On Contradictions: The Architecture of Women’s Resistance and Emancipation in Early twentieth-Century Iran

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Introduction

1 When Reza Shah Pahlavi (1878-1944), an army officer, came to power in 1925, Iran was sharply divided. It had suffered from the country’s fragmentation in the aftermath of World War I. Reza Shah overcame internal and external threats and unified the country. His reign (1925-1941) marked one of the most intensive periods of modernization in Iran (and the broader Middle East). His modern reforms, which determined to bring Iran into the Western economic, cultural, and political milieu, signified important steps toward establishing an industrialized economy, secularizing the nation, and creating a modern bureaucratic system. It included upgrading urban infrastructure and communication networks through automobile-oriented urbanization as well as transforming the built environment through new design forms, construction methods, and building materials. Initially, Reza Shah and his administration invited and employed modernist Iranian and European architects and urban planners to redesign and refashion many major cities in Iran. They approached this mission with a key focus on rationality and functionality, and an emphasis on health and efficiency, all of which followed the Congrès Internationaux d’Arхitecture Moderne (CIAM, or International Congresses of Modern Architecture).
In early twentieth-century Iran, men had relative freedom and were less restricted in their access to various public spaces. Women's movement, in contrast, was structured by patriarchal power, cultural taboos, immobility, and dress code. Reza Shah, the architects, and planners attempted to challenge a host of gender hierarchies and divisions in the design and usage of urban spaces, to increase the visibility and mobility of women, and to emancipate them from what they viewed as oppressive traditional practices. This policy was also incorporated into the state propaganda campaign known as the Women's Awakening project (1936-1941), which encouraged women to participate in social life and promoted women's education, work, and legal rights (i.e. to property), and the abolition of polygamy. The Women's Awakening project also dictated a new, modern appearance for women in the public sphere, in stark contrast to the image of the veiled Muslim woman relegated to the private domain of the home. Correspondingly, gender desegregation became central to discussions about modernizing and reshaping public spaces. Most notably, in 1936, Reza Shah’s policies directed women’s embodiment and performance in public spaces by banning the use of the chador (the traditional Iranian head covering) in favor of Western clothing and fashion.

Taking this history into account, rather than situating the modern architecture and planning movement in Iran merely as a product and result of a seemingly coherent narrative of architectural and cultural modernization, or simply as an appreciation of male architects’ designs and their “masterpieces,” I contextualize the monolithic and hegemonic spatial changes (e.g., planning and architecture) and socio-cultural reforms (e.g., gender-based laws and policies) imposed by state modernization and deployed through architects’ and planners’ practices under the reign of Reza Shah. In these hegemonic yet pluralized formations of the modern built environment and modern Iranian women, I ask: in what ways did women experience collective social emancipation and face persistent or new inequalities in urban spaces in major cities, including Tehran, Shiraz, Qazvin, Rasht, and Bushehr? What consequences did women (in particular, those who did not want to be seen in public without the veil) face? How did the architecture of the built environment (in both vernacular and modern forms) facilitate their access or prevent their mobility? To reveal new narratives of the urban through isolated episodes, and because modernization was perceived in contradictory and complex ways during this period, I concentrate on two main groups of women (i.e., elite, urban, upper-class and conservative, religious and lower-class) and their lived experiences. I address how the implementation of modern narratives and practices led at the same time to increased forms of mobility and expression for one group of women eager to confront cultural traditionalism and patriarchal ideologies; and yet limited, compromised, and forestalled other group of women’s resistance to the coloniality of modernization and state power. I argue that the vision of women as a single group of citizens with universally shared needs and desires, and with presumably the same goals and understandings of emancipation and freedom through modern practices in urban spaces in this period, is problematic. I emphasize that unless the gender dimensions and the roles of women in constructing and negotiating the top-down modernization of the built environment are carefully considered, any historical understanding of modern architecture in Iran (and, more broadly, in the study of global modern architecture) is incomplete and inaccurate. This is particularly true in a context such as Iran’s Reza Shah era, when discourses on women’s emancipation were highly visible, contested, and controversial in public/private daily life.
I utilize a transnational feminist conceptual framework that builds on ideas developed by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984) and Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994), which critique modernity and modernization and emphasize the diversity of women's experiences and the importance of contextualizing them. I extend this transnational feminist concept to the study of the built environment and propose it as an alternative framework to earlier studies of gender and modernization of the built environment in Iran (and globally). I also use an intersectional lens in that I privilege gender given its primacy in Reza Shah’s vision of modernity, yet I analyze gender as it intersects with class, religion, ethnicity, and geographic location whenever possible. The gender analysis in this paper is structured according to two principal axes: first, the gendering of modernization as it intersects with nationalism, and second the (de)gendering of urban spaces in regard to women’s emancipation. At the time, Reza Shah and his newly created modern state controlled the print media. Through these channels, along with explicit propaganda campaigns, his administration worked to educate the population about Western ideas and beliefs about modernization. In this qualitative research, I examine historical archives and primary sources ranging from articles published in the professional architecture journal *Arshitikt* (The Architect) to cartoons and historical photographs of spaces that appeared in official newspapers and women’s magazines. Architecture and urban planning scholars, among others, have focused closely on the ways that modern architecture and urban development have been key to the articulation and consolidation of hegemonic configurations of the nation-state in the Middle East. In the context of Iran, one group of scholars describes Reza Shah’s modernization as Iran’s unprecedented step toward modern architecture and urban planning. Other groups critique Reza Shah’s modernization policies and claim that his ideologies went against the traditional architectural culture of Iran. These studies mainly described the technical aspects of Iranian architecture; the spectacle of the state’s monumental architecture; modernist architects and their designs; and/or architectural forms and form-making. They are also largely descriptive in nature. Despite the obvious links between the promotion of Western-oriented ideas regarding women and spatial design, ranging from the physical appearance of women in public spaces to their active participation in the construction of and/or resistance to modernizing narratives, issues of gender and sexuality remained conspicuously absent from the architectural historiography of modern Iran (and to some extent the Middle East). In fact, scholars have only recently begun to examine the complicated relationship between political discourses, nationalist sentiments, cultural disputes, gender norms, and architectural forms during this period in Iran. Within such a framework, Pamela Karimi demonstrates that modernization created a new space of cultural conversions, including new notions of taste and consumption in Iran. She argues that from the start of modernization, Iranians did not accept the Western-oriented changes imposed by the state (or other colonial powers), instead they chose what to accept and bring into their everyday lives (or not) in contexts of rapid structural change. Most significantly, recent works in gender and feminist studies have discussed how women were seen as agents and objects of Reza Shah’s nationalist ideologies in his modernization project. This paper builds on these literatures.
The emergence of gendered modernization

Despite the fact that Iran had a heterogeneous culture and diverse ethnic groups including Fars, Turks, Kurds, Lor, Azari, and Baluchi, the Iranians had no lack of a monolithic identity any single, unifying culture, language, and dress code, Reza Shah aimed to unite Iran through modernization reforms and to create a homogeneous modern nation-state there. His goal was to free Iran from the foreign capitulations, to restore it from the uprisings of nomads and tribes, to end the influence of clergies, and to emancipate women from what he perceived as oppressive traditional practices. While not an unusual story (this is, after all, a common modern European colonization narrative), it is unique in how central gender became to Reza Shah's self-fashioned version of modernization, a radical project contributed to a very clear visual manifestation of Iran as a modern nation.

In many ways, a cartoon illustration in Nahid (Venus) magazine exemplifies Reza Shah's perception of a homogenous modern nation in Iran (fig. 1). In this cartoon, Iran is personified as an unveiled female character, a young woman with an Oriental look, trapped in chains of foreign capitulations (which were barriers to her national sovereignty for so long). As she sinks to her knees to thank Reza Shah for rescuing her, her chains break and fall away from her. The cartoon also shows two male figures standing behind Reza Shah gazing at freed (and tamed) Iran. One of these men, dressed in Western clothing, might represent Reza Shah's administration. The other, who holds a flag, might represent the nationalist elites. The flag signifies Iran's liberation from foreign capitulations (and the uprisings of nomads/tribes) and unity as one nation. The cat-shaped map of Iran on the woman's skirt symbolizes how she (re)produces Iran, presumably with the help of the shah's modernization reforms. The sovereignty embedded in the cartoon, represented by the presence of various masculine figures and the power and hierarchy among them, overlays the conditions of modernization in Iran with a new set of expectations and limitations. Reza Shah is mainly viewed as the “supreme” protector of the female figure (read all women in Iran) and women's role in nation-building was framed solely in the maternalist discourse of motherhood (and through the construction of new architecture and urban artifacts).

The population in the background symbolizes the presence of the nation in the urban space. The whole nation, however, is made up of male figures. This language shapes gendered ideas, such as the concepts of nation (millat) as maleness and homeland (vatan) as femaleness. It also indicates how citizenship rights and privileges in urban spaces were (and to some extent continued to be) gendered. This gender binary further represented the secluded, private world of women as subordinate and powerless on the one hand and the visible, public world of men as dominant and powerful on the other. What is crucial to understand here is that modernization became even more masculinized, because the crowd of male figures in the background, as the collective body of the modern nation, become responsible for protecting and possessing feminine Iran. In addition, the male figures are perceptible as a united group, due to their similar costume (except for the clergies). This demonstrates that a new structure of ethnic and class diversity has been (re)framed and/or remained invisible as a way to create a homogeneous national community under the slogan of “one country, one nation, one language” by Reza Shah.
A cartoon illustration in Setareh-e Sobh (The Morning Star) is a rare document that sums up the way modernization was perceived by the state (and by many elite Iranians, including European trained Iranian architects and planners) (fig. 2). The cartoon compares two illustrations: the one at top reads as “An Example of Today’s World Civilization!” and the one at the bottom reads “An Example of Today’s Iranian Civilization!” The upper cartoon illustrates a modern developed country, with all kinds of transportation: trains, airplanes, automobiles, and ships. Factory smoke in the background shows that the country has advanced in industrialization. Electrical lines represent electrification projects, bringing the citizens light. The sun shines happily in the skies of this developed, modern country. In the bottom illustration, Iran is portrayed as an underdeveloped land where people must still plod along on donkeys and horses. They carry lanterns, for the country lacks electricity infrastructure. The mountains in the background are bare of modern factories and the landscape is still untouched. The illustration is even drawn with a lack of perspective symbolic of one-dimensional development and the lack of modern expansion. The sun looks down on Iran with a sad face.
In addition to contrasting “undeveloped” traditional Iran and the “developed,” modern West, the cartoon is also gendered in many ways. In both illustrations, countries are personified as women (see the left side) and represented as motherlands/homeland. The Western country is portrayed as a young woman with flowing blond locks and a radiant young face. She proudly gazes at her success in modernization, confident and calm about her development. In comparison, below, Iran is rendered as an old woman with dark hair, glumly contemplating her failures and traditionalism. Her sad, wrinkled face reflects her suffering. In both illustrations, the homeland is represented as a female body and imagined and articulated as a woman. However, each homeland is given a different body to represent the degree of advancement. This type of feminization of countries epitomizes how homelands are gendered. Moreover, both illustrations similarly symbolize public spaces and urban areas as masculine: no female figures are depicted among the users of public spaces and none are a part of the nation in either illustration. They make up unequal spaces of mobility and access to civil (gender) rights.

One can argue that Reza Shah’s Western-oriented modernization project comes across as a response to the negative image of Iran in this cartoon. Initially, Reza Shah’s model of modernity was expressed in terms of a new concept of urbanism and construction in Iran’s major cities. This concept was directly influenced by CIAM’s modern housing and planning manifestos, because Reza Shah employed modernist Iranian and European architects and urban planners to carry out his policies. Many of these middle-class architects and urban planners, including Vartan Hovanessian (1896–1982); Mohsen Foroughi (1907-1983); Keyqobad Zafar (1910-1987); Ali Sadegh (1908-1987); and Gabriel Guevrekian (1900-1970), returned to Iran or were engaged there in the mid-1930s. For example, Guevrekian, who served as CIAM’s General Secretary in an international housing exhibition in Vienna and was a founding member of the French architectural journal L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui, was appointed by Reza Shah as the chief architect of the municipality of Tehran. A friend and colleague of Le Corbusier, Guevrekian
influenced intellectual thought about modern architecture and planning of this period. He worked in Iran from 1933 to 1937 and designed a number of villas and public buildings that were covered in *Arshitikt*.²⁴

Historically, the urban fabric of Iran’s major cities was primarily private- and inward-oriented, made up of compounds typically surrounded by fortified walls. Street systems comprised chiefly of traditional streets were based on pedestrian movements, and had narrow, twisting, partly-roofed alleyways (fig. 3). Initially, to upgrade these urban infrastructure and communication networks, the state instituted a large-scale national urban development plan, mainly in major cities including Tehran, Shiraz, Qazvin, Rasht, and Bushehr.²⁵ It included the well-known Road Widening Act of 1933, as well as plans for industrial development, infrastructure projects, and a cross-country railroad system.²⁶ The Road Widening Act specified an orthogonal network of wide, straight streets and boulevards, paved with modern materials including asphalt.²⁷ The new thoroughfares were to be lined with trees (e.g. plane trees) providing perspectives and shading for pedestrian promenades.²⁸ To achieve these goals, the state financed the purchase of homes in old neighborhoods (Mahalla).²⁹ In many major cities, municipalities destroyed traditional buildings and historical monuments in order to build straight roads and widen streets (fig. 4).³⁰ For example, one report by the American embassy estimated that between fifteen and thirty thousand houses and buildings had been destroyed in the capital city Tehran for modern road expansion.³¹ This modified the homogeneity of the traditional urban fabric of many neighborhoods and the way people moved around the city. It changed the face of Tehran (and that of many other major cities) from a traditional, inwardly-oriented, “private” Middle Eastern city to a modern, outwardly-oriented, “public” one.

Figure 3: Aerial view of the city of Qazvin (Iran) with traditional twisted organic alleys in 1920.

Figure 4: The city of Rasht in the north of Iran.

Tehran’s urban transformation ultimately aimed to respond to the existing social segregation and contribute to modern cultural shifts related to equality of ethnicity, class, and gender. Reza Shah ordered the destruction of the defensive walls around Tehran to create an opportunity for diverse communities including the Fars, Turks, Kurds, Lor, Azari, and Balouchi to interact and communicate with each other. Since, historically, Tehran was segregated, and religious minorities had their own quarters outside (or inside) the walls, one aim of this urban transformation was to contribute to a spatial desegregation of religion-segregated quarters and create more physical mobility for different communities. Because the new modern social structures were based on wealth, status, and education, the renewal segregated Tehran according to class, instead. The royal family, elites, officials, civil servants, and foreigners (missionaries, diplomats, businessmen, etc.) occupied the north sides of the cities (shumal-i shahr), and became constituent parts of the new power system. The middle class inhabited the central spaces of the cities; the lower class resided in the still existing old neighborhoods on the south sides of the cities (jonub-i shahr). The intended secularization of Tehran dismantled a particular kind of social segregation (i.e., ethnic and religious) and created a modern social hierarchy (i.e., based on class and status) instead. The impact was similar in many other major cities, such as Shiraz, Qazvin, and Bushehr.

Spaces of emancipation and resistance

Historically, in Iran, there had been a clear distinction between masculine public spaces and feminine private spaces. Streets, squares, and shops were all considered masculine. When women left the feminine space and privacy of the home and entered
the masculine public world, they were obligated to wear the veil (chador) and conceal their bodies. Most women’s outside activity was limited to socializing among neighbors, relatives, and kin, or to carrying out religious rituals. The goal of the modern democratization of public spaces was to reduce this gender segregation. For example, consider Le Corbusier’s criticism of traditional streets: “no more than a trench, a deep cleft, and a narrow passage.” Like him, European-trained Iranian architects and planners were committed to widening streets so that they could serve as aesthetically-pleasing spaces where both men and women could come to stroll and socialize. The state, similarly, argued that existing traditional gender relations needed to be replaced by “modern” relations, based on Western values and standards, to allow women’s participation in public spaces and national processes. Reza Shah explicitly changed a number of patriarchal laws upholding gender segregation, long opposed by female activists. For example, in 1934, a new law set heavy fines for cafes, cinemas, theaters, and restaurants that were not open to both genders. Whereas women had previously had no seating in theaters and cinemas, magazine and official newspaper advertisements began to announce the admission of both genders to various theatrical shows and movies, a step towards mingling the genders in public. They published articles on gender desegregation of public spaces and women’s emancipation and freedom to use public spaces.

Interactions between men and women in modern public spaces, including streets, public gardens, automobiles, parties, and theatrical playhouses, introduced a new set of experiences in the emerging modern society of Iran. For example, an advertisement in Ettela’at magazine praised the municipality of Tehran for constructing the “National Garden” near Mashgh square. Even though the park had not been completed at the time of publication, the author claimed the landscaping, the sidewalk paving, and modern facilities accommodated many women and men every afternoon. Another article focused on street sidewalks, previously segregated by gender. It explained that customarily, men had used the sidewalks on the right, while women used the ones on the left. The author endorsed the mixed-gender use of sidewalks, enabling men and women to walk hand-in-hand in public spaces. The national unity paired with gender desegregation provided an opportunity for many to imagine “the utopia of an imagined national future,” as Ann McClintock calls it.

In another example, women and men had previously been forbidden from riding together in horse-drawn carriages (fig. 5) even if they were relatives. In the aftermath of Reza Shah’s gender desegregation, they could now not only ride in the same carriages, but women could also drive cars. Iran became one of the hubs for automobile export from Western countries. In their printed ads, many car manufacturers portrayed modern women behind the wheel (fig. 6). Many of the elite, urban, upper-class women started driving, taking advantage of the opportunity that modern urban reforms offered. This was another way in which they negotiated their “right to the city,” resisting the traditional (and cultural taboos) that defined public spaces as masculine.
Figure 5: Women and men were segregated in the same horse-drawn carriages.

Source: Nahid (Venus), 31 Ordibehesht 1305/22 May 1926, Year 5, no.66, p. 4, Chicago (USA), University of Chicago, Middle East Documentation Center (MEDOC).
Figure 6: An auto ad shows a “modern” woman (who looks European, not Iranian) driving a car as an example of women’s emancipation in Iran.

In addition to urban reforms, Reza Shah viewed women’s dress, particularly the chador (black shawl) and pitche (face veil), as the primary barrier to women’s socialization and to their more “equal” participation in modern public life (fig. 7). The Unveiling Act of 1936 (Kashf-e hijab) may have been his most dramatic and best-known social modernization reform. The national act, which later became law, mandated that all women should appear without the veil in public spaces and while using public facilities. Reza Shah declared that unveiling gave women more physical and social choice of movement and would facilitate women’s participation in the outside world, including state-sponsored jobs (e.g., as schoolteachers or factory workers).
Soon after these announcements, the pages of national newspapers and women’s magazines were filled with articles and images about unveiling laws and clothing reforms. Via these media, the state attempted to showcase, disseminate, and appropriate the modern accomplishments of women from other nations, particularly European countries, such as France, Germany, the UK, and also the USA (fig. 8). Importantly, the state’s propaganda campaign included many educational and visual materials from these nations to assist Iranian women in “modernizing” their fashion and bodies based on Western clothing and fashion, by wearing European hats, coats, and gloves. Before Reza Shah’s dress reform, Iranians, particularly women, tended to dress diversely based on their ethnic background, geographical location, economic condition, and even religious beliefs. For example, the Fars, Turks, Kurds, Lor, Azari, and Balouchi ethnicities each had different women’s costumes. Some women used a scarf rather than the chador to cover their heads in public. Moreover, in cold, rainy northern cities like Rasht, women’s dress was different from that in hot, humid southern cities like Bushehr. Reza Shah’s Unveiling Act, like the instructions and prescriptions in national newspapers and magazines, however, overlooked these differences, and the diversity of women’s dress according to divisions of class, ethnicity, religion, geographic location, and family. Iranian women were homogenized into a single group identity, and generally assumed to be imperfect, incomplete, and in need of immediate physical modification and assistance in order to serve as the modern subjects for the state’s nationalist discourse.
As mentioned before, the Unveiling Act helped primarily elite, urban, upper-class women to challenge traditionalism, overcome patriarchal barriers, and increase their access to the city. In their diaries and memoirs, these elite women argued that veiling was the primary source of women’s limited access to knowledge, success, and the usage of public spaces. Badr-al-Moluk Bamdad, for example, describes the day that Reza Shah publicly announced the unveiling in “A Momentous Decree,” a chapter of her memoirs (published in 1977):

After that day, women wearing veils were forbidden to circulate in the main streets of Tehran and the provincial cities. They were guided by the police into side streets … The women themselves found their new situation strange and startling. Thanks to the unshakable strength of will of the nation’s liberator, the difficulties were overcome.

Bamdad applauds the state-imposed unveiling as a symbol of social progress from the “nation’s liberator,” Reza Shah, and celebrates the unveiling as a form of women’s emancipation. Bamdad and similar elite women who interpreted the veil as a signifier of backwardness praised Reza Shah as an enlightened ruler who democratized gender relations and increased women’s mobility through modern nationalist reforms. Bamdad further reflects on women’s lives prior to Reza Shah’s reforms:

since the women had to be allowed out of doors from time to time if necessary tasks were to be performed […] they gradually became prisoners, confined in the home or under the veil and the cloak (chador). In their ignorance and isolation, they remained unaware of their own capabilities and spiritual worth.

Bamdad and many other elite women resisted traditionalism and cultural taboos and pursued their livelihood in a male-dominated public space. They adapted to the new rules and regulations, and took advantage of the freedom of movement provided by unveiling. It could be argued that since cultural barriers had made it difficult for this group of women to exercise their rights to the public domain, they framed their
demands according to the guidelines of the Unveiling Act. The new paradigms of resistance they forged might work for one group of women, but was not inclusive to all.

**Spaces of domination and resistance**

The Unveiling Act, although it seemed emancipatory for elite, urban, upper-class women, created different reactions among various communities and women’s groups. In particular, due to unveiling, women needed to focus on perfecting their outer appearance more than ever before. This created difficulties for those women who felt more comfortable continuing to wear the veil, including conservative, religious, and lower-class women; importantly, these women comprised the largest percentage of the female population. For example, although lower-income class women had been able to wear old, worn clothing under the chador, mandatory unveiling forced them either to obtain proper, acceptable, or “respectable” clothing, or to stay at home, out of embarrassment. In rural provinces, some reports indicated that one of the primary reasons that women violated the unveiling law in public spaces was due to poverty.

Cornin argues:

one major problem for most low-class women was that they simply lacked the sartorial culture of appearing in public without a bodily cover, and in any case, it was very expensive for them at the time. They also lacked the culture of a proper hairstyle and—apart from that—would have felt much less shy if they could cover their hair with a scarf.

The state established a number of welfare-like programs for lower-class women. For example, it created fundraising programs, or sent state officials to Europe to buy Western-style clothing and distribute it to lower-class women in the provinces. Despite these measures, there was not nearly enough to clothe the women who were most in need.

Due to state law, veiled women were not allowed to use public transportation (e.g., riding in horse-drawn carriages or cars) or public facilities such as cinemas and public bathhouses (hammam), and were prevented from shopping in most stores and from receiving treatment in public health clinics. Local police were also authorized to enforce the unveiling law through the forceful removal of women’s veils in public spaces. Unlike elite, urban, and upper-class women, many of these women perceived this law as a violation of their bodies and their sense of self. For conservative and religious veiled women, the Unveiling Act was not only an intrusion into what they perceived as their identity and private lives, but it also created additional limitations, insofar as they felt uncomfortable being unveiled in public spaces and in some cases their male relatives demanded that they continue to wear the veil. This created a deeply contradictory and conflictive setting for many individuals and families. These tensions and concerns illustrated often in the literature from the period which showcased more, not less, exclusion of certain social groups. According to some records, some women did not leave the house for the 5 to 6 years (1936-1941) mandatory Unveiling Act was effective. It ultimately limited the mobility of this group of women, and their opportunities in modern urban life.

Interestingly, in this climate of limited mobility and restrictions for many veiled women who still lived in old neighborhoods, the vernacular, organic Iranian urban form of narrow, partly-roofed alleys and linked architecture became the women’s tool of resistance against modernity and state power. For example, one of the main needs
of women during this period was using the public bathhouses (hammam). In traditional Iranian architecture, due to many limitations such as access to water and/or lack of urban plumbing, houses did not have baths. Although private baths and plumbing were gradually became part of the modern architecture of Iranian houses, in older districts and poor neighborhoods, public hammams were still the only way for men and women to bathe. Soon after the Unveiling Act was announced, the state mandated that hammams could no longer allow veiled women to use their facilities and threatened to penalize hammam owners who violated this law. However, as a form of solidarity, many male hammam owners allowed veiled women to use their baths. This can be observed as an intersection where women’s individual rights overlap with their communities’ acts of resistance and where new gender relations are discursively created.

Typically, veiled women would remain at home and hide from the gaze of state police during the day. After nightfall, they would climb over rooftops their neighbors’ houses to reach the neighborhood hammam (fig. 9). Through this process, the “inviolable” division between public and private spaces was challenged. Private spaces that were marginal (physically and cognitively – tucked away and largely secluded) became sites of potential and resistance, to put it in bell hook’s words. Rooftops that were once private “spaces of captivity” for women became “reversed: the inside outside,” turning formerly private spaces of the house into a public site of solidarity and liberation far from the state’s gaze.

Moreover, rooftops, as part of often-overlooked everyday spaces (neglected by the state and architects/planners as a site of political potential and resistance), embodied processes of negotiation and appropriation that mediated everyday spatial practices of conservative, religious and lower-class women in major cities such as Tehran and their “right to the city.” They also provided more than a space for replication of existing gender (and power) inequalities. Instead, they served as a site where these women reclaimed their inclusion in modern urban life through a different form of movement within space (and time). Through a process of transgression, these women enacted a series of spatial tactics undermining a state-imposed plan and its modern gender constructions. The lack and limitations of the right to the city as “right of access” and “right of play and appropriation,” as Henri Lefebvre mentions, produced a new urban form, a counterhegemonic plan, that demystified the modern arrangements of public spaces and their representation/production of the “modern woman.” This counterhegemonic plan can be interpreted as a parallel horizontal plane that served as a space of micropolitics, biopolitics, and autonomy for women. It ultimately represented a distinct and autonomous space in relation to the state-controlled modern city ground/plan.

For affluent families, including the old aristocratic ones and the merchants who were still living in the old neighborhoods and who could afford the expense of construction, building a bath in a corner of their private courtyard also served as a way to oppose the state normative views on women’s rights. One can argue, baths attached to the architecture of traditional houses became an element of resistance to the law, because they allowed women to bathe without leaving home. These spaces similarly symbolized the veil, and both the spaces and the veil embodied the protection of the female body from the purview of modernization of public spaces and its laws.
Elements of resistance were not limited to the two examples I just mentioned. Historically, extended families typically lived under the same roof or, if they could afford it, in several different dwellings clustered together. In the years after the Unveiling Act, to make it easy for veiled women to socialize and communicate with each other, these families started to cut into joint walls and create hidden doors between their houses. This phenomenon happened primarily in southern cities like Bushehr. Joining two houses represented an especially active pursuit of the formation of a collective space of solidarity, sociality, and mobility and in that sense, a form of active alternative practice by-passing and/or subverting the state's modern spatial codes.

**Conclusion**

The modern architectural culture that came about through Reza Shah's policies, coupled with his gender reforms, exemplifies the ambiguities, complexities, and contradictions that emerged in the encounters between imposed and imported ideas and the local realities of communities that were affected by the reforms. On one hand, the modern urban and architectural reforms made public spaces more intertwined, less gender-segregated, and more inclusive spaces. They made the relations between men and women more direct, transparent, less mysterious, and less discriminatory towards women. Public spaces, such as streets, squares, and public businesses, manifested the emerging democratization and equality of the urban realm and were helpful in the gender desegregation in Iranian-Islamic society, albeit at the cost of ignoring the
context and characteristics of different cities in Iran and suggesting a universal, national modern plan for all cities, regardless of their vernacular architecture settings and socio-cultural conditions. On the other hand, public spaces became elements of modern micropolitics and biopolitics, in which Iranian women’s bodies were subjugated, disciplined, and controlled through the measurement and surveillance of the state. Modern public spaces, in this sense, served as a liminal space of acceptance and resistance that (re)produced inclusion and exclusion and challenged hegemonic and counterhegemonic normative views on gender, class, ethnicity, and religion. This liminal space was shaped by gender and helped constitute gender (and other social) relations as exemplified in the modern architecture movement in Iran, which helped determine how public spaces became (gendered) sites of domination and subordination, yet also terrains of resistance and transformation.

The history of modernization and gender desegregation in public spaces during the first Pahlavi period thus requires study through a transnational and intersectional feminist lens. Furthermore, the gendered nuances and paradoxes, and the daily tactics and choices of women, create a complex and contradictory picture of this era. On one hand, they demonstrated the conflict of unequal power relations between the new state as “us” and all Iranian women as collective “others.” On the other hand, they showed the hierarchical conflict and separation among Iranian women of different social classes (and to some extent ethnic backgrounds), instead of creating solidarity and cooperation among them. I argue that elite, urban, upper-class women who supported the state-imposed unveiling as a symbol of social progress and emancipation in public spaces helped produce a binary narrative of “semi bourgeois-modern-unveiled us” vs. “backward-pre-modern-veiled other,” through discourse that was proto-feminist. However, their proto-feminism ignored issues of class, culture, religion, freedom of choice, and equal access. Their equation of the modern with cosmopolitan urban life and the traditional with the lower classes also constituted the position of an elite opposed to the masses. Such traditionalism does not fade away in the face of modernization.

To conclude, this paper attempts to serve not only as an intellectual intervention in a long scholarly trajectory about modern architecture in Iran and the Middle East, but also as a form of advocacy which encourages architects and scholars, particularly from Iran and the Middle East, to become more aware of their roles when writing their histories. Other than the actual stories of women we try to narrate, our own positionality and standpoint as feminist architectural historians, and the methods we use to historicize the production and consumption of spaces – including how women embrace and/or resist these spaces – is itself significant for social justice. It is our responsibility to write histories of actors shaping the built environment outside the traditional boundaries of the discipline and thus contribute to the accounts of modern architectures regionally and transnationally by making the histories of disenfranchised and marginalized groups visible.
NOTES


2. Afsaneh Najmabadi discusses how during the last years of Qajar era Iran was left with inefficient and incapable guardians (the state/kings) and therefore needed a strong guardian like Reza Shah to save it. See Afsaneh Najmabadi, “The Erotic Vatan [Homeland] as Beloved and Mother: To Love, to Possess, and to Protect,” Comparative Studies in Society and History, vol. 39, no. 3, 1997, p. 442-467.


4. For example, Mina Marefat argues “the transformations in Iran paralleled an international movement spearheaded by the Committee Internationale d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM).” See Mina Marefat, Building to Power: Architecture of Tehran, 1921-1941, Ph.D. diss., MIT, Cambridge, MA, 1988, p. 191.

5. Generally, space can be considered gendered in at least two broad ways: in terms of women’s and men’s accessibility to space; and in terms of the activities that take place in a given space.

6. Generally speaking, modernization is based on a Western ideal of progress and is associated with development, progress, foreign investment, capitalism, Westernization, and secularization. In contrast, tradition or traditionalism refers to local customs and longstanding cultural norms and practices, including “traditional” or conservative beliefs. In response to this linear and superficial definition, Arjun Appadurai (1996) argues that, especially in non-Western circumstances, this definition of modernization and its global policy trend is problematic. See Arjun Appadurai, Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization, Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996 (Public worlds, 1), p. 3-9.


8. This paper does not intend to view all Iranian cities through a single lens. Many major cities, however, experienced this period of national modernization in similar ways. The focus of the paper is limited to a selection of major cities, since the discussion about rural areas differed significantly.

9. This approach contributes to feminist architecture historiography in a unique way, mainly from the standpoint of disenfranchised groups neglected in the historiography of architecture due to the discipline’s methodological limitations. Scholars such as Donna Haraway (1988) and Sandra Harding (1993) have contributed to the development of standpoint epistemology and theory, which inform my analysis.

10. Well-known feminist scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984) and Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994) argue the homogenization and

11. Intersectionality was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. She argues how intersecting social identities such as gender, sexuality, class, race, etc. relate to structures of domination and subordination (particularly for minority identities).

12. Arshitikt helps frame the works of European-trained Iranian architects during the era of Reza Shah, who believed modern practices could contribute to radical changes in the aesthetic, physical, and social fabric of Iran. This journal published only six issues over a two-year period between August 1946 and July 1948. Arshitikt includes architectural drawings, project photographs, and substantive articles on the architecture and urban planning of Iran. These materials and evidence were collected and written by early modernist European-trained Iranian architects and planners. In many ways, Arshitikt provides original summaries of the works of European-trained modernist architects during the Reza Shah period.


16. Iranian scholar Minoo Moallem states that “while some recent postcolonial feminist scholarship elaborates on the ‘woman question’ by locating it in the context of modernity and colonialism in the Middle East, there is still no discussion of the specificity of modernity—the distinctive ways modernity was imagined, materialized, and experienced—in Middle Eastern societies.” I agree with Moallem that many Middle
Eastern/Iranian scholars take modernity for granted or romanticize it, for example in light of modern developments. Since these literatures are invested primarily in positive aspects of modernization, they are limited in scope, failing to perceive how modernization and patriarchy intertwined to create a gendered built environment. See Minoo Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005, p. 22.


24. Historically, the profession of architecture and planning in Iran (as it was in many other places) was male-dominated. The first architecture school was founded in 1927 and adopted the principles of École nationale des beaux-arts de Paris as its teaching model. The school was under the leadership and influence of French archeologist and architect Andre Godard (1881-1965). Female students first enrolled in this program in 1945, after the end of Reza Shah’s reign. See Arshitikt (*The Architect*), Bahman 1325/March 1947, vol. 3, p. 90. See also Élisabeth Vitou, Dominique Deshoulières and Hubert Jeannol, Gabriel Guevrekian, 1900-1970: une autre architecture moderne, Paris: éditions Connivences, 1987.

25. As Talinn Grigor states, Reza Shah’s urban renewal plans were mostly applied without any consideration for historical growth patterns and traditional cultural values. See Talinn Grigor, “The king’s white walls: Modernism and bourgeois architecture,” op. cit. (note 3), p. 97.
26. These projects also included the centralization and bureaucratization of the state and its institutions (which had implications on urban form as well). See Ibid., p. 97-98.

27. Municipalities published several articles on the benefit and need for creating straight, wide roads and boulevards as a better solution for people's movements in many major cities. Ettela‘at (Information), special edition 2800 Days, 1307/1928, p. 131.

28. Such practices resembled the role of roofed traditional alleys for the citizens. Ibid., p. 338.

29. Mahalla is the traditional neighborhoods where families clustered in homogeneous communities of courtyard houses.


31. Pamela Karimi, Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran, op. cit. (note 17), p. 68.


34. See Amir Bani Masoud, Memari-e Moaser-e Iran, dar Takapouy-e Beyn-e Sonat va Modernite, op. cit. (note 15), p. 192. Madanipour states this further increased the power of Reza Shah, because it facilitated police control over the citizenry and the deployment of police or troops to quell rioting. See also Ali Madanipour, “Urban planning and development in Tehran,” Cities, vol. 23, no. 6, 2006, p. 434.


38. One can argue that these architects and planners may unintentionally have ignored gender discrimination in European cities at the time.

40. In many cases, changes in these laws had been demanded by almost all women in Iran.

41. An article in the daily Ettel’a’at describes a gender-integration movement in movie theaters in Mashhad, a major city in Iran. Both sexes were admitted, but seated in separate spaces, inside. See Ettel’a’at [Information], special edition 28000 Days, 1307/1929, p. 220.

42. This was reflected in Iranian literature as well. For example, in the Persian novel Shohare Ahoo Khanoom, Homa asks her husband, Miran, to take her to the cinema screening of Reza Shah’s trip to Turkey. Ali Mohammad Afghani, Shohare Ahoo Khanoom [Mrs. Ahoo’s Husband], Tehran: Amirkabir: 1340/1962, p. 537.

43. For example, see Ettel’a’at [Information], op. cit. (note 41), p. 220.


45. Ettel’a’at [Information], op. cit. (note 41), p. 266.


47. Many newspapers wrote articles and published advertisements about different styles and prices of automobiles. One article even mentioned that Iranians have created the biggest and the most diverse collection of automobiles in the world, as there were more than one hundred different makes of cars in Iran at that time. Ettel’a’at [Information], op. cit. (note 41), p. 176.


49. On January 7, 1936, an official unveiling announcement was made at the Women’s Teachers’ Training College graduation ceremony in Tehran, the capital city.

50. It can be argued that this modern agenda aimed to create “a civic order rather than public sphere or civil society,” to quote Elizabeth Thompson. See Elizabeth Thompson, “Public and Private in Middle Eastern Women’s History,” Journal of Women’s History, vol. 15, no. 1, 2003, p. 52.


52. There were also some local examples from other Middle Eastern countries, including Turkey and Egypt. For information regarding these advertisements see Camron Michael Amin, “Importing ‘Beauty Culture’ into Iran in the 1920s and 1930s,” op. cit. (note 18), p. 82. See also IDEM, The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman, op. cit. (note 7).

53. The instructions were primarily about western dresses and were amended over time. In the beginning, women were allowed to wear their western-style hats, coats,
and gloves in indoors mixed-public settings, given that many women felt uncomfortable not wearing the veil. See “Dasture Tashrifat” [“Ceremonial Instructions”], Ettela’at [Information], no. 1, Shahrivar 1315/September 1936, p. 8.

54. Women such as Badr-al-Moluk Bamdad, Sedigheh Dowlatabadi, Noor-al-Hoda Mangeneh and Farkhonde Jurabchi, among many others, are well-known examples of these elite women. Jahan-e Zanan [Women’s World], Isfand 1299/4 March 1921, no. 2.

55. As unveiling became a law, the patriarchal guardians of families were less and less able to control women. The state and its law protected an unveiled woman, which allowed her, for example, to seek state protection if a male family member refused to allow her to be unveiled in a public space.


57. I argue that, while women may have acquired some freedom from their male relatives’ control within patriarchal families, at the same time, paradoxically, they were increasingly subjected to patriarchal state control. Freed from the private patriarchy (their male guardians), women were still bound by the public patriarchy (state). This is not to suggest that men totally lost their dominion over women; on the contrary, many husbands, male relatives, and business owners opposed Reza Shah’s social reforms, arguing that men and women should remain in their traditional roles. This created great friction for women who were told by their husbands to continue wearing the veil, yet were fined or penalized by the state if they appeared in public wearing their veil.


59. Farkhonde Jurabchi participated in the Women’s World Congress as the first Iranian representative to discuss women’s issues in Iran with her elite female counterparts in Istanbul, Turkey in 1930s. See Ettela’at [Information], special edition 28000 Days, p. 266.

60. In the provinces, severe poverty was reported as the main factor that women violate the unveiling order. Administrative officials and municipalities also mailed secret reports to the Shah and his administration about women’s resistance to unveiling. For example, see “Report on the women's resistance in unveiling in provinces,” from the official documents from the Archives of the Unveiling Act (Asnad-e Kashf-e hijab), published by the National Library and Archive of Iran (Sazmane Ketabkhane va Asnade Melli Iran), Tehran: April 7, 1937, no. 290/13213. See also H.E. Chehabi, “Expanding Agendas for the ‘new’ Iranian Woman: Family Law, Work, and Unveiling,” in Stephanie Cronin, The Making of Modern Iran, op. cit. (note 19), p. 213.
64. Persian fiction of the period also reflects on this. In the novel *Shohare Ahoo Khanoom*, author Ali Mohammad Afghani describes the character Miran’s worries about his daughter and wife going out into public unveiled. The author argues that in the lower classes of society, the source of worries was not only based of religion beliefs or logic, he believes it was mainly a matter of ignorance. Ali Mohammad *Afghani*, *Shohare Ahoo Khanoom*, op. cit. (note 42), p. 445.

65. The Unveiling Act was enforced for five years from 1936 until 1941. With the abdication of Reza Shah from power and upon the start of second Pahlavi dynasty (1941-1978), Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, Reza Shah’s son, made unveiling voluntary.

66. “At first many women reacted by wearing long dresses and headscarves, but in late spring of 1936 the government gave orders to local authorities to stop this practice or face the consequences.” See Ali Mohammad *Afghani*, *Shohare Ahoo Khanoom*, op. cit. (note 42), p. 202.


69. *Ibid*.


74. For Michel Foucault, the concept of biopolitics is based on his notion of biopower, which describes the ways in which the power of a state has been extended over bodies of a population and/or a nation. These bodies are both the physical and metaphorical bodies. For further discussion see Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, edited by MichelSenellart, [First published as *Sécurité, territoire, population*, Paris: Editions du Seuil; Gallimard, 2004, translated by Graham Burchell], New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

75. Generally, houses had a traditional water reservoir called “*ab anbar*.” The city water would come to *ab anbar* of the houses (or sometimes a neighborhood) through narrow canals.


78. For example, in her memoir, Badr Al-Moluk Bamdad discusses proto-feminist discourse in Iran in settings such as women factory workers, athletes, and even women as pilots-in-training during the Women’s Awakening project. See Badr Al-Moluk BAMDAD, From Darkness into Light, op. cit. (note 57), p. 100.

ABSTRACTS

The public spaces in Iran’s built environment were gendered sites of domination and subordination, yet also terrains of resistance and emancipation. Tracing the massive western-oriented project of modernization of public spaces issued by the Shah of Iran, Reza Shah Pahlavi (1925-1941), this article contextualizes the gendered language used to advance modernization, and examines examples of women’s experiences in major cities including Tehran, Shiraz, Qazvin, Rasht, and Bushehr. During this period, modern architecture and planning movements in Iran mainly followed the discourse instigated by CIAM [International Congresses of Modern Architecture]. Urban street plans with an orthogonal network of roads, streets, and wide boulevards were favored over the vernacular system of narrow, twisting, partly-roofed alleys, based on pedestrian movements. The modern movement also attempted to desegregate and “democratize” public spaces through gender desegregation, arguing that streets needed to be aesthetically-pleasing spaces where both men and women could walk and socialize in mixed-sex gatherings, a phenomenon that was not common in public spaces in the history of Iran. It should be noted that in 1936, Reza Shah promulgated a ban on the use of the chador (the traditional Iranian veil) in public places, in favor of Western women’s fashion, i.e., European hats, coats, and gloves. Due to this ban, some women, particularly those from conservative, religious, lower-class backgrounds, resisted using public spaces and streets. In older neighborhoods, where houses were attached to each other, these women used the rooftops as gathering spaces and as a form of pedestrian pathway. Others, mainly elite, urban, upper-class women, accepted and appreciated the desegregated spatial practices, using them to free themselves from social and cultural taboos.

Building on postcolonial and transnational feminist theories, including those of Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984) and Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994), which critique modernity and modernization and emphasize the diversity of women’s experiences and the importance of contextualizing them, this article addresses how, in a political climate of enormous contradictions, architectures were (re)configured and (re)appropriated as physical tools of resistance against the coloniality of modernization of the built environment and state power for one group of women, yet simultaneously, were (re)envisioned as an apparatus of confrontation with cultural traditionalism and patriarchal ideologies for another group of women.

Dans l’environnement construit de l’Iran, les espaces publics ont certes été des espaces genrés, lieux de domination et de subordination, mais aussi des terrains de résistance et d’émancipation. En analysant le projet d’envergure, influencé par l’Occident, de modernisation des espaces publics lancé par Reza Chah Pahlavi (qui a régné de 1925 à 1941), cet article met en contexte le « langage genré » utilisé pour atteindre les objectifs de la modernisation et étudie des expériences vécues par des femmes dans des grandes villes comme Téhéran, Qazvin, Racht et Bouchehr. Au cours de cette période, les mouvements d’architecture et d’urbanisme modernes ont surtout obéi aux prescriptions du CIAM. Les plans hippodamiens aux axes de circulation clairs ont pris le pas sur les systèmes traditionnels locaux de ruelles étroites, tortueuses, souvent semi-couvertes, qui répondaient aux pratiques du cheminement piéton. Le mouvement moderne a également tenté de « démocratiser » les espaces publics à travers une abolition de la ségrégation liée aux genres et a mis en avant que les rues devaient être des espaces agréables esthétiquement où femmes et hommes pourraient circuler et socialiser dans la mixité, phénomène tout à fait contraire aux traditions locales. À cela vint s’ajouter le fait qu’en 1936, la politique de Reza Chah fut d’intéresser les femmes de porter le tchador dans les espaces publics et de privilégier le vêtement à l’occidentale. Certaines femmes, principalement issues de milieux conservateurs, religieux et de classes sociales inférieures, rejettèrent l’utilisation des espaces publics transformés par la loi. Ainsi, plus particulièrement dans les quartiers anciens et ceux où les maisons étaient mitoyennes, les femmes se mirent à utiliser les terrasses comme lieux de réunion et comme substitution des voies piétonnes. D’autres, appartenant aux classes supérieures, accueillirent favorablement cette modification de l’espace public désormais ouvert à tous, l’utilisant pour
s’affranchir de tabous sociaux et culturels. À l’appui des théories féministes postcoloniales et transnationales, dont celle de Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984) et celle d’Inderpal Grewal et Caren Kaplan (1994) qui critiquent la modernité et la modernisation et mettent l’accent sur la diversité des expériences vécues par les femmes mais aussi sur l’importance de leur mise en contexte, cet article montre comment, dans un climat politique fait d’énormes contradictions, les espaces construits furent (re)configurés et réappropriés en tant qu’outils physiques de résistance vis-à-vis de la colonialité de la modernisation de l’environnement construit ainsi que du pouvoir, tout en étant (ré)envisagés par de nombreuses femmes comme un objet de confrontation aux traditions culturelles et aux idéologies patriarcales.

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