age of female consent for marriage and included stipulations regarding divorce and second marriages. However, the basic issues of child marriage, groundless divorce and taking a second wife without notifying the first, endured. As for the education reforms, there were few female teachers to teach the newly opening schools, but Sanasarian notes that Reza Shah's reign was the first time that the government of Iran had taken a firm and supportive interest in educating women. The final tenet of the Women's Awakening was the "mandatory unveiling" decree. Sanasarian, 61-65.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 96-95.

¹²⁷ Amin, *Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*, 91.

The Women's Awakening ended abruptly in 1941 due to the abdication of Reza Shah, in favor of his son, Muhammad Reza. After a decade of consolidation of power, including a short abdication and restorative coup in 1953, Muhammad Reza was sufficiently strong enough to govern.¹²⁸ The women's movements took full advantage of this initial thawing in the co-optation trend and there was a renaissance of women's groups in the confusion of the late 1940s but by the 1950s, the women's groups had been relegated to charitable and/or professional organizations that had little power to change society's viewpoints towards women.¹²⁹

The authentic identity for the Iranian woman, therefore contradicted itself in an attempt to reconcile notions of traditionalism with the modern woman. The modern reforms vis a vis women were important in Iran insomuch as they could be displayed to the world. This disconnection between the public and the private notions of womanhood persisted.¹³⁰ The women's movement in Iran was not a movement for equality (prior to Reza Shah's co-optation of it) but for parity. The acceptance of a separate role for women within society is inherent in the notion of gender parity. By accepting the call for gender parity, Sanasarian argues there was a shift that occurred within the women's movements as they existed within Iran. According to Sanasarian, women of the 1920s valorized women's strength but "educated women of the 1950s passively accepted the

¹²⁸ The 1953 coup was masterminded by British and American intelligence.

¹²⁹ Sanasarian, 79.

¹³⁰ For more information, see Sattareh Farman Farman's autobiography. *Daughter of Persia: A Woman's Journey from Her Father's Harem Through the Islamic Revolution*, (New York: Crown Publishing, 1992). Her father was a Qajar elite with a more modern understanding of women's position. Although he kept his wives and female children secluded, he also believed that they should be educated and taught to do both masculine and feminine activities. As Reza Shah came to power, the bounds of the harem were increasingly loosened and Sattareh was permitted to leave the compound.

notion of the physical inferiority of women.”¹³¹ The contradicting role for women in society is due largely to the acceptance of parity over equality and the definitions of both. Farah, by concerning herself with the feminine issues of the weak and children engaged this above contradiction; women could work, but only within the confines of their gender defined roles.

The contradictions that this focus upon gender parity led to persisted into the twentieth century and are demonstrated in an interview that that Shah gave to journalists Oriana Fallaci and Barbara Walters in the late 1970s. As Shah, he publicly championed women’s rights, but privately, as the below interviews confirm, held a conflicting notion of womanhood. In the Fallaci interview, he negated feminism and reduced womanhood to aesthetics. The offending portion of the Fallaci interview to which Walters refers to below is as follows:

Oriana Fallaci: Majesty...you’re a Muslim. Your religion allows you to take another wife without repudiating the Empress Farah Diba.

Muhammad Reza Shah: yes, of course. According to my religion, I could, so long as the Shahbanou gave her consent. And to be honest, one must admit there are cases when...for instance, when a wife is sick, or doesn’t want to fulfill her wifely duties, thereby causing her husband unhappiness...After all! You’d have to be hypocritical or naïve to think a husband would tolerate such a thing. In your society, when a circumstance of that kind arises, doesn’t a man take a mistress, or more than one? Well, in our society, a man can take another wife. So long as the first wife consents and the court approves...

Oriana Fallaci: I am beginning to suspect that women have counted for nothing in your life...

Muhammad Reza Shah: Here I am really afraid you’ve made a correct observation...women are important in a man’s life only if they’re beautiful and charming and keep their femininity and...this business of feminism, for instance. What do these feminists want? What do you want? You say equality. Oh! I don’t want to seem rude, but...you’re equal in the eyes of the law but not, excuse my saying so, in ability.

Oriana Fallaci: No, Majesty?

Muhammad Reza Shah: No. You’ve never produced a Michelangelo or a Bach. You’ve never even produced a great chef. And if you talk to me about opportunity, all I can say is ‘are you joking? Have you ever lacked the opportunity to give history a great

¹³¹ Sanasarian, 81.

chef? You've produced nothing great, nothing!...You're schemers, you are evil. All of you.¹³²

In the Walters interview, Muhammad Reza Shah was questioned as to his words given in the Fallaci one,

Walters: I'm quoting Your Majesty. "In a man's life, women count only if they are beautiful, graceful and know how to stay feminine. You may be equal in the eyes of the law, but not in ability. You have never produced a Michelangelo or a Bach or even a great cook. You are schemers. You are evil. All of you." Your Majesty, you said all these things?

Shah: Not with the same words, no.

Walters: Well, the thought, "You've never produced a Michelangelo, a Bach, or even a great. . . ."

Shah: This I have said.

Walters: So you don't feel that women are in that sense equal, if they have the same intelligence or ability.

Shah: Not so far. Maybe you will become in the future. We can always have some exceptions.

Walters: Here and there? Do you feel your wife is one of these rare exceptions?

Shah: It depends in what sense.

Walters: Well, do you feel your wife can govern as well as a man?

Shah: I prefer not to answer.¹³³

This episode arises in Blanch's biography of Farah. Blanch records it in a portion where she is discussing whether the Shah is influenced by anyone. Blanch concludes that no one except Assadollah Alam and Farah are able to influence him, but even this has its limit. Blanch then notes

although a year or so ago, His Majesty went on record (when needed by a provocative Italian woman journalist) as saying women were inferior to men, scheming, and far more cruel, if possessed of power. . . . Tut! Tut! However, it is now known that he does seek the Shahbanou's opinion on many matters he would once have considered above her head. Over the years, she has proved herself, justified his first impressions that she was the Shahbanou his country needed; and now, a counselor upon whom he can rely, and whom he has appointed Regent for his son, should need arise. What more proof could be given, of his trust?¹³⁴

¹³² Oriana Fallaci, *Interview with History*, (New York; Liveright Publishing, 1976), 270-272.

¹³³ Elaine Sciolino, "The Last Empress" *New York Times*, May 2, 2004, 12. The offending portion of the Fallaci interview to which she is referring is as follows

¹³⁴ Lesley Blanch, *Farah, Shahbanou of Iran, Shahbanou of Persia* (London: Collins, 1978), 90.

The disapproval in Blanch's writing regarding the handling of this matter is comedic at best and biased at worst and Blanch offers nothing in the way of evidence for her assertion. That this interview was raised in the context of Farah's official biography indicates that it was a topic that could not be ignored.

The interviews with Walters and Fallaci reflect the superficiality of the reforms at the highest level, that of the Shah. While on paper women had equal rights in many aspects in Iran in the 1960s and 1970s, they were marginalized in order to protect their nature. That these contradictions persisted even at the level of the Shah indicates how basic the notion of subservience and dominance, as Vahdat noted above, was in Iranian society.

The modernity movement in Iran was based upon the idea that Iran would be able to compete in the global economy only after its people were educated and individualized, wrenched from their backward condition into the era of industrialization and technological advancement. The ideas of women's increased education and women's civic participation accompanied the movement, but only so far as these did not interfere with women's first duty to her family, husband and children. The conflicting constructions of woman—as subjects and objects, nurturers and public participants—that were articulated in these three periods reflected larger issues in society regarding the role of Iranian identity and the self.

The contrasts of the construction of the Iranian woman with the Egyptian one focus largely upon the differences mentioned above, that the Egyptian reform movement was concerned with the urban/rural as two distinct groups as well as with the divisions

within the urban contexts. Further, that Iran's women's movement was co-opted by the early 1930s into state-feminism, there was little intellectual development beyond what the state dictated and as noted above, even at the highest levels of the state there was uncertainty regarding women's role in society that persisted into the 1970s.

The women's movement in Egypt has been the subject of a number of books and has been examined from a number of angles. The five features which characterize the Egyptian women's movement and its interactions with the state and society are the devaluation of women's work and abilities, calls for gender equality, the attempt to work within the system to change the system, the concept of division followed by integration, and the tradition of private initiative, not governmental edict to bring about social change.

The first feature is by no means unique to Egypt, but Egypt's experience with social reform and colonialism altered fundamentally the way that society valued or devalued women's work. The second reflects a contrast between the Iranian and Egyptian experiences with the women's movement. Unlike in Iran where reformers called for gender parity, in Egypt women rallied for equality from an early period of the women's movement. My third criterion refers to the contradictory acceptance of patriarchy in an attempt by women's leaders to advance women's position in society, for example, rallying for the establishment of women's doctors to cater to women's needs. By accepting the patriarchal system that upheld the notion that male, non-family members should not be permitted to minister to female patients the leaders of the women's movement were able to establish a school for female doctors, or *hakimas*. The fourth refers to the practice of keeping philanthropy and politics separate initially, but

finally integrating them into a single system. The final criterion is one that separates Iran from Egypt most distinctly. In Egypt, the majority of women's legislation throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries comes not from the government in the form of state-sponsored directives, but from non-governmental sources. That is, the government in Egypt is less likely to undertake legislating social reform that impacts women positively upon its own initiative and more likely to require outside forces to compel it to change. These five criteria along with the three features of modernity that I highlighted above—the importance of the individual, the question of authentic identity and the notion of class—form a prism through which the women's movement in Egypt can be examined.¹³⁵

The devaluation of women's work within society resulted from Muhammad Ali's reforms in the early nineteenth century. Judith Tucker concludes that in the period of 1800-1914, women's access to property guaranteed by Islam was decreased due to increasing "pressure from the loss of land and contraction of home crafts."¹³⁶ Men refused or were unable to give women their inheritance due to increasing taxation by Muhammad 'Ali's and his successors' governments. Further, as European goods entered the Egyptian economy the market for cottage industry goods decreased.¹³⁷ This decline in cottage industries increased a woman's dependence upon her male relatives by decreasing her monetary contribution to the family unit. By decreasing women's financial power, these reforms decreased women's social power. Moreover, the colonial

¹³⁵ Tucker's analytical categories were "women's access to property...their position in the family unit...their participation in social production" and "the prevailing ideological definition of their roles." Judith Tucker, *Women in Nineteenth Century Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 6, 194-197.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹³⁷ Cottage industry goods are those products produced for consumption within the home or immediate community, not for global trade.

experience “completely alienated” women linguistically, culturally and sexually from the state apparatus, subjugating them to both imported and traditional constraints due to their decreased production value.¹³⁸

This alienation and devaluation of women’s work was a lasting legacy of this period of Egyptian history. Although the Egyptian constitution of 1922 declared all Egyptians equal, in 1923, the suffrage bill was passed, declared women ineligible. This exclusion denied women’s participation in society and in the constitutional movement by denying them the right to vote. Further, Nadia Hijab notes in the 1980s that although women’s work was essential to rural families’ stability, it was often overlooked due to the emphasis on the male as the provider.¹³⁹ Clearly, this view has withstood the test of time.

The call for equality between the sexes and not simply gender parity, conflicts slightly with my third criterion of women attempting to work within the system and so they will be discussed together. The leaders of the organized women’s movement, Huda Sha’rawi, Malika Hifni Nassif, Safiyeh Zaghlul, and Nabawiyah Musa believed in and called for women’s equality with men.¹⁴⁰ This can be seen in their attempts to tie women’s independence with national independence and to couch their goals such as literacy and health care as national goals.¹⁴¹ However, in the above described suffrage debate, the leaders conceded that perhaps only educated or propertied women should vote. In proposing this notion, Badran argues that the leaders of the women’s movement

¹³⁸ Ibid., 194-197.

¹³⁹ Nadia Hijab, “Women and Work in the Arab World,” 45.

¹⁴⁰ Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 74-80, 106.

accepted tacitly the notion of men's superiority over women, because such stipulations of education or property were not imposed upon men.¹⁴²

This notion of working within the system to affect change occurred also in the unveiling debate where women's removal of the *niqab*, or face veil, was highly publicized. However, many women found that the veil was a useful tool to subvert male discourse regarding women's participation outside of the home.¹⁴³ This debate is found in similar re-veiling literature that has been published in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.¹⁴⁴

Perhaps the best example of women's working within the system and the notion of equality between the genders is the establishment of the Wafdist Women's Coordination Committee (WWCC). The Wafd began in 1919 as a male movement against the British. However, women soon joined the men in the streets protesting for independence and eventually the leaders' wives formed the WWCC.¹⁴⁵ Women's participation in this movement was significant, because while the British focused upon the contacts and movements of the Wafd's male leaders, their wives were able to move about unnoticed. By using British biases against women's abilities to be political, the WWCC enabled communication between the male Wafd members in the pre- and post-

¹⁴² Ibid., 209.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 48.

¹⁴⁴ Sherifa Zuhur, *Revealing Reveiling: Islamic Gender Ideology in Contemporary Egypt*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), Nilüfer Göle. "Islam in Public: New Visibilities and New Imaginaries," *Public Culture*, 14 (1) 2002, 173-190, Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival," *Cultural Anthropology*, 16 (2) 2001 202-236.

¹⁴⁵ Huda Sharawi was affiliated with this organization, as her husband, Ali Sharawi, was treasurer, as was Safiyeh Zaghlul, not as a member, but as the wife of the Wafd party, Sa'd Zaghlul. Badran, 81.

independence eras.¹⁴⁶ However, once in power, the Wafd quickly changed its stance regarding women. Badran notes that most Egyptian women were barred entrance to the opening of the Parliament. The only Egyptian women present were the wives of ministers and officials, although European women were admitted without question, indicating the lower status of Egyptian women in the eyes of the party, generally. Further, as noted above in the suffrage debate, women were excluded by this new party from voting.

The final feature of the women's movement in Egypt is the importance of private initiative in spurring the government to support social change. The Egyptian government did not take on the responsibility of social reform for women until the 1950s with the absorption of the women's groups into mainstream political parties. Because of the long history and diversity of women's voices in the women's movement and the tolerance of the Egyptian government in allowing the women's groups to fold into their ideological counterparts, there remained a dynamic element within Egyptian society as regards women. This is not to say that the Egyptian government remained tolerant of every viewpoint after 1952, often women's issues were ignored in lieu of larger political issues, such as the wars with Israel (1956, 1967, 1973). What is important is that the diversity of viewpoints on women's issues was preserved in Egypt in a way that did not occur in Iran because of the late co-optation of the women's movement.

In Egypt, the Modern Egyptian Woman was unveiled and educated, similar to the constructions in Iran.¹⁴⁷ She was a mother, but she was also valued at times for her political participation. The basic philosophy for women's inclusion into Egypt's

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 86.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 74.

modernity movement is elucidated by Margot Badran who notes that by the 1930s, feminists argued that

when Egyptian civilization was at its height, women were advanced. Egypt had fallen under foreign occupation because the country had declined, and the country had declined because women had become backward. Through education women and the nation would be revitalized.¹⁴⁸

Revitalizing in this sense meant the increasing use of science and technology to govern people's lives. According to the early feminists, it made economic "sense" to integrate women into the public sphere as workers. They were an "untapped" resource whose working would lead to an increase in the standard of living of the Egyptian family.¹⁴⁹

The legal ramifications of the women's movement and the social realities were not congruent. Leila Ahmed argues that intersection of the modernity movement and women was a complicated, but ultimately negative process that emphasized women's dependent status.¹⁵⁰

During the later nineteenth century, a number of modern Egyptian ideologues viewed women as a stagnant sector of society whose economic participation in the modern Egypt would help secure economic and political sovereignty. The modernists, among them Qasim Amin and Muhammad Abduh, argued that women were the nurturers of the family and should therefore be educated in order to raise "proper" children. The focus of women's incorporation into the movement for modernity in Egypt was their inability to raise "suitable" children due to their own lack of education. Women were constructed as the most backward element of a backward society, so it was only through

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 145.

¹⁴⁹ Cole, 387-407.

¹⁵⁰ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1992), 127.

educating women that they could fully assimilate Egypt's children into the realities of the "modern" world, full of rapidly changing technological and ideological advances. In order for this to happen, women needed to be educated and unveiled.

This contradictory construction of woman as capable, yet threatening was not solely a theoretical concept, but manifested itself in a number of real ways. Khaled Fahmy, Mervat Hatem and Omnia Shakry examine the contradictions as they emerged in the early period of the Egyptian women's movement and Nada Tomiche examines them as they manifested themselves in the 1960s. Each concludes that the paradoxes of modernity have their roots within the 19th century and that these paradoxes were not 20th century constructs, demonstrating the long-standing history of Egypt's conflicting relationship between feminism and modernity.¹⁵¹

Despite producing a socially mobile element within the urban, female population, which existed outside of the traditional social structure, the *hakimas*, registered nurses, remained imprisoned by the patriarchal ideals that characterized this traditional social structure. Fahmy explains that women's medical education,

on the one hand, one can clearly see how the school helped girls who joined it by turning them into *hakimas* [registered nurses] and thus saved them from a worse fate...they were thus offered free education, economic power, mobility and an enviable social status...yet...these women found themselves strongly enmeshed in a hierarchical system in which they occupied the lowest rung.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Khaled Fahmy, "Women, Medicine, and Power in Nineteenth-Century Egypt. *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* ed. Lila Abu-Lughod (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 35-72, Mervat Hatem: 'A'isha Taymur's Tears and the Critique of the Modernist and the Feminist Discourses on Nineteenth-Century Egypt" *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 29-48, Omnia Shakry, "Schooled Mothers and Structured Play: Child Rearing in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt" *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 126-170.

¹⁵² Fahmy explains the vulnerability of these women to charges of incompetence due to the fact that they were breaching both societal and gender stereotypes and that they were seen as agents of state control. Fahmy, 59.

Both men and women attacked the creation of the hakimas. Men criticized them for existing with the masculine field of organized medicine, while women criticized them for supplanting the traditional midwives, called *dayas*.¹⁵³ This ambivalence of their position reflects the duality of women's construction as modernity was experienced in Egypt.

Mervat Hatem and Omnia Shakry examine a similar dichotomy of women's position through the lens of domesticity and women's public role. Hatem argues that by entering the public sphere, women were required to devalue their domestic duties, a tradition in which modern scholarship has been complicit while Shakry argues that the emphasis on women as mothers elevated the notion of domesticity to that of a full-time career.

Hatem, by examining Aisha Taymur's (Taymuriyya's) life, objects to its portrayal by modern scholars. Taymur was a renowned female poet and writer in Egypt during the late nineteenth century, whose life has been, according to Hatem, examined as a result of various men's interventions.¹⁵⁴ She argues that this reflects how modernity privileges the male by first, constructing only exceptional women's lives and second, reducing the influence of women in their lives. Hatem concludes, therefore, that women's new gender roles were modeled upon those of men and that therefore women's domestic contributions were devalued. She argues that by entering the public sphere, women "had to deny their gender difference and consent to its continued social devaluation."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Ibid., 57.

¹⁵⁴ Hatem, 74-75.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 86.

Omnia Shakry examines the opposite side of the domesticity debate. She notes that the increasing emphasis on science and technology that characterized the modernity movement generally entered into women's domestic sphere. She argues that the emphasis given to "scientific" child rearing indicates a privileging of women's domestic roles. She explains that modernity carried with it the assumption that mothers "were responsible for the physical, moral and intellectual development of children within the nexus of a nascent nationalist discourse."¹⁵⁶ By situating women as the nurturers of Egypt's future, the modernity movement removed childcare as a prerogative of men and elevated domesticity to the level of a full-time occupation, precluding women's participation in broader public circles.¹⁵⁷

This elevated domestic role conflicted with the idea of women's work outside of the home and by the 1950s, this tension became apparent. Nada Tomiche argues that this tension is demonstrated in the debates regarding education and personal status both within rural and urban Egypt. Although the tone of her work affirms her own superiority at a number of points, her information reflects the growing contradictions emerging from the paradoxes of modernity in Egypt. She explains,

Communal hatreds exist equally between the peasantry and the city dwellers. As a result, young village people cannot marry members of an enemy clan, nor the townspeople. Though educated, with a high post in Cairo or Alexandria, they return to the village to get married, thus forming alliances in which there is often a considerable disparity in the cultural level of the two partners, one being 'modern' and the other 'conservative'. These marriages are disrupted when the husband leaves his wife in the village and returns to work in the city, or when the woman, uprooted from her village and brought to the city, feels disoriented and unhappy.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Shakry, 126.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 135, Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society and the Press* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1994), 158-159.

¹⁵⁸ Nada Tomiche, "The Position of Women in the UAR," *Journal of Contemporary History* 3:3 (July 1968), 132.

This recognition of the problems of rural woman whose social dislocation occurs due to the conflicting desire within the husband to be both 'modern' and work within the government as his education level permits and 'traditional' and continue to solidify familial bonds within the home village. Tomiche then recognizes the problems of educated women noting that

Women are subject not only to the constraints of popular traditions; they are also affected by economic change, by education, and by their entry into the world of wage earners. Attempts at adaptation often result in situations of extreme tension within their environment, in deep discontent, and, particularly for the woman living in town, in a feeling of frustration and stagnation. Her desire for independence, her sense of her own dignity and her emotional needs develop more quickly than collective attitudes.¹⁵⁹

The impact, according to Tomiche of the distance between social reality and traditional sensibilities is seen in women's attitudes towards marriage. She explained, that "women trade unionists are rarely married, for, they say, intelligent men are still too conservative and are afraid of them, while they in turn are becoming more demanding in their choice of husbands."¹⁶⁰ Yet, she argued "marriage still represents a crucial problem for the working woman, for in spite of the realities of emancipation, she can hardly escape prejudice, and her fears of rejection by her society conflict with her reluctance to resign herself to a life of solitude."¹⁶¹ This lack of satisfaction and pull between tradition and reality manifested itself throughout society and was not specific to the 1960s. This problem was not posited as it was in the West, as the choice between a career and marriage, but it was indicative of a larger problem, the issue of authenticity, and was concerned with finding a balance of tradition with modernity.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 136.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 138.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

Although women's social position could improve through education and participation in the public realm, their role in society was still limited to the position of a nurturer and subject to the patriarchal construction of woman as an inferior category. This participation was marked by conflicts within and between classes as middle class men increasingly wanted intellectual partners but not competition for employment while rural men rejected outright women's equality and education.¹⁶² The values that were adopted *vis a vis* women during the interpretation of modernity included the accepting and championing of women's public visibility and education, while simultaneously constructing "woman" as a locus of backwardness and tradition. Women were constructed the nurturers of the nation, yet were unqualified to raise children. This difference, between the collective "women" as an acceptable concept, and the individual "woman" as a negative one, demonstrates the inherent contradictions in the modernity movement as it related to the construction of an individual within society. The pull between exaltation of women's domestic roles and their requirement to ignore them is fundamental to understanding women's public participation throughout the Middle East, because it is only through a negotiation of these two extremes that public women live their lives.

¹⁶² This is supported in Nada Tomiche's article where she notes that *Rose al-Yusuf* published the statistics from a study done by the Ministry of Labor in 1962, 1963 and 1964, emphasizes that female and male participation in education in rural areas of Egypt are not proportionate. She notes that one article said "boys from 6 to 15 years of age form 10.8 per cent of the national labour force, whilst the proportion of girls from the same age group is three times as high, rising to 31 per cent." She quoted another saying, "In fact, if primary school is 'almost' compulsory for boys living in the country...it is not the same for girls. In Nubia...98 per cent of the school pupils are boys, and only two percent are girls...the same at Qena." Tomiche, 130-131.

The legacies of the Egyptian women's movement were far reaching and many are apparent in the works of Jehan Sadat that will be discussed in chapter four. The tensions and the negotiation of authentic identity and the role of the individual varied within and across the urban/rural divide, but the very fact that the rural was a significant factor in the discussion is enough to set the Egyptian experience apart from the Iranian. While the Iranian intellectuals, as a nod to the constraints within society, called for gender parity, the Egyptian leaders called for equality and were consistently rebuffed.

In this chapter, I have attempted to identify a number of features that influenced the course of the women's movements in both Egypt and Iran, from their inception to their co-optation by the government. In Iran, I identified three factors—the call for gender parity, not equality, the superficiality of reforms, and the mental distance between reformers and reformed, while in Egypt I identified four features—devaluation of women's work, the calls for equality while upholding societal divisions, working within the system and the importance of private initiative to affect change—that characterized their countries' interactions between modernity, the women's movements and their historical context. In the coming chapters, both Farah Pahlavi's and Jehan Sadat's life and works will be discussed with attention to these issues as well as to the tensions of class, the notion of authentic identity and the position of the individual within the collective.

CHAPTER THREE

FARAH PAHLAVI: NURTURING IRAN

Farah Pahlavi was the embodiment, as interpreted by the government of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, of ideal Iranian womanhood—a wife, a mother, and a public figure championing the feminine arenas— yet she was completely out of touch and distant regarding authentic Iran. As a Shahbanou, she acknowledged that she was “the representative of female emancipation,” but that her role was held apart from the reality of women during the period.¹⁶³ Farah’s role as a dominant female character in Iran was constructed via the engagement with the discourse regarding the feminization of Iran that arose in the late Qajar period. While she did not consciously engage this discourse, it is easy to notice how the feminization of the land along with the emphasis on the woman’s role as nurturer contributed to her ability to become an actor within the Pahlavi government. By manipulating the discourse of motherhood she created a new role for leader’s wife within Iran, if only for herself.

Farah Pahlavi wrote two autobiographies, *My Thousand and One Days*, published in 1978 and *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah*, published in 2004. Both of these were originally published in France and were translated into English from French. There is a marked difference in tone between the first and the second autobiography; the first is more confident and the second is more reflective. There is also a biography of her, commissioned with the approval of the state and published in 1978, written by Lesley Blanch, *Farah, Shahbanou of Iran, Shahbanou of Persia*. Blanch’s account is laudatory,

¹⁶³ Farah, Shahbanou of Iran, *My Thousand and One Days: An Autobiography* (London: W.H. Allen, 1978), 131.

of course, but it also attempts to create a view of the Royal Family as “normal.” For instance, Blanch describes Niavaran Palace, which the Royal Family moved to in the early 1970s saying without a hint of irony,

Behind all the protocol, below the pale blue Royal standard, the guards, the monitoring system and the hovering Royal helicopters, it [the palace] retains the essential character of a home. Here, the Shahbanou has achieved what she considers her ultimate responsibility—to have created the core of family life.”¹⁶⁴

From the above quote, it is easy to see where the criticisms of the Pahlavis came from, but equally as interesting is the inherent “normality” that Blanch is trying to display in this quote. She is judging Niavaran based upon whether it was a palace or a home. By acknowledging its existence as a “home” Blanch attempted to situate Farah within the realm of “normal” womanhood, as a wife and mother, reflecting perhaps Farah’s own desire to be portrayed that way.

Motherhood

The use of women and their participation in Qajar politics combined during the concession era and the Daughters of Quchan story to form an essentially effeminate view of the Qajar Shah and his government as a whole, according to Afsaneh Najmabadi.¹⁶⁵

Women’s bodies became an arena for Iran to show its masculinity. Najmabadi notes that in response to Russian aggression on the northern border of Iran the nation became gendered feminine and needed to be protected at all costs. She explains,

In a remarkable chain of shifting meanings, sexual honor became national honor; women, whose sexual honor needed protection, became sisters and wives of brothers of Iranian soldiers. These brothers were not only brothers-in-religion; they were Iranians, a national brotherhood, whose honor thus became a national one. The message went beyond demonstrating the oppression of rulers. When women were subjected to such treatment

¹⁶⁴ Lesley Blanch, *Farah, Shahbanou of Iran, Shahbanou of Persia* (London: Collins, 1978), 93.

¹⁶⁵ Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Zanhā-yi Millat: Women or Wives of the Nation?” *Iranian Studies*, 26:1, (Winter/Spring, 1993), 56.

and men did not respond, this oppression became simultaneously the sigh of unmanliness of men. Men were thus called upon at once to set the political injustice right and to reconstitute their manhood, to salvage national and sexual honor, to save the nation and manhood in one justified act of revolt.¹⁶⁶

As the nation became feminine, the protectors became masculine.

Camron Michael Amin too notes the importance of “Mother Iran” as a moral figure used in magazines and journals. She was figured as a nurturer to the men of the country, who in turn are bound to protect her.¹⁶⁷ In the context of the Pahlavis, Reza Shah reformed women’s roles as a way to demonstrate his commitment to reform. According to Sanasarian, his reforms stemmed from his beliefs that women were essentially nurturers who needed a glimpse of public life in order to be better wives and mothers, and to be able to instill a sense of civic responsibility in their children.¹⁶⁸ In turn, Farah constructed herself as a protector of the nation and its people.

Farah’s engagement with the discourse on motherhood in Iran reflects her interaction with a larger tradition. Eliz Sanasarian notes that in the early period of the women’s movement, women’s activists constantly negotiated the boundary between advocating societal change and safeguarding tradition.¹⁶⁹ Her interaction with these issues provided her the opportunity to enter the public world of politics in an initially acceptable way. However, throughout all of her works, charitable and political, she interacted with the features of the Iranian women’s movement as described in Chapter Two. She did not question that her role as a woman was equal to that of any man and

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 62.

¹⁶⁷ Camron Michael Amin, “Selling and Saving ‘Mother Iran’: Gender and the Iranian Press in the 1940s,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 33 (2001), 335-361.

¹⁶⁸ Eliz Sanasarian, *The Women’s Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900-Khomeini*, (New York, Praeger Publishers, 1981), 68.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 46, 57, 66.

consistently defined herself and her work in terms of her duty to “mother” Iran. She maintained the dominance of her husband as Shah and man, consistently reassured the public of her role as a mother to her own children, and revealed her own misunderstandings of Iran and its culture.

Throughout her works, Farah constantly refers to her role as wife and mother and connects this to her role as Shahbanou.¹⁷⁰ In her 2004 autobiography she gives a piece of advice to women saying, “For a mother, the happiness and well being of her children is the most important thing...if it is not essential minimize your work and be available to your children.”¹⁷¹ She then goes on to question her role as a mother to her children saying that “I feel I contributed to the well-being of my fellow country-men and – women...but that cannot replace the daily show of affection and the presence that I would have liked to give to” her children.¹⁷² In Blanch’s recollection, this thought is not divorced from itself as it is in the 2004 autobiography and she quotes Farah saying,

Sometimes I used to feel a sort of guilt, that I did not succeed in spending more time with my children—that I had only been a part-time mother. But I have had to become a kind of mother to so many other, poor, neglected children all over the country. They need me desperately, so I have spread bits of myself everywhere.¹⁷³

This quote comes in the context of her worrying about her absences upon her own children, she projects her role as a mother to the nation of unwanted children. By engaging in the discourse of motherhood, Farah engaged the earliest period of the

¹⁷⁰ I am using the word maternalism instead of paternalism because Farah is a woman and I feel that her admonishments and attitude towards the Iranian people reflect a maternal rather than a paternal essence, based upon the concept of nurturing rather than upon a restriction of freedom. “maternalism” and “paternalism,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), <http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.library.arizona.edu/entrance.dtl>.

¹⁷¹ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 186.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Lesley Blanch, *Farah, Shahbanou of Iran, Shahbanou of Persia* (London: Collins, 1978), 96.

women's movement in Iran. Magazines in Iran were devoted to explaining how women could be better wives and mothers initially and by the 1920s, discussed how they could contribute to the country's growth and progress by raising educated children.¹⁷⁴

Her feeling of maternalism towards the Iranian children and people engages the class tensions that arose in Iran while simultaneously bringing to light the contradictions between image and reality and the distance between herself and those people. These class tensions arose more from a distance between the ruler and ruled than out of any other issue. Although Farah constructs herself as an Iranian, she consistently attempts to discover "real" Iran, as though she was not a part of it. From her upbringing to her time as Shahbanou, she was not a part of the same Iran of her people.

Like any other maternal figure, she often expressed her frustration with her subjects. In her 1978 autobiography, she noted that she received pleas from throughout the nation, explaining, "there are all kinds of letters, from the humblest, who ask for very little, to those who describe the most complicated situations. Some write to me only as a very last resort. Others have not even thought of first trying to solve their own problem."¹⁷⁵ She explained, her office tried to

show them all that when there is a problem, we are there to serve the people. Obviously, it is impossible to solve everything but we must convince the people that we consider what they say to be important and that those responsible do truly study with care everything that comes before them. Even what seems futile to us may be of basic importance to some family.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Sanasarian notes that beginning in 1913, women's magazines targeted the domestic aspects of women and by 1920 were also discussing health, beauty and fashion as ways for women to be better wives and mothers to their husbands and children. Sanasarian, 69.

¹⁷⁵ Pahlavi. *My Thousand and One Days*, 67

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

Her characterization in this passage of people's pleas to her, illustrates how she thought of her role, as a problem solver. It also denotes the distance between her and those requesting her help and one cannot help but wonder what could be "futile" to her but of "basic importance" to a family. The other element that arises in the above quote is the question of responsibility. She lauds those who help themselves first before turning to her, but her words regarding those who simply turn to the government without first working out their problem, give the reader a feeling that approaches frustration.

This frustration is reflected when she again addresses the notion of responsibility saying, "in our present system, everything is too dependent on the King. This must be changed. The people do not assume enough of the responsibilities. *They are like children who have always been pampered by their parents.* When the parents die, the children are lost."¹⁷⁷ There is no denying the admonishment in this phrase and although it is for the good of the country that she says it, her characterization of the people as children is telling. However, given the system and the degree of control within it, there was no way that the people of Iran could have assumed any responsibility not explicitly given to them by the Shah.

While Farah acknowledged the reforms as passed by her husband were not enough, she argued that the fault did lie entirely with him. She explains,

I spoke about it to my husband and to the ministers concerned, but it was one of the many vexing questions with the clerics...we wanted to go forward, and I was particularly insistent on it for women, but we had to pay attention to different mentalities, being careful not to precipitously do away with solidly held customs, not to shock people, and I tried to propose some adjustments in each case.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Italics mine. Ibid.,138.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 177.

She explains that one of these “adjustments” came with permitting women to be included on the Literacy Corps and sending them to discuss family planning with village women.

She explains,

convincing rural populations that taking control of the number of children they had would bring them and the country a better life. The circumstances in which they lived made them think exactly the opposite: the more children we have, they assured us, the more manpower we have...they could not imagine the progress of mechanization, nor a different future for their children through increased access to education, better health, and social security. It was our job to inform them and *make them understand*.¹⁷⁹

Despite the government’s reforms of the 1960s, there remained an inability to reach the rural people of Iran. The law could be changed while the circumstance of the poor remained unchanged. This demonstrates the distance between reality and law that demonstrated the lack of depth with which some reforms penetrated society.

The idea that the masses are simply not enlightened and need to be brought kicking and screaming into the “modern” world is one that is prevalent among elites throughout the discourse of modernity and is especially connected to the idea of education. That she felt the Iranian public were like “children” or needed to be made to understand demonstrates her feeling that they did simply not comprehend the scope of the modernity movement. However, it also indicates her realization and recognition that government programs and policies were not being sufficiently enforced or simply did not exist the rural areas and that there were places that Teheran did not control sufficiently, a notion not altogether incorrect.

Farah did not ascend to the throne of Iran with a clear view of her own role and it took her a few years to negotiate a role for herself in the government. Initially she

¹⁷⁹ Italics mine. Ibid., 178.

explained, “I inspected, I opened buildings and institutes, but while doing so, I watched, I listened and I learned.”¹⁸⁰ She also did what neither of his previous two wives had done, provided a male heir, Reza (b. 1960) and three other children, Farahnaz (b. 1963) and Ali-Reza (b. 1966), and Leila (1971).¹⁸¹ In watching, listening, and learning, she developed her role as more than mother to her children. Farah seems to have understood the importance of leaving the capital and of appearing accessible to the people. By leaving the capital to visit her institutions, she was able to translate her role as simply a philanthropist into that of an advisor.

One of her initial problems was rousing the Shah from his apathetic approach to cultural and social issues outside of the White Revolution. Lesley Blanch asked Farah “if the Shah had schooled her, prompted her, on her new role” and she answered “Not at all...he had just left me to get on with it n my own way. It was probably best, but I used to feel rather anxious, at times, in case I was doing the wrong thing...but really, all seemed to go well.”¹⁸² She explains that in bringing issues to him,

At first I was too emotional—too overexcited. It was my weakness. I would rush to the Shah and ask him to right some wrong, change some law or something I thought was a social injustice. But I didn’t present the matter to him in a good way, psychologically. I didn’t know how to check and cross-check what I was told. And I didn’t know, then that people are not always truthful...gradually I had to learn, from my husband, the many different responsibilities of power, the necessity of analyzing people and their motives—of being more objective, too. I learned to weigh everything, before I tackled him.¹⁸³

This thought was echoed in 1975 in an interview she gave an interview to *The Saturday Evening Post*. During it, she reveals,

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 104.

¹⁸¹ Their final daughter, Leila was born in 1970. Ibid., 108-110, 132, 151.

¹⁸² Blanch, 64.

¹⁸³ Blanch, 108

It takes a lot of psychology sometimes when you want to expose an idea to him. To arrive at your aim you have to think how to do it. I try to present an idea logically, intelligently, coolly, to make him understand. Of course sometimes I get overexcited about the thing or over angry, and then it doesn't help....it depends on how you say it, if it's the proper moment, the right time of day or the wrong time. If it doesn't work, I try again, if I believe in that thing.¹⁸⁴

Eventually, she achieved the proper timing and her office and The Private Secretariat of H.I.M. the Shahbanou grew.¹⁸⁵ She was given Fazlollah Nabil, a former ambassador as her personal secretary and “guided by him and the appropriate officials” she was able to integrate herself into the political apparatus.¹⁸⁶ She explains that eventually she realized that she “could take initiatives and launch myself into useful action.”¹⁸⁷ Her office by 1978 included one hundred and fifty people.¹⁸⁸ Through her office, she set up a vetting system for the requests she received by region and problem.¹⁸⁹

Farah's organizations did not focus upon women, but upon children, the infirm, and the poor. The Women's Organization of Iran, under the direction of Ashraf Pahlavi, was the branch of government that oversaw all issues specific to women.¹⁹⁰ Ashraf was Muhammad Reza Shah's twin sister and was rumored to be a formidable politician in her own right.¹⁹¹ As Farah was not involved in this organization, her work could not focus upon women directly. Therefore, she focused her energies towards the broader social

¹⁸⁴ Joy Billington, “The Shah's Advocate,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, (November 1975), 12.

¹⁸⁵ Blanch, 108.

¹⁸⁶ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 105.

¹⁸⁷ Pahlavi. *My Thousand and One Days*, 65.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁸⁹ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 166.

¹⁹⁰ It is unclear exactly how much direct influence she had with this group, but it is clear that Farah was not a part of it.

¹⁹¹ Soraya, Muhammad Reza's second wife recalled that after her sister, Shams, went into exile in Egypt, “Ashraf suddenly became the first lady at court. It was an opportunity. She would be able to take revenge for all the injustices and humiliations she had suffered. Her flair and her determination opened the corridors of politics to her; and her salon soon became the centre of Persian high society.” Soraya Esfandiary Bakhtiary, *Palace of Solitude* (London: Quartet Books Limited, 1992), 73.

categories of the poor, young or infirm. Just as Eliz Sanasarian noted regarding the literacy debate of the early twentieth century, women could not address literacy without first attending to the nation's physical security and stability.¹⁹² To this end, Farah was involved in a number of domestic charities and two of these issues stand out in her memory, the Organization for the Protection of Lepers and her work with children.¹⁹³ The Organization for Help to Lepers was a fund begun by Farah after she witnessed the "physical and moral distress of these outcasts."¹⁹⁴ Despite the protests of the World Health Organization for the inclusion of cured lepers into mainstream society, Farah had the Shah donate land and she oversaw the construction of a village for them.¹⁹⁵ She found that even after being cured lepers were still viewed as pariahs; so she convinced the King to donate more land for cured lepers to establish a village for them, which was called Beh Kadeh.¹⁹⁶ Reflecting on this achievement in her 2004 autobiography, she said "history did not leave us enough time to build other Beh Kadehs, but I think that in twenty years we managed to make Iranian hearts respond to the fate of leprosy sufferers and those who had been cured."¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² Sansarian, 46, 48.

¹⁹³ Among them are "the Organization for Family Well-being...The Organization for Blood Transfusion; the Organization for the Protection of Lepers; the Organization for the Fight against Cancer; the Organization for Help to the Needy; the Health Organization;...the Children's Centre, the Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children;...the Imperial Institute of Philosophy; the Foundation for Iranian Culture; the Festival of Shiraz; the Teheran Cinema Festival; the Iranian Folk-lore Organization; the Asiatic Institute; the Civilizations Discussions Centre; the Pahlavi University; the Academy of Sciences" as well as the Farah Pahlavi Foundation, the Organization for Mothers and the new-born, and the Institute for the Cultural and Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults. Pahlavi. *My Thousand and One Days*, 73-74.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 72

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 72-73.

¹⁹⁷ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 143.

Her second major cause had two separate branches, one for education, and the other for orphans. The education branch was accomplished through the Literacy Corps, the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, as well as through independent action on Farah's part; the second was achieved through the Farah Pahlavi Foundation.

The project of educating and founding libraries for children was difficult in Iran, because as Farah notes, there were few books written for children in Persian. She points to the fact that she herself translated *The Little Mermaid* for her own children, so that they could have something appropriate to read.¹⁹⁸ Farah explains her reasons for sponsoring libraries noting that “if we could get our children to read, we could help them enter the modern world, have less trouble accepting new ideas, and acquire a sense of morality and responsibility.”¹⁹⁹ In this quote she is implying that those children who are not educated are immoral, irresponsible, and ignorant. This is remarkably similar to how uneducated women were constructed in the discourse of modernity. This statement demonstrates that she was clearly in favor of rural Iran taking responsibility for its own development, but also realized the difficulties—the lack of books and access alone limited their abilities.

In the second branch of her program for children, she developed the Farah Pahlavi Foundation which was an organization that oversaw orphanages and attempted to “make the children's lives as normal as possible” by preserving their individuality and reducing

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 146.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 145.

the sterile nature that is found in most orphanages.²⁰⁰ To do this, she encouraged the children's hair to be cut in different styles, had their rooms decorated and used the names of flowers to denote each room instead of numbers.²⁰¹ In this organization her attempts to create individuals out of orphans was reflective of the overall "modern" trend of individuality. However, the question emerges from this episode: Was this a real difference in their standard of living or was it simply another example of the superficiality of the reforms?

Despite her attempts to be a fixture in her institutions and organizations, Farah increasingly noticed that the reports she was getting in the letters she received and the reality of what she saw were not congruent. In an astute observation she recalled that "in the beginning, when I arrived at some orphanages, I sometimes felt that everything had been specially set up for my visit."²⁰² She greeted this deception with harsh words and admonished the organizers of a given orphanage, "if I take the trouble to travel and come from so far away...it's not so that you can conceal the most distressing situations...on the contrary, I'm here to help you, and I want to see the difficulties you face everyday."²⁰³ She then explains, "Making them understand that even though I was Shahbanou, I had to come into contact with reality, with life as it was in order to be able to make good decisions."²⁰⁴ Again, she is expressing a maternalistic attitude, this time in order to make people understand that her role, as she understood it was not to be placated, but to achieve real change and acknowledge the reality and not simply an image.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 179-180.

²⁰¹ Pahlavi. *My Thousand and One Days*, 71.

²⁰² Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 180.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

In a similar vein, Queen Noor, wife of the former King of Jordan, Hussein, noted that while she was in Teheran in 1973 she heard

A story described her [Farah's] visit to a poor section of Teheran. Evidently, just prior to her arrival the city's mayor had the street paved over and arranged a complete face-lift for that part of town. This sparked a great deal of criticism, although most guests at the table, when pressed, acknowledged that the Empress probably was completely unaware that the mayor had whitewashed the situation to make it appear less desperate than it was.²⁰⁵

This recollection reinforces the idea of the previous paragraph by demonstrating that Farah's outrage at the sanitizing of the situation was not due to a single occasion but a result of a more widespread problem. It is also important to note that Queen Noor records that those engaged in the conversation admitted that while Farah might not have realized the sterilization of the city she visited, it was still a source of criticism for her.

Although Farah was unable to participate in charities that targeted women specifically, she did engage the legacies of the renegotiation of authentic Iranian identity.²⁰⁶ Although the contradictions of her role as a woman figure prominently in her life, to her, the majority of Iranians were inferior. This inability to distinguish one minority group from another is a characteristic of Iran's ambivalence towards fully adopting the tenets of modernity. Just as the reformers in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Iran could not distinguish urban from rural Iranians, ignoring their needs in service of a greater good, Farah's attitudes towards her charitable works and the peasant population demonstrated her inability to comprehend the basic needs of her people.

²⁰⁵ Queen Noor al-Hussein, *Leap of Faith: Memoirs of an Unexpected Life* (New York: Miramax Books, 2000), 40.

²⁰⁶ I noted above that she was unable to engage in charities focusing upon women due to their being under the control of Muhammad Reza Shah's twin sister, Ashraf Pahlavi.

This section concerning Farah's attitude towards the Iranian also points to another legacy of the women's movement—the need to focus on the pragmatic rather than upon the ideological. In the early women's movement, leaders focused upon clean water and food for the poor of Iran rather than focusing upon their social or legal advancement. Because Iran lacked the necessary infrastructure, schools, hospitals, etc., attacking a problem like women's rights was insignificant. That Farah had to spend time opening orphanages and hospitals and commissioning the translating of children's books, reflects Iran's deficiency of the basic social institutions that make social development possible.

An Agent of the Government

By focusing on children and the infirm, Farah was able to transfer her role as a nurturer onto the political arena. By confining her activities to philanthropy, aesthetics (discussed below) and nurturing, Farah was able to manipulate the confining contradiction inherent in womanhood in Iran. In periodically inspecting her institutions, she was able to gain valuable information that increased her status to that of an advisor. It is unclear what she was able to witness as the above comments by Queen Noor demonstrate. It is clear that she was able to gather information that was not included in the official Pahlavi intelligence gathering apparatus, as evidenced in Assadollah Alam's published diaries. However, William Shawcross, looking retrospectively at the Pahlavi era of Iran argues that Farah was in fact, more “in touch” with the Iranian public than the Shah due to her spontaneity and inspections of her various charities.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ William Shawcross, *The Last Ride of the Shah* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 95.

While it remains unclear as to whether Muhammad Reza Shah ever took her advice, it is clear that she gave it freely and often to both he and his cabinet ministers. Unlike Ashraf Pahlavi, Muhammad Reza's twin sister who oversaw the Women's Organization of Iran from afar, or even Muhammad Reza himself, Farah periodically visited institutions founded by her and in her name.²⁰⁸ These inspections allowed Farah to "to appear spontaneous and in touch."²⁰⁹ These inspections led to her being better informed about the situation of the country outside of Teheran. She explains

these trips were an opportunity for me to register these numerous reactions [to the White Revolution] and report them to the king...I considered myself the best ambassador to give him a faithful report of what was being said far from Teheran and what life was really like in the provinces.²¹⁰

This knowledge allowed Farah to act an official advisor to Muhammad Reza, a role which was not accepted by him but that often reflected the opinions of his advisors who were too worried about their own position to raise the issues. Assadollah Alam notes that Farah was able to raise issues with Muhammad Reza regarding the mismanagement of and corruption in his government and he records a number of quarrels that arose from Farah being better informed about the tone of the country than was Muhammad Reza. While in April 1972, Alam and Farah agreed that the Shah needed to take account of the news stories being printed abroad about the Iranian Court, leading to a disagreement between royal couple, more often, they ended in the Shah and Alam accusing Farah of having "a misguided anxiety to appease public opinion."²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Pahlavi. *My Thousand and One Days*, 66, Shawcross, 165.

²⁰⁹ Shawcross, 95.

²¹⁰ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 165.

²¹¹ Alam, Assadollah. *The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran's Royal Court, 1969-1977* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1991), 211.

Although she acknowledges that she was able to raise issues related to nurturing such as child labor, educational and environmental reform with the Shah, she was quick to uphold the supremacy of her husband and explain that she was not engaged in “real” governing. She explains, “I have responsibilities, but not the very weighty, important ones of a sovereign; the areas with which I’m concerned can only bring joy and satisfaction whereas a Head of State has sometimes to take decisions which arouse discontent.”²¹² By demurring in this way, she was attempting to support his role as Shah; however, her comments provide a second, corollary effect, that of denigrating her role and signaling her submission to the greater being. By assuring the public that she was not taking part in the “real” governing, she was denigrating her own work and those she worked for as being unworthy of being included in “real” process of governing.

Perhaps the biggest faux pas of the Pahlavi monarchy was its 2,500 Anniversary Celebration. It is also an arena to demonstrate Farah’s understanding of Iranian society. The celebration garnered the government a great deal of criticism both at home and abroad. Farah was included in the group responsible for the celebrations and was not criticized explicitly. However, this did not mean that she did not defend her role in the festivities and highlight the fact that she was in favor of an all-Iranian festival. Sally Quinn, a reporter for *The Washington Post*, *Times Herald* explains it well, saying “Although she has stressed the importance of reviving Persian art and culture and waning her country away from ‘Westernization mania’ nothing but the caviar will be Iranian

²¹² Pahlavi, *My Thousand and One Days*, 66.

during the entire festival.”²¹³ Alam noted in his diary that Farah was “keen to find a role for herself in their planning.”²¹⁴ Quinn then quotes Farah’s lament about the celebrations saying,

People are quite right in their criticism...the problem was that that the plans for the festival were starting to be made 10 years ago. And I was not involved in the beginning. I am in on it only because they said they needed me and then it was too late. And so we were with so many problems, so many details...what you say is true about the fact that there are few Iranian provisions for the celebrations. But we have not come so far in some fields that we do not need the Occident. The things which will remain will be Iranian. We would have done the interior decoration of the tents in Persian and the design could have been done in Persia but it was all so rushed. Everything happened at the last moment and I just didn’t have a chance to see to it. There were so many more important things. And also it was a committee point of view. It was a majority decision. I tried to get them to see it my way. But they were all so much older than I. Maybe it’s just a generation gap.²¹⁵

Throughout her reign as Shahbanou, Farah tried to connect with “real Iran,” defined in this case by the displayable concepts of culture—food, clothing, and the makers of both.²¹⁶ She was preoccupied with the trappings of Iranian identity, but that she realized the hiring of chefs, stylists etc., from the West was a problem, indicates that she had a degree of understanding of the politics in Iran.

By 1974, however, even Alam began to notice the problems that Farah had for at least two years. Alam quotes a meeting between he, Muhammad Reza Shah and Farah where she told them that despite the progress in Iran, “people remain dissatisfied; above all by commodity shortages and bureaucratic mismanagement” that prevailed throughout the 1970s because of mismanagement and corruption brought about by the White

²¹³ Sally Quinn, “It Isn’t Easy Being Empress of Iran,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, October 8, 1971, C1.

²¹⁴ Alam, 166.

²¹⁵ Quinn, “It Isn’t Easy Being Empress of Iran,” C1.

²¹⁶ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 170, Sally Quinn, “50 Monarchs—50! & All the Sheiks of Arabee,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, August 29, 1971, 105.

Revolution.²¹⁷ While Alam agreed with her in the meeting, the Shah was “displeased” with her frankness.²¹⁸

By 1976, she explained that the tone of the Iranian people had changed. She recalls, “People still came to see me...but they focused on what was wrong rather than what was right” and by March 21, 1976 the 50th anniversary of the Pahlavi monarchy, she explains, “Particularly on that day, I felt something had changed between the people and their monarchy, like a sudden icy wind.”²¹⁹ In June 1976, Alam records that she brought this problem up with the Shah. Alam recorded somewhat derisively that “she worries the public is growing fed up with her and [the Shah].”²²⁰ She went on, ““they don’t seem to show anything like the enthusiasm for us that they once had.””²²¹ To this, both Alam and the Shah protested her comment, but she went on saying, ““Even so...if I were made to wait in a crowd for hours to see my King with an officious policeman blocking my way, I too would be fed up.””²²² Alam, seeing that the Shah “was on the verge of losing his temper” Alam told her that “she is hardly likely to see eye to eye on all this with the Iranian public.”²²³ In this case, both Alam and Muhammad Reza disagreed with her estimation of the situation, the Shah because of her criticism, and Alam because he felt she was too far removed from society to comprehend their desires. While Farah did discuss issues related to the Iranian population with the Shah, her views were not usually desired or accepted. Yet, her position as Muhammad Reza’s wife made it difficult for

²¹⁷ Ibid., 376.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 260, 261.

²²⁰ Alam., 494.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid..

him to dismiss her outright as he did so often with ministers who were no longer in favor.²²⁴ She provided him with two heirs and he crowned her Regent in 1967.

Because of the anomalous definitions of her category, not only as Shahbanou but also as a woman within Iranian society, Farah was able to participate in the government outside of the traditional role of nurturer. Even though her involvement did not directly engage the discourse of motherhood, her actions were a direct result of her inspecting her institutions and “checking up” on them as a mother would a child. Because she stepped outside of the boundaries that traditionally defined her position as Shahbanou, she opened herself to criticism.

As noted in the Introduction, the criticisms leveled against Farah were mostly indirect. They did not attack her person, for many reasons, most of them relating to the high degree of media control exhibited by the Pahlavi government and fear of SAVAK (Iranian Intelligence). Farah was accused of extravagance and being out-of-touch with the Iranian masses.²²⁵ Her attempts to maintain and reflect authentic Iranian identity garnered her the most criticism; her critics echoed the idea that she was too alienated from authentic Iran to be able to interpret it correctly.²²⁶ As noted in the Introduction, authenticity in Iran was an indefinable concept. Farah’s attempt to strike a balance with authentic Iran demonstrates her acknowledgement that she was not a part of it.

From the beginning, her ascension to the throne was surrounded by controversy over its extravagance. Her wedding gown was designed by Yves Saint Laurent for the

²²⁴ He could not dismiss his wife as quickly as he dismissed Ardeshir Zahedi who submitted his resignation after being requested to do so by an unknown minister, as she was somewhat popular with the public.

²²⁵ Shawcross, 97.

²²⁶ Alam, 380.

House of Dior in Paris, was inlaid with embroidery, pearls, rhinestones and silver threads, had a nine foot train, weighed thirty three pounds and was insured for \$46,200 in 1959 dollars.²²⁷ Her trousseau was rumored to be worth \$142,000 and to be contained within fifty one pieces of luggage.²²⁸ Blanch defended this, noting that it was not completely her choice that ruled the assembling of her trousseau, but that Muhammad Reza's sisters, Ashraf and Shams were sent to Paris to help. Their advice was to have the trousseau say "Paris" but Blanch notes it "was also marked by that restraint which is an essential part of "Farah's character."²²⁹

As she increasingly took control of her own role as Shahbanou/Empress, she also began exerting pressure upon herself to remain true to Iranian identity. She explains this pressure to remain authentic in relation to the bread industry in Iran. In her 2004 autobiography, Farah confirms that she understood one of the problems facing Iran. She explains, "one of [her] growing concerns in the second half of the sixties was not to forget culture in the march to progress."²³⁰ She uses a discussion of the industrialization of the bread industry to explain this. The demand of Teheran's population for bread outstripped the abilities of its traditional bakers; therefore, a bread factory was built. While Farah approved of the use of mechanization, she recalled wanting to maintain the

²²⁷ "Shah's Bride to Wear 'Simple' Gown," *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, December 4, 1959, C1; Peggy Massin, "Bride of Shah Gets Gown Fit for Shahbanou," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 21, 1959, 1; "Farah Diba's Dress Weighs 33 Pounds," *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, December 21, 1959, B5.

²²⁸ "Shah to take 3d Wife Next Month," *New York Times*, November 23, 1959, 4; "News Summary," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 22, 1959, 4.

²²⁹ Blanch, 56-57.

²³⁰ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 227.

quality of the bread, for it to remain Iranian and not to become American white bread.²³¹

This episode reflects her attempt to integrate both pressures, Iranian and Western into a single whole that could become symbolic of a new Iran, conscious of tradition, but not imprisoned by it. By attempting to maintain a semblance of authentic Iranian identity while approving alterations of traditional processes, Farah displayed her desire to protect Iranian identity from becoming inauthentic and a reproduction of the West.

Despite the emphasis on French culture in her childhood and in her early years as Shahbanou, she increasingly attempted in the later years of her reign to reflect Iranian culture abroad. One way she did this was in her clothing. In the service of authenticity and promoting culture, Blanch records that Farah often had her clothes designed in Paris (by the House of Dior) and executed in Iran by a personal couturier. Further, her clothing reflected Iranian tribal themes and traditional Iranian patterns. While this cannot account for her entire wardrobe, it does account for some of her formal wear and reflects her attempt to combine both her need to appear regal with her need to retain her Iranianness and display it to the world.²³²

Just as her wardrobe underwent a shift from European to Iranian works, so too did her art collection. Farah's art collection underwent a slow change throughout her reign, from collecting all that was Euro-American to slowly collecting pieces of classical Iranian art.²³³ One of the biggest purchases of Iranian art that she made was the "Avery

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid., 127, 136..

²³³ Her art collection was reexamined in 2003 in an article for *Le Monde* by Henry Bellet, "Art Under the Veil," in which Bellet described some of the Western art works in the collection and the recent attempts by the current curator, Alireza Sami Azar, to publicize its works. Henry Bellet, "Art Under the Veil," *Le Monde*, June 18, 2003, 30.

collection” of 19th century Persian paintings. Blanch recorded that when Farah heard that the collection was going on the auction block in London, she told her emissary, “you must get them for us at all costs. They must not be dispersed—they *must* come back to Iran.”²³⁴

As part of an attempt to introduce Iranians to world art, she established the Shiraz Festival, an art and performance art festival held from 1969-1977.²³⁵ The art displayed and performed at this festival reflected the cutting edge of both world and Iranian art forms, so cutting edge that her office became associated with “avant-garde liberalism” in its taste of art and politics, leading to criticism from both outside and inside the palace.²³⁶ Queen Noor recalls an example of this noting that during the 1974 Shiraz Festival the musical *Hair* was performed. Queen Noor explains that this same musical had “shocked Western audiences at the time because of its nudity. Needless to say, it had a far more jarring effect in an Islamic culture.”²³⁷ Although her charities saved and restored architectural and artistic monuments of Iran’s past and she began to wear Iranian inspired fashions brought some popularity with the Iranian people, her attempt to deliver Western-style art to them was misguided.²³⁸

Each of these reactions indicates that she did attempt to control her extravagances, a view that is upheld throughout her biography by Blanch. However, she was pulled between her “modern” sensibilities, tastes in dress and art, with her identity and pride in her heritage, reflecting her desire to integrate the two. By saving the Avery Collection,

²³⁴ Blanch, 102-103.

²³⁵ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 229.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 97-99.

²³⁷ Al-Hussein, 40.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

she was not flaunting, in her mind, Iranian wealth, but was attempting to recover pieces of Iranian history from the West. In sponsoring the Shiraz Festival, she attempted to open Iranians' artistic consciousness to the outside world. By requiring her garments to be made in Iran with respect paid to Iranian fabrics and tribal patterns, she was attempting to showcase the beauty of Iranian design. However, that she did buy the Avery collection at any cost and did bring innovative artistic shows such as *Hair* to Iran, demonstrated that she did not understand the sensibilities of rural Iranians. Further, by integrating Iranian designs on silk, chiffon and satin, she was seen more as exploiting than exalting Iranian customs. Throughout each of these attempts to appease the Iranian public and to showcase Iranian culture, she demonstrated her misunderstanding of Iranian identity as live by the majority of Iranians.

The features that characterized modernity and the women's movements in Iran were demonstrated in the life of Farah Pahlavi. In her attitude of maternalism and fierce defense of women's abilities, while focusing on the necessities of life above legal advancement, all of which occurred within the boundaries of governmental authority, she interacted with the ideological legacies of the women's movement and the discussion regarding authentic identity begun the century before. Her construction of her role as a philanthropist and translation of that role into an advisor mirrors her belief in gender parity in civic participation as well. In the criticisms about her works, her attempt to introduce and negotiate Western imports with indigenous Iranian art and artworks reflects the tension that began with the 1906 Constitutional Revolution and the attempt to discover why Iran was "backward."

CHAPTER FOUR

JEHAN SADAT: MOTHER TO EGYPT

Jehan Sadat's Egyptian identity was a largely urban-inspired one that reflected the tensions surrounding authentic identity described in Chapter Two between the urban and the rural in Egypt. She was a mother, first to her own family and then to the nation. Like Farah, Jehan translated the latter role, as mother of the nation into a vehicle for her to change the political reality of women. Her work remained outside of the confines of the official governmental apparatus in Egypt. This chapter will explore Jehan Sadat's interactions with the legacies described in the Introduction and Chapter Two of this work with particular attention paid to the intersection of Jehan's work with the example set by Huda Sha'rawi.

The sources for this work are Jehan Sadat's autobiography, *A Woman of Egypt*, numerous newspaper articles from the Euro-American press. Because many of the newspaper articles are from after the assassination of Anwar Sadat, her tone in them is mainly reflective and laudatory about Anwar's goals of peace and stability within the Middle East. This is in sharp contrast to the tone of her autobiography and interviews before his death, where she emphasizes her own role. Her interviews were taken from popular magazines and news shows such as *People Weekly*, *Vogue* and *60 minutes*. I recognize and acknowledge the problems inherent in using these sources and will note them where necessary. The secondary sources for this work regarding Jehan Sadat specifically are sparse. Many authors do not even include her in a discussion of Egyptian feminism except as a way to explain why the 1979 Personal Status Laws were called

Jehan's Law, and even then simply describe her as the wife of President Sadat who pushed for them.²³⁹ She was not a towering figure of women's liberation and it is not the purpose of this work to describe her as such. The purpose of this work is to evaluate her attitudes and interactions with modernity and to demonstrate how these are situated firmly in Egypt's cultural, ideological, and the historical context of the Egyptian women's movement and not simply a Western import.

Motherhood

The discourse of domesticity and motherhood as described in Chapter Two influenced Jehan's life tangentially but its effects were central to Jehan's identity as a public figure. Nada Tomiche in her work describes the opposing forces pulling upon women in 1950s Egypt as a result of the redefinition of women within society. She explains, women were,

Subject to the diverging constraints of a way of life which is still conservative, but sharply aware of her inferior position, the 'modern woman' finds herself today at the point at which two societies, the liberal and the closed, confront each other. 'Westernized', she desires recognition and respect as a human being, economic independence, but she is faced with the traditional and legal institutions of her largely conservative environment.²⁴⁰

It is clear that these forces pulled upon Jehan Sadat. In an interview with Morley Safer, Anwar Sadat was asked how he felt about his wife's activism. He replied,

She has neglected some of her duties at home. As you know our traditions, one has to come at home and has to find his wife preparing everything for him, looking after everything for him. especially in the Orient here. Most of the days I don't see her until late at night...she is at luncheon or dinner or so. Maybe I envy her because I don't have this freedom.²⁴¹

²³⁹ Azza M. Karam, *Women, Islamisms and the State: Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1998), 14.

²⁴⁰ Nada Tomiche, "The Position of Women in the UAR," *Journal of Contemporary History* 3:3 (July 1968), 129.

²⁴¹ Morley Safer, "A profile of the Egyptian First Lady" *60 Minutes*, April 18, 1976.

In this same interview Jehan affirmed that her “husband is the head of the family” yet, she challenged him mercilessly on issues of Family Planning and the Egyptian population explosion.²⁴² While Jehan never espoused directly the contradictions in her own role as a public figure and a mother, it is an ever-present tension in her autobiography.

Jehan began her public career doing war relief work just prior to and following the 1967 Six Day War with Israel; her youngest, Jehan was 6 years old.²⁴³ In engaging in war relief work, Jehan Sadat continued a trend begun in the late nineteenth century by Djavidian Hanim (noted in Chapter Two) and by Huda Sha’rawi. In 1939, Huda Sha’rawi along with the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) mobilized support for the Red Crescent to aid victims of an earthquake in Turkey. In 1940, they aided the victims of the bombardment of Alexandria and floods in Cairo. In 1940-41, the Women’s Committee of the Red Crescent was organized, which held classes to teach elite women first aid and to prepare them to assist in relief efforts.²⁴⁴ While Jehan Sadat does not specifically engage this legacy in her work directly, the similarities are notable and serve to demonstrate the continuities between the two periods of history.

Jehan’s relief work began just before the official outbreak of the war, when she mobilized her social network to aid the Red Crescent (the Egyptian Red Cross).²⁴⁵ Her work followed the accepted role of woman as nurturer. She explained that during that time she “was leading the volunteers of women and men in the hospitals and going all

²⁴² Safer.

²⁴³ Earl L. Sullivan, *Women in Egyptian Public Life*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996)87-88.

²⁴⁴ Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 117.

²⁴⁵ Jehan Sadat, *A Woman of Egypt* (New York: Pocket Books, 1987), 222.

over the country talking to and helping the soldiers and trying to make them as comfortable as possible in the hospitals.”²⁴⁶ Gloria Emerson reported that just after the 1967 war Jehan “realized there were no existing provisions for their [the veterans’] rehabilitation and no possibility of hope for their leading decent, useful lives. She was seeing, and speaking, to men burned by napalm, blinded, amputated, and paralyzed.”²⁴⁷ In her autobiography, Jehan recalls her inspiration for founding an institution for wounded veterans explaining,

‘Mother, mother what shall we do?’ men on crutches and in wheelchairs had called out to me again and again after the war, clustering around my car whenever I visited the military hospitals, the doctors have dismissed us, telling us to go back to our villages. But we having nothing to do there and will only be a burden on our families.’ For four years the complaints of these men had haunted me. They were as recovered as they were going to be, but they had no training which would help them support themselves. Egyptian soldiers were being forced to live without their dignity, relying on the charity of their families, or on what little money they could make...on the streets because their pensions were meager.²⁴⁸

Jehan founded the Wafa’ wal Amal (Faith and Hope) Rehabilitation Center with land from the Governor of Cairo, money from the Ministry of Social Affairs and private donations to aid the soldiers beyond the battlefield shortly after the 1967 War.²⁴⁹

In order to complete her relief work and to visit these soldiers, though, she had to leave her children. She explains that she sent them to a relative’s house explaining, “I knew I would not be able to concentrate on the work that lay ahead of me if I did not know my children were with my family.”²⁵⁰ By framing her dilemma in this way, she

²⁴⁶ Robert Selle, “Woman of Peace,” *World and I*, 14:7 (July 1999), 64.

²⁴⁷ Gloria Emerson, “Jehan Sadat: A Woman Making History,” *Vogue*, 170 (January 1980), 205.

²⁴⁸ Sadat, 302.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. 224.

affirms that her first thoughts were of her own children, but that duty required she take up her position as wife of the Speaker of the Parliament and aid the less fortunate.

The above vignette connects Jehan's belief in her role as a mother to the soldiers with her patriotism for Egypt. Just as women connected the two ideas, motherhood and patriotism in the early 1920s protesting for Egyptian independence, so too did Jehan in her founding of the Wafa wal 'Amal center. She opened the center for two reasons—she was asked to do so by the soldiers and because it was her duty to do it. She explained her philosophy to Emerson, saying “it is no use...teaching a man to walk again if he is going to starve after he leaves. So there are vocational workshops” for the veterans as well as help with prosthetics.²⁵¹

Physically connected with Madinat Wafa' wal Amal as the veterans' rehabilitation center is known, is the SOS (Save our Souls) Orphans Village. She explained,

Our orphans in Egypt were well taken care of, but they did not enjoy the same warm, family atmosphere that these orphans had. In the SOS Villages the children all lived in small houses with a 'mother' as if they were in a normal family. The 'mother,' who had been specially trained, treated them like her own children, disciplining them, training them, cooking meals for them, loving them.²⁵²

Gloria Emerson noted that on a visit to the playground, Jehan “knew the names as most of the children, who clearly saw her not as an awesome figure but as a friend.”²⁵³ This familiarity indicates the degree of contact that the children had with Jehan and also the degree of micromanaging that Jehan did in the founding of the village. The village, according to *Al-Ahram*, “was established in 1975 and ready to receive orphans by 1977”

²⁵¹ Emerson, 205.

²⁵² Sadat, 306.

²⁵³ Emerson, 205.

and Jehan notes that it was funded entirely by Hermann Gameiner and the Austrian SOS Village organization.²⁵⁴

By caring for veterans and aiding orphaned children, Jehan demonstrated her commitment to being a mother of the Egyptian nation in a way that was in line with the traditional understanding of motherhood—nurturing those who cannot care for themselves. By observing the institutions personally, she showed her desire to be involved beyond the dedication ceremony. While the articles written about her visits might have been for propaganda purposes and to emphasize her non-politically threatening works, that she visits the institutions and even knows some names of the inhabitants is significant and indicates the level of energy she dedicated to these institutions. Further, both of these institutions, Madinat Wafa' wal Amal as well as the SOS Orphans village are still in existence and thriving (there are now three SOS Villages in Tanta, Alexandria and the original in Nasr City) a testimony to the public's acceptance of them and the degree of organization from the beginning that was bestowed upon them.²⁵⁵

Contradicting Expectations of the Peasantry

Unlike at Wafa' wal Amal and the SOS Village where her work directly engaged her nurturing instincts, her work with Talla and her speech to Assuit demonstrates an area where her maternalism conflicted with her views on women's advancement. Her tone

²⁵⁴ Amira El-Noshokaty, "Home Alone," *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, 8-14 April 2004, 685, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2004/685/feature.htm>. Sadat, 306; "Egypt--Select a Village" *SOS Children's Villages Organization Webpage*, <http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/cgi-bin/sos/jsp/wherewehelp.do?ct=14359&lang=en&nav=2.3&site=ZZ>

²⁵⁵ "Egypt--Select a Village" *SOS Children's Villages Organization Webpage*, <http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/cgi-bin/sos/jsp/wherewehelp.do?ct=14359&lang=en&nav=2.3&site=ZZ>

towards the peasantry vacillates between awe and condescension, reflecting the dual construction of the rural areas in Egypt. As noted in Chapter Two, the peasantry as a whole in the context of Egyptian twentieth century history was constructed in terms of a contradiction—they were the keepers of tradition in both positive and negative understandings of the word tradition.

By going to the individual villages Jehan was recreating in a new form this dialogue of authenticity versus inauthenticity that accompanied the tension of modernity and tradition. Jehan's comments illustrate how she viewed "women's work" in the village; the women were not working for financial independence and were complicit in their own subjugation. By linking the traditional elements of the village, women's proclivity for collaboration, with a modern element of financial independence, Jehan hoped to inspire rural women to achieve financial independence. However, it is clear from the way she describes her own involvement in the cooperative that she did not believe that the women had the innate ability or ambition to improve their situation.

Jehan's inspiration to help village women become financially independent came from a number of areas in the late 1960s and 1970s. She explains her initial views about women in the villages noting, "the sight of the village women depressed me at first" because

the women seemed like nothing but beasts of burden—or even less, because the men cared more for their cows than they did for their wives...if his wife died, he would be sad, of course. But if his cow died, he would be heartbroken, having lost his life savings and his economic future.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁶ Sadat, 184.

Jehan's truly inspirational moment comes when she meets a woman whose husband sold her sewing machine to pay for his gambling debts.²⁵⁷ She reasoned that "if women in the village could cooperate when one was sick or pregnant or marrying off a child, why, then, could not all women group together to help one another make money and support themselves?"²⁵⁸ In this passage, she simultaneously exalts and denigrates rural women—while praising their abilities to work together, she points out the ignorance of their inability to see the value this could hold to improve their lives. She attempted to solve the problem of women's dependency upon men by recognizing and tapping into what she considered the rural women's innate ability to work together.

In her work with Talla, Jehan situates herself as the personal savior of these women, it was *she* who secured a loan from the government, *she* who recruited the women and *she* who, by her example, provided the women with the belief that they could, in fact, work outside the house independent of their husbands.²⁵⁹ Beyond rallying the women, *by herself*, and obtaining the money *by herself*, she then micromanaged the cooperative to a high degree. She recalls how she would encourage the production of quality products saying, "This seam is not straight,' I would chide one woman. 'Look how uneven this hem is,' I would criticize another. Soon the clothes were nearly perfect"²⁶⁰ However, this "quality" clothing was nothing without a market, so she arranged for the clothing to be sold to the Army. After a disastrous first fitting for the Army, she asked rhetorically,

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 200.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 200-201.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 201, 202.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 203-204.

What was the point of *my working so hard* with the women of Talla if this was the result? I had taken much time away from my family. I would do better just to stay at home and tend to my children....Why had I thought I could benefit the women? I had done nothing but bring embarrassment and humiliation on them.²⁶¹

This line of questioning again explains her interpretation of the situation and of the role of the rural women in this operation. They needed to be *led* to self-sufficiency by Jehan, because otherwise, they would have stayed in their unhealthy family situations. In this same passage she explains, “Every day I drove two hours from Cairo to supervise and encourage the women, then two hours back so that I could be with my family.”²⁶² If Talla failed, then she had wasted precious time away from her family and would be criticized for it, if it succeeded, then perhaps she would be able to avoid criticism due to her absence from her family.

In reading Jehan’s version of the situation, one would assume that Talla was a large operation; but it was centered in a village and initially only benefited twenty five women. Yet despite its small numbers, Talla has remained in operation since its inception. Talla is an example of the super-localized nature of Jehan’s work. She hoped like Huda Sha’rawi before her, that through her own example that the women involved in Talla would become self-sufficient and an example for others to follow, non-elite women would flock to the cooperatives to improve their financial situation and elite women would heed the call to philanthropy and found similar institutions.²⁶³

²⁶¹ Italics mine. Ibid., 205.

²⁶² Ibid., 203.

²⁶³ In 1927, Huda Sha’rawi opened a handicraft school to aid widows and divorcées. Badran reports that “Sha’rawi hoped the EFU model would be replicated by others in different quarters of Cairo” but that lack of elite interest did not permit the idea to spread Badran, 112.

While Talla demonstrates Jehan's belief that women can be organized to advance their own position, her speech at Assuit indicates her acceptance of the gender status quo in the village and her desire to be seen as a woman apart from the norm. After Anwar's inauguration, Jehan felt the need to engage the women of the country and to secure a mandate from them as an active First Lady.²⁶⁴ To this end, Jehan traveled to Assuit in Upper Egypt in order to garner support and approval from a "conservative," read traditional area.²⁶⁵ In her speech, she explained to them,

The choice is whether to I stay inside my house, unable to go out into my own garden, or whether I try to help my husband to get our garden back. Am I going to share the burdens of Egypt, working with women and children, the disabled and the poor, or am I going to leave it to my husband to do everything all alone?... I want to help my husband, to do whatever I can for our country, to play a role. I will receive no money for it. Instead I will sacrifice my time, my health...my comfort...In one way, this role will not be enjoyable. But in another it will, for I believe that God has sent me this mission. And I want to do it.²⁶⁶

She received applause after her speech, which she took to be *carte blanche* for her social work. She recalled this same sentiment in 1983. She echoed the above sentiments in an interview with the *Christian Science Monitor*, saying that she chose public life because she felt "that the role of the wife of the president must be a link between her husband and the people, that she must serve the people as much as possible."²⁶⁷

Jehan reinforced the legacies of the women's movement by accepting that women in Assuit were different somehow than women from Talla. Just as the EFU had accepted

²⁶⁴ She explains, "I could not—I would not—give up the public work I had started. I felt that God had given me the power to help the people and the ability to understand their problems and to work with them. As the wife of the new President, I could be the link between Anwar and the people, sharing their suffering and studying their problems. I knew that some would criticize me for my work, and that Anwar too would be attacked for allowing his wife to appear in public. But those who objected to my role I was determined to ignore. How I made use of this gift from God would be up to me." Sadat, 257.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 260.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 260-261.

²⁶⁷ Hilary DeVries, "Jihan Sadat: a world symbol comes out of seclusion," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 4, 1983, B8.

the divided notion of womanhood by arguing for a property or education requirement for women's suffrage in 1923, believing that by working within the system it could be changed, so too did Jehan Sadat in this instance. She, like Huda Sha'rawi and the other women's leaders, accepted that women were a stratified group with some capable and some incapable of change, some desiring it and others content in their station. This acknowledgement of her own difference from the women of Assuit demonstrated her belief that each person could determine their own destiny. In her mind and by her own implication, these women were content in their lives (unlike the women in Talla). In this way, she accepted the subjugation of women to men in Assuit and the principle of the right of each person to determine their own destiny.

Political Activities

Jehan's greatest challenge to Egyptian authentic identity came when she engaged in overtly political activities. By engaging in politics, Jehan engaged the trends begun with the WWCC (Women's Wafdist Coordinating Committee) in the 1920s. Jehan viewed herself, like Huda Sha'rawi before her, as a partner to her husband and his compatriot in his political goals. Badran notes that Sha'rawi was kept informed by her husband of the various machinations of the Wafd, in order to be able to continue the movement if he was imprisoned.²⁶⁸ Also like Huda Sha'rawi, Jehan saw herself as the voice pushing for women's rights. To this end, she ran for a seat on the Munufiyya District Council and campaigned to change Personal Status Laws and increase the use of birth control. While the Munufiyya Council represents her direct engagement with

²⁶⁸ Badran, 75.

politics on a local level, her work with the Personal Status Law reforms and birth control reflected her attempt to affect the legal reality of women and it was for this that she was most criticized. As Howard-Merriam noted, politics was not an acceptable forum for women's participation.²⁶⁹

As in her work with Talla, she recalls her inspiration coming from rural Egyptian women who “around the waterwheel in Mit Abul-Kum...still talked only of men—their husbands, their sons, the village boys their daughters would marry.”²⁷⁰ Jehan's disdain for the women's choice of conversation is apparent, but also apparent is her conviction that they could become empowered within the political process of their district, if only they had an example to follow. By running for a seat on the People's Council of Munufiyya in 1974 Jehan attempted to demonstrate the political role women could assume by running for an elective office in the rural district. She explained her rationale saying “I wanted only to pave the way for other women to participate in rural politics.”²⁷¹ However, while her work on the council funneled money into the district, it did not advance women's rights in the direction that Jehan had wanted.

Jehan's work with the Munufiyya Council was fairly innocuous as far as redefining the role of woman as a social category. However, Jehan's crusade to alter the Personal Status Laws of Egypt and her campaign to curb Egypt's birthrate raised the ire of both secular and religious scholars alike. Her crusade to alter women's Personal Status

²⁶⁹ In her work, Howard-Merriam sets up social feminism as a positive and acceptable form of women's participation in the public sphere, while political feminism was not an acceptable form of participation. Kathleen Howard-Merriam, “Egypt's Other Political Elite,” *The Western Political Quarterly*, 34:1, March 1981, 174-187.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ The council was a governing body that oversaw the finances and politics of 301 villages, including her husband's home village of Mit Abul-Kum. Sadat, 310, 311.

Laws grew out of her campaign to curb Egypt's skyrocketing birthrate. Morley Safer explained the problems facing Egypt in 1976 saying,

Jehan Sadat's country is hopelessly broke, hopelessly overpopulated and hopelessly corrupt. Public services, the power and the water systems are forever breaking down. The population of 37 million increases at the rate of a million a year. Cairo is the Calcutta of Africa. It is a city coming apart with people. It was designed for 2 million, 8 million live in it.²⁷²

She reasoned if women have equal status with men socially, then they would worry less about having more children.²⁷³ Jehan noted, however that,

the village women...saw no advantage in limiting the size of their families. The more children they had, the greater the free work force in the fields. The larger the family, the greater the woman's status in the village...the more sons they had, the less apt their husbands would be to divorce them or to take a new wife. And with six, eight, even ten children from a first marriage to support, the father would be less attractive to another woman than a father with two or three children...it was not surprising, then, that the message of family planning was falling of deaf ears.²⁷⁴

Jehan's treatment of this situation conveys that she was able to acknowledge that there was logic and reason involved in women's actions. In acknowledging the logic of women's actions regarding family planning, Jehan demonstrated her understanding of women's lives and problems. Jehan could not be criticized for misunderstanding the Egyptian reality; instead, she was criticized for being alienated from Islam, which was increasingly defining authentic Egyptian identity, and for trying to change Egypt too fast.

Jehan saw a direct correlation between women who worked and the number of children they had. She explains, "I had noticed at the women's cooperative at Talla that few of the women had more than four children, because they knew that they could not earn money and bear one baby after another at the same time."²⁷⁵ She reasoned, "if we

²⁷² Safer.

²⁷³ This is not an untrue statement and is demonstrated throughout the world.

²⁷⁴ Sadat, 317

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 318.

trained more women to work, then they too would listen to our message of family planning” and this message could be delivered during the training programs.²⁷⁶ However, she realized that focusing on women was not the answer; men had to be educated as well. Jehan demonstrated that she understood men’s objections to family planning, explaining “the men in rural areas believe the more children the more of a man he appears to be.”²⁷⁷ So, instead of simply handing birth control to army recruits, who would “not have accepted it or used it,” the Family Planning Council (of which Jehan was a part) “tried to educate them to the possibilities of a better life if they had fewer children to support.”²⁷⁸ These possibilities include explaining, “your wife’s health would be much stronger and she could work harder to better the lives of your families.”²⁷⁹

By using this logic, Jehan was combining her own beliefs regarding rural men, that they devalued their wives as individuals but acknowledged their wives’ contributions to their livelihood as a family, with her own desire to advance women’s social position. If men were creating these unstable situations, as had occurred with the woman in Talla whose husband sold her sewing machine to pay off his gambling debts, then men needed to be educated as to how to interact with women and be made to realize that manliness does not lie in the number of children one can produce, but in how well one can care for those children. This is an inversion of the nineteenth and twentieth century debate regarding women’s education. Here, instead of arguing that women needed to be educated to produce ‘modern’ children and to be partners to their husbands, men needed

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Emerson, 203.

²⁷⁸ Sadat, 319.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

to be educated to produce a better life for their family. By shifting the focus to men, Jehan's family planning program collided with the historical context of the discourse of education in Egypt.

The problem of family planning was a point of contention between Anwar and Jehan. Jehan notes in her autobiography "we argued about the issue unceasingly in private" as well as on the television.²⁸⁰ In 1976 Jehan and Anwar quarreled in an interview with Morley Safer.²⁸¹ In order for the true tone to be "heard" it is worth quoting at length.

Morley Safer (MS): Do you think your wife if trying to effect changes here too quickly?

Anwar Sadat (AS): Yes sure, she wants to move too quickly, quite right, but I think in Egypt here, we are ready for this. But...

Jehan Sadat (JS): The result is very sad to hear, the family planning. There is no result.

AS: Family planning and family planning...what can I do for this family planning? When I have the villages who think it is against religion? I can't do a lot in this field. While some of these philosophers and my wife is one of them, is urging me every day, family planning, family planning. Very well, I have done my best. She is always like the other philosophers telling me family planning, family planning. Explosion is coming. I know this! But what am I going to do?

JS: You must do something, punishment.

AS: More than I am doing already. It can't be done by law. She says punishment. No! It can't be done by law at all..

AS: Why?

AS: At all. It is conviction.

JS: There must be a law for anybody who brings anybody who brings more than 2 children must pay a fine. The government is giving free pills and helping convincing people. What's the result of all this? Nothing. When I talk about sterilization, they says it is against religion, but I believe we will reach this step. Maybe now, it is dangerous, afterwards it will be disaster.²⁸²

Anwar's frustration is clear at this line of discussion, but what is also clear is that Jehan did not back down. This was a collision with tradition as much as the above attempt to

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ The recording of this interview was transcribed by Victoria Penziner and the introduction to it said the interview took place with "Morley Safer of CBS News". Gloria Emerson, in her article for *Vogue* and Jehan Sadat in her autobiography claim it was done for the program *60 Minutes*. Unfortunately, this was not recorded upon the version that I heard. I have decided to cite it as occurring on *60 Minutes*.

²⁸² Safer.

alter men's understandings of birth control and manliness. By speaking out on American television in opposition to her husband and his eventual endorsement of the idea two years later, the idea that she ruled Egypt or was a force behind the president was firmly entrenched. This idea was furthered by her support of the Personal Status Law reforms.

The Personal Status reforms were not entirely her creation but were based upon previous proposals made by the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1929.²⁸³ She did not write the reforms, but lobbied for them publicly and when they were adopted into law, her critics questioned who really ruled Egypt.²⁸⁴ In the interview with Morley Safer he confirmed this rumor saying,

MS: The gossip in Cairo used to be that Jehan Sadat is the real boss of this family.

JS: Real boss? Who said that?

MS: The gossips.

JS: The gossips. But as I told you, in the family, I always believed my husband is the head of the family.²⁸⁵

In this interview, Jehan retreated into the safety of affirming her maternal role to counter the charge that she was too powerful. However, that the gossip had made it to the desk of Morley Safer and Jehan's spirited defenses of it in numerous newspaper articles indicates

²⁸³ In 1929, feminists began to attack patriarchy by reforming the personal status laws of the country which remained under *Shari'ah*, Islamic, law. The EFU attempted to change many aspects of *shari'ah* law such as the minimum marriage age, length of time between separation and remarriage of a woman, inheritance, the right of a husband to force her to come home, and divorce. Badran argues that their purpose in attempting to change personal status law was not to attack Islam, but to attack patriarchy and its hold over the household. This attack on patriarchy would elicit a reaction to feminism from mainstream Egyptian society, namely that feminism was causing the decline of the family in Egypt. Badran, 127-135.

²⁸⁴ Karam notes that the 1979 incarnation of the laws contained amendments dealing with "the right of the wife to keep the family after divorce, the right of the first wife to be informed in case of the husband's marriage to another, as well as her right to demand a divorce on that basis." Fazya Hassan notes that the reforms included "a woman's right to seek a divorce if her husband took an additional wife without her consent; to be informed if her husband divorced her; to retain custody of her children (boys until the age of 10 and girls until the age of 12); to receive alimony; and to retain the marital home until she remarried or until the period of child custody ended. "

Karam, 145, Fazya Hassan, "Women's Destiny, Men's Voices."

²⁸⁵ Safer.

the pervasiveness of the idea.²⁸⁶ Gloria Emerson too notes that “in times of huge crises, her husband has not needed her because his own courage and convictions sustained him” but that “it is apparent that she is a trusted and needed person in his life.”²⁸⁷ When Jehan was asked by Siobhan Morrissey whether she had a role in policy making and she replied, “No, no, no. We were as two contrasts, just trying to complete each other. In ever interfered as so many people *think* I was interfering in politics. Quite the contrary.”²⁸⁸ This need to defend her husband’s autonomy and acknowledge the rumors reflects how widespread this thought, that she ruled Egypt was.

The Personal Status Law reforms had two main criticisms. First was that the laws, by amending laws regarding divorce, marriage and inheritance statutes, attacked Islam, as these were the last vestiges of Islamic law left in the Egyptian constitutions. Azza M. Karam argues that the Personal Status Laws reflected “broader relations between the state, Islam and society,” a view which is also stated by Haddad.²⁸⁹ By attacking these laws, Jehan was attacking the basis of these laws, *shari’a* (Islamic law) and therefore Islam itself. The second criticism for them was that they were passed illegally. Anwar Sadat passed the Personal Status Law reforms while the Parliament was out of session and for this reason as well as their challenging of *shari’a* that they were criticized and eventually repealed in 1985. Fayza Hassan notes that it was “the content of

²⁸⁶ Karen De Witt, “Egypt’s Jihan Sadat,” D3 and Hall, “Jihan Sadat in her Own Defense,” D13, DeVries, B8, Mira Avrech, “In Anwar Sadat’s Egypt, his feminist wife, Jihan, is ‘The Divine Disturber of the Peace,’” *People Weekly*, 13 (February 1980), 87, Paul Hendrickson, “The Tentative Transformation of Jehan Sadat,” *The Washington Post*, June 11, 1987, C15. (C1, C14, C15), Emerson, 161.

²⁸⁷ Emerson, 205.

²⁸⁸ Siobhan Morrissey, “Between the West and Islam: Wanting Too Much, Too Late?” *The Washington Post*, March 3, 1985, C3.

²⁸⁹ Azza M. Karam, *Women, Islamisms and the State: Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1998), 141, Haddad, 6.

the amendments as well as the rather cavalier way in which Sadat purported to pass them aroused endless criticism.”²⁹⁰ Karam further explains the problem these laws posed noting that not only were they criticized for being against *shari’a* but also “it put women’s groups in a quandary owing to their principled disagreement with [Anwar] Sadat’s undemocratic rule.”²⁹¹

Because of these criticisms, in many interviews, Jehan felt the need to defend and confirm her identity as a Muslim.²⁹² She explains to Emerson, “I am Moslem [sic]...I believe. But at the same time I hate to be very religious. I prefer to do my best, to do my duty, to think about God...but not to pray all during the day, because God respects work...I live my life correctly.”²⁹³ She goes on to note that Islam is reflected in “your work and your attitude but not your appearance! Of course the appearance must be respectful but not to the extent of putting on veil and long clothes—not that!”²⁹⁴

Speaking to Hilary De Vries who asked “is Islam an impediment to women’s progress?”

Jehan answered,

No. Believe me, I am a Muslim woman and I follow my religion. I respect my religion, and there is nothing (in Muslim law) against women...and if very narrow-minded religious people want to say that this or that is against Muslim law, it doesn’t mean that Islam itself is against women working or women sharing in building the society.²⁹⁵

This answer was an almost knee-jerk reaction to a charge that was levied numerous times against her. Jehan’s answer to the question indicates that she felt the need to defend herself first before actually answering the question at hand. In another interview in 1985

²⁹⁰ Fazya Hassan, “Women’s Destiny, Men’s Voices,”

²⁹¹ Karam, 259 n4.

²⁹² De Witt, D3 and Hall, A1, DeVries, 3

²⁹³ Emerson, 161.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 203

²⁹⁵ DeVries, 3.

with Siobhan Morrissey she was asked about women's decisions to reveal, Jehan replied, She answered,

Never, never I would wear it. Because I believe that Islam is much, much deeper than just trivial things. I am a religious woman...I feel that I wear respectable dress which matches with the live I'm living, in the 20th century. In the same time I am following my religion, Islam's attitude and obeying God, doing what we are told to do.²⁹⁶

In each of these three interviews, she confirms her identity as a Muslim while defending her decision to not veil. By arguing that Islam is beyond "trivial things" like appearance, she is connecting it with a deeper meaning. By doing this, she defined the veil as a "traditional" item and not a "religious" one, and therefore as subject to change and reinterpretation.

Because of her conflicting views and roles in life, as wife and public figure, women's liberator and denigrator, her works were attacked from all sides of the political spectrum. She was criticized equally by the Islamic elite, who felt she was being un-Islamic in her attempts to reform the notion of the family, women's role in society and women's legal status, and by the liberal elite, who saw her domestic life as a potential hindrance to her desires for liberation and her contradicting attitudes towards women of different classes as problematic.²⁹⁷ It was a combination of Jehan's attitude and approach that threatened her conservative opponents—her lack of deference to male authority, perhaps, and her insistence on participating in the government that combined with her assertions about women's place in society to threaten the social order, while it was her

²⁹⁶ Morrissey, C3.

²⁹⁷ "Quiet wife of Egyptian leader winner of top UNICEF award" *Toronto Star*, April 4, 1989, Georgie Anne Geyer, "Mrs. Anwar Sadat: This Lady's not for Spurning," *New York Times*, March 2, 1975, G15.

various nods to the traditionalism that angered her liberal ones—Assuit, insistence on motherhood etc.

Throughout Jehan Sadat's career as philanthropist and First Lady, she was criticized for being too political and wanting to push society in an unauthentic direction. Yet she clearly engaged in activities similar to those by Huda Sha'rawi and the early women's movement in Egypt. Her work with Talla, her war relief efforts, and her campaign to reform the Personal Status Laws each have direct correlations with programs undertaken by the Egyptian Feminist Union. There are further connections in her social philosophies, her attempt to reach out to rural women and alter their social situation, her union of politics and social work, and her belief that her role was as a partner to her husband, to the early period as well.

Each of these links correlate to the features of the women's movement I outlined in Chapter Two. By going to the rural areas and sending a mixed message, as exemplified in her work with Talla and her speech as Assuit, she upheld a notion of womanhood divided along class lines. By constructing rural women as two distinct groups, one that required liberation and one content with their subjugation, she attempted to recognize and respect different traditions, while trying to change these traditions. In her work with the Munufiyyah District Council and her championing of the Personal Status Law reforms, she demonstrated that private initiative, not governmental edict was the main thrust of political change regarding women. Her work clearly reflects the dualities, contradictions and paradoxes inherent in the modernity movement within Egypt.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The premise of this work is that Farah Pahlavi and Jehan Sadat engaged the women's movements and the interpretations of authentic identity of their respective countries. While the women's movement and the modern identities of each country had Western influences, this does not negate these women's contributions. Their actions and writings demonstrate that neither woman valued the Western over their national identities but sought to combine the two fruitfully within their own countries' contexts. In participating in the synthesis of the Western with the Iranian or the Egyptian, both women were continuing trends that began in the nineteenth and continued into the twentieth centuries in each of their countries and not introducing a completely new system of interaction into their countries.

In Iran, the legacies of the women's movement were limited by the lack of unity among women's groups in the early stages, the state of the country at the turn of the twentieth century and the early incorporation by the government. By being identified with the Baha'i sect, women's advancement as an idea in Iran was deemed dangerous at best and heretical at worst. This forced the women's groups throughout the nineteenth century to maintain their position as nurturers within Iran as a demonstration of their commitment to an authentic Iranian identity that defined women as nurturers. The high poverty rate and an ineffective bureaucratic system led to early women's groups focusing on the necessities of daily existence rather than upon the advancement of political rights. Using the discourse of domesticity reforming women entered the public sphere by

focusing upon these necessities such as food and clean water, under the idea that as a nurturer, the woman's first goal is the safety and health of her children (in this case, Iran itself). However, just as the women's groups were gaining political momentum Reza Shah's government took over the project of women's social advancement in the Women's Awakening and effectively silenced independent liberatory thought within the women's groups. The groups then became agents for the Iranian government. This legacy of the discrediting of women's reformers either as Baha'is or as agents of a corrupt government continued and was strengthened in Iran by the formation of the Women's Organization of Iran and the collection of all women's organizations into this one.

However, the single most important trend that occurred in Iran with respect to authentic identity and the definition of women was the trend that the social reforms were a largely urban, elite movement and that these urban, elite reformers were unable to comprehend the daily exigencies of the lives of most Iranians. While it is clear that Farah understood that there were basic necessities needed for daily life to occur, her writings show a high degree of frustration with the slow pace of reform within the country. More often than not, she focused upon the problems that faced Teheran and its environs, hoping that the trends she was beginning, translating literature for children, helping orphans and the infirm, would become popular throughout the rest of the country. While she realized, like the reformers before her in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there were basic problems that needed attending to in the larger population, she focused mainly upon Teheran. This detachment of the reforming elite from the majority of the Iranian

population, combined with the social stigmas attached to the movement for women's advancement to form the boundaries under which Farah Pahlavi had to negotiate.

Independent thought regarding women's liberation in Iran was unable to progress far beyond this idea; therefore it is the main discourse that Farah Pahlavi engaged with during her reign as Shahbanou/Empress. Although she entered public service under these auspices, she was able to translate her role as a nurturer into a larger role in the government. However, her attitudes towards her people demonstrate the legacies noted above—she was detached from the reality of majority of Iranians from an early age and did not see distinctions among Iranian social, ethnic or religious groups. By ignoring these differences, she was ignoring a fundamental fact of Iranian authentic identity, Iran is culturally diverse. Further, in her attempt to synthesize Western culture with Iranian culture, in the Shiraz Festival or her wardrobe, for example, she failed miserably. Instead of looking as though she was promoting Iranian identity at the same level as Western culture, she appeared to be exploiting Iranian culture to gain favor.

Farah Pahlavi did interact with her country's historical legacies regarding its (Iran's) negotiations of authentic identity and the category of woman. She did not simply accept all things Western as a substitute for all things Iranian. That she tried to assert her Iranian identity and showcase Iranian achievements to the world indicates that she understood the difference between Iran and West. Her ineffectiveness at this task is clear, but her ineffectiveness, should not negate the attitude with which she undertook the job of cultural fusion. By using the discourse of motherhood and domesticity as a platform to undertake social work and by choosing to do her work within the confines of

the governmental apparatus she interacted with the legacies of the definitions of women's place in twentieth century Iranian discourse.

If Farah was a simple duplication of Western feminism transposed into an Iranian context, then her work would not attempt to reflect Iranian culture or ideals, and would theoretically denigrate the Iranian in lieu of the Western. While in some ways this was the case, it is clear that she more often reflected Iran's interaction with the West and its discourses. Her role as a philanthropist and advisor to the Shah, whether he wanted her or not, reflects her belief that women could in fact, achieve gender parity (not equality) with men, while remaining feminine. However, her role, even in public, largely remained that of a nurturer and her causes remained confined to the feminine issues, nurturing the sick and orphaned or, as will be discussed in the section below, issues of aesthetic and cultural authenticity.

The direct parallels between Jehan's actions in the 1970s and Huda Sha'rawi's in the 1920s-1940s, indicate that Jehan was not engaging some non-Egyptian legacy in her work, but was employing the language and experiences of the Egyptian women's movement. The nature of the Egyptian women's movement and the battle over authentic identity involved tensions within and between classes and locations. It led to individual women who could be and were emulated, such as Huda Sha'rawi. In Egypt the legacies of the women's movement gave rise to independent women's groups pursuing both social and legal advances for women outside of governmental control and doing so without the consent of the rural population. As in Iran, the rural areas were not included in the decision-making process for the reform movements, but unlike in Iran, rural Egypt

figured prominently in the equation for modernizing the country. In Egypt, the rural people were simultaneously considered backwards and in need of development. With education, it was thought, Egypt could be liberated from the British and eventually all usurpers of the Egyptian leadership.

Jehan Sadat was ambitious and envisioned her role as First Lady as a vehicle for the advancement of all Egyptian women. Her charities and philanthropic works were confined to specific institutions rather than to broad-based organizations and were often too limited to alter effectively social relations in all Egypt. Further, her tendency to micromanage and her belief in her own exemplary status did not permit the development of permanent gains for all Egyptian women. While these institutions had positive effects upon the people involved, they did not affect large numbers of Egyptians.

With the exception of two institutions, the Wafa' wal Amal and SOS Children's villages, much of Jehan Sadat's work was focused upon women. She concentrated on women because she viewed them as the nurturers of the next generation, believe they were the loci of tradition in the villages and she had access to them. She believed that if you could change the women's ideas, you could change Egypt's ideas, and perhaps most importantly, philanthropy was an acceptable form of public service. By going to the villages, she acknowledged that women were considered the bastions of authentic Egyptian identity and that only through changing their ideas progress be achieved by Egypt.²⁹⁸ By focusing upon women, she engaged the belief that women were the glue of

²⁹⁸ There is a feeling in her work that approaches disdain for village men, in fact, Anwar is the only village man portrayed positively in her autobiography and even then, he had his moments where she needed to remind him that his village roots were showing. Sadat, 301, for instance

society, they worked harder than men, and as a woman Jehan had access to them. Jehan's speech at Assuit and her work with Talla demonstrated her paradoxical relationship with women and women's rights. She believed that by going to a *single* village and asking their permission (Assuit), that all of Egypt would accept her chosen public role. She was not asking at Assuit that *all* women join her in her effort, but that she, as President's wife, be involved in public, political activities. Yet in her work with Talla, Jehan demonstrated that she believed financial independence was necessary for women's happiness. Jehan's political work opened her up to enormous avenues for criticism, the loudest coming from those who doubted her identity as both an Egyptian and as a Muslim. Because Jehan worked within the government she was more easily singled out for criticism than Farah was. Her work with the Personal Status Laws reflected directly the work of the Egyptian Feminist Union in the 1930s and 1940s and their attempts to change the legal status of women.

The silence in scholarship upon the women's movements in Iran and Egypt between the period of incorporation of the women's groups into the governmental system, 1936-1941 in Iran and in the early 1950s in Egypt, is artificial at best. That scholars have chosen to ignore these women's contributions (positive and negative) to their countries' articulations of womanhood denies the importance of the end of the secular nationalist understanding of society and social relations. That Farah and Jehan reflected the discourses and actions undertaken at the beginning of the century does not automatically negate their participation in the women's movements at large. By ignoring these women as actors in the greater context of the countries' women's movements,

scholars are ignoring a particularly important piece to the puzzle that is twentieth century Iranian and Egyptian history. The context of their times, the 1970s was a transition point between what was a secular interpretation of society and social issues and what would become in the 1980s the Islamist viewpoint of society. While it is clear that neither Farah Pahlavi nor Jehan Sadat advanced the women's movement in their respective countries, it is also apparent that they did not act independently of their countries' contexts.

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