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WRITING WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES:
TWELVE MEMOIRS OF LIFE IN IRAN AND ABROAD SINCE THE 1940S

by

KAYLA ABERCROMBIE

Under the Direction of Allen Fromherz, PhD

ABSTRACT

Iranian women have taken up memoir writing in response to the tumultuous recent history of their country and their own difficult experiences. My thesis explores twelve memoirs of women's lives in Iran and abroad from the time of the Shah through the Islamic Revolution to the last couple of decades of reform and reaction under the Islamic Republic. The similarities and variations in the experiences of the women in these cohorts reveal the value of memoirs as historical evidence. These memoirs illuminate how changes in history have shaped changes in their authors' consciousness, sense of self, identity, and sense of belonging as an individual person, as a woman, and as an Iranian.

INDEX WORDS: Memoirs, Iranian women, Exilic writings, Iranian history

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KAYLA ABERCROMBIE

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in History

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Georgia State University

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2019

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TWELVE MEMOIRS OF LIFE IN IRAN AND ABROAD SINCE THE 1940S

by

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College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

December 2019

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family and friends for their love and support and their dedicated partnership for success in my life.

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I would like to extend my deepest gratitude and appreciation to my advisors Dr. Allen Fromherz, and Dr. Ian Fletcher for providing guidance, encouragement, and support with my work, during all stages, and for bringing this work to fruition.

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1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1980s, the literary genre of memoirs has grown in popularity worldwide. There is greater acceptance of and interest in women's voices and women's experiences. Indeed, women authors have begun to change the genre as a whole.¹ Iranian women have taken up memoir writing in response to the tumultuous recent history of their country and their own difficult experiences. In particular, women who left Iran and went into exile have contributed many accounts. This thesis provides insight into not only women's experiences as expressed in their memoirs but also women's identities as part of the political and historical context in which they are written.

1.1 Scope of the Thesis

My thesis explores twelve memoirs of women's lives in Iran and abroad from the time of the Shah through the Islamic Revolution to the last couple of decades of reform and reaction under the Islamic Republic. I have divided the authors of these memoirs into three cohorts. The similarities and variations in the experiences of the women in these cohorts reveal the value of memoirs as historical evidence. These memoirs illuminate changes in their authors' consciousness, sense of self, identity, and sense of belonging as an individual person, as a woman, and as an Iranian.

My first cohort is composed of Iranian women who were born between the years of 1921 and 1946, lived in Iran during the last decades of the Monarchy, and left for exile prior to, or around the same time as the Revolution. They all lived in Iran under the Shah, a time of

¹ Carolyn Heilbrun, "Contemporary Memoirs: or Who Cares Who Did What to Whom," *The American Scholar* 66, no. 3 (1999): 35.

accelerating change and deepening conflict. The particular questions that guide my reading of these women's memoirs are the following. How do their childhoods and familial structures compare to one another? How did their upbringings reveal the influence of life circumstances such as class, education, and occupation? How did they relate to or experience significant political events in Iran, such as the White Revolution, the Shah's "revolution from above," and the Iranian Revolution?

My second cohort is composed of Iranian women who were born between the years of 1947 and 1969, went through the Iranian Revolution, and lived under the Islamic Republic until going into exile. How do their life experiences as young adults compare to one another? How did they relate to or experience the Islamization of society and culture during the Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership of the Islamic Republic in the 1980s and 1990s?

My third cohort is composed of a new generation of Iranian women born on the eve of the Iranian Revolution or in the years after the foundation of the Islamic Republic. This last group is different from the first and second because it includes women who have lived most of their lives in the worldwide Iranian diaspora, in countries such as U.S. or France, and observed the experience of exile through their parents or other older relatives. As a result, these individuals share the perspective of a mixed cultural identity and the experience of diasporic life, in which the performance of gender or religion may diverge significantly from the public norms of the Islamic Republic. How did these women's exilic families and communities influence their understanding of Iran? How did they experience major Iranian political events such as the political oscillations of the 1990s and 2000s, culminating in the failed Green Revolution? What role does their diasporic identity play in their relationships with peers in Iran?

These questions will allow me to analyze each memoir, compare the memoirs in each cohort, and, in my Conclusion, compare all three cohorts. This thesis contextualizes these sources, by revealing similarities and differences over time, from the rule of the last Shah to the upheaval of the Revolution to the unending tensions of the Republic. Some of the commonalities and changes that bind and divide generations of Iranian women will be revealed.

1.2 The Historical Background of Women in Modern Iran

The study of women's and gender history has expanded rapidly since the 1970s. More recently, scholars such as Lila Abu-Lughod, Margot Badran, Beth Baron, Marilyn Booth, Mounira Charrad, Haleh Esfandiari, Deniz Kandiyoti, Valentine Moghadam, Afsaneh Najmabadi, Parvin Paidar, Lisa Pollard, Eliz Sanasarian, and Elizabeth Thompson have produced numerous historical, ethnographic, and cultural studies of women in Egypt, Iran, Turkey, and the Middle East.² The historical context of these works is analyzed here. First, it is important to outline the modern history of Iran before the 1970s, starting with the Qajar dynasty (1796-1925) and extending to the overthrow of Mosaddegh in 1953 and the rise of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (d. 1980). At that point I will continue the story of Iran as seen through the memoirs of twelve

² Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Marilyn Booth, *May Her Likes be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Mounira Charrad, *States and Women's Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Haleh Esfandiari, *Reconstructed Lives* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997); Deniz Kandiyoti, *Women, Islam, and the State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996); Valentine Moghadam, *Globalization and Social Movements: Islamism, Feminism, and the Global Justice Movement* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012); Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Parvin Paidar, *Women and Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Eliz Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Elizabeth Thompson, *Justice Interrupted: The Struggle for Constitutional Government in the Middle East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

Iranian women. I highlight moments when the histories of Iranian women and Iranian history after 1953 have intersected.

Qajar society stubbornly adhered to traditions and rhymes, and their religious rhetoric. Nonetheless, important changes occurred in this era.³ Ottoman reforms and British imperial rule over India and Egypt influenced Iran. So did internal developments, such as the emergence of the minority Bahai faith, with its belief in the equality of men and women in the mid-nineteenth century. Without question, one of the most distinctive characteristics attributed to the Qajar Dynasty is patriarchy in the family, the clergy, and the monarchy.⁴ It was typical for wealthy and middle-class families in Qajar Iran to live in extended, patriarchal households. The head of the household was the oldest member, and, in most cases, everyone was supposed to obey his decision; in theory, the father was the ultimate source of authority regardless of class.⁵

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, cultural and political conflict and change become more pronounced. This period of unrest was marked by two events, the protests against the foreign tobacco concession in 1890, which became a mass movement, and the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911, which established a parliamentary government for the first time in Iran. Women emerged as significant and influential in both events. They not only engaged in national uprisings, but also mandated the reform of women's social, legal, and political position.⁶ However, women did not win the vote.⁷ Nevertheless, women inserted

³ B. Rabiee and S. Jalalpoor, "Development of Cultural Construction and Constitutional Revolution in Iran," *Journal of History Culture and Art Research* 6, no. 4 (2017): 1144.

⁴ Raibee and Jalalpoor, "Development of Cultural Construction and Constitutional Revolution in Iran," 1141.

⁵ Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran Digital Archive and Website," *Perspectives on History* (November 2013): 246.

⁶ Deleram, Farzaneh, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: A brief History of the Legal Discriminations Against Women in Iran and the Violation of International Human Rights," *Annual Survey of International and Comparative Law* 20, no. 1 (2014): 208.

⁷ Sarah Sheibani and Siva Jalapour, "Historical Approach to the Role of Women in the Legislation of Iran," *Journal of HHistory, Art, and Culture* 5, no. 4 (2016): 296.

themselves into the public arena and established their own *anjomans* (nationalist groups) and a women's newspaper.⁸

A few years later, the Constitutional Revolution came to an end. Britain and Russia divided much of Iran into rival spheres of influence, not least because of the discovery of oil in Iran. An ally of the Ottoman empire, Germany expanded its influence in Iran in the course of the First World War disruptions, including revolts, discredited the Qajar dynasty and the Iranian government. After the First World War, nationalist movements and armed groups contended for power. The British supported the self-made Cossack Brigade commander, Reza Khan. He was able to displace political rivals and gather power largely in his hands.⁹

After the coup d'état in February 1921, Reza Khan made a strong public appeal for his rule:

Our aim is to establish a government that will not plunder the treasury. A strong government, that will create a powerful and respected army, because a strong army is the only means of saving the country from the miserable state of its affairs. We want to establish a government that will not discriminate among Gilanis, Tabrizis, and Kermanis. We want to establish a government that will not be an instrument of foreign.¹⁰

He insisted that nationalism would unite the divided factions throughout Iran. Further, he blamed the state of the country on the interference of foreign powers, and political leaders who acted as their pawns. He also used the symbol of women and secularization in his agenda.

⁸ Nikki R. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 77.

⁹ Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, 88.

¹⁰ Quoted in M. Reza Ghods, "Iranian Nationalism and Reza Shah," *Middle Eastern Studies* 27, no. 1 (January 1991): 30.

By 1921 Reza Khan was in position to demand even greater power. Unable to persuade Iranians to establish a presidential republic, he successfully founded a new dynasty and monarchy.¹¹ As Reza Shah, he made modernization of Iran a top priority for his regime. One of his beliefs was that the condition of women was central to achieving a modern society. He abolished the veil in 1936 and sent his wife and daughters out in public without their veils. Women began wearing western-style dress, which became a symbol of modernization. Reza Khan also instituted major reforms in women's education. The year after Tehran University was re-founded in 1934, women were permitted to attend. Although their circumstances were less than ideal, the presence of women in higher education was significant and foreshadowed growing female participation in public and professional life.¹²

As in the period of the Constitutional Revolution, women in Reza Shah's Iran failed to gain political rights. This lack of rights was the case for men as well as women. Women connected to the Pahlavi court enjoyed some influence and prestige, but the Shah determined the nature and extent of any reforms for women. Reza Shah's political authoritarianism and Iranian men's support for traditional gender roles and relations severely limited what passed for the modernization of state and society.¹³

In 1941, Reza Shah refused to break ties to Nazi Germany and his reign subsequently ended. British and Soviet forces invaded Iran and forced him to abdicate the throne. He was replaced by his son, Mohammad Reza Shah who also held similar beliefs as his father about the role of women in society.¹⁴ During this time, U.S. influence in Iran grew because of its role in

¹¹ Ghods, "Iranian Nationalism and Reza Shah," 42.

¹² Seyedeh Shojaei, Ku Samsu, and Hossien Asayeseh, "Women in Politics, a Case Study in Iran," *Journal of Politics and Law* 3, no. 2 (September 2010): 259.

¹³ Shojaei, Samsu, and Asayeseh, "Women in Politics, a Case Study in Iran," 261.

¹⁴ Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, 112.

the Second World War. Foreign influence in Iran led to volatile politics and an unstable economy. The rise of the pro-Soviet, progressive Tudeh (Masses) Party represented a challenge to social and political conservatism. Such seemingly internal struggles carried international implications, for Iran's oil wealth was a target of foreign companies and governments seeking advantage in the postwar period.¹⁵

In this political opening, women called for freedom, education, and the abolition of polygamy and the veil. Several women's organizations emerged, including Tashkilaat-e Zanaan-e Iran (Organization of Iranian Women), Hezb-e Zanaan (Women's Party), and Jamiat-e Zanaan (Women's League).¹⁶ Women's groups became aligned with political parties and active in the struggle against foreign interference, with women taking part in political demonstrations. Their demands, however, could not carry the day, given the weight of opposition, especially from most of the conservative *ulama* (clerics).¹⁷ Although some state-sponsored *ulama* did support the reforms.

In 1951, the new Iranian prime minister Mohammad Mosaddegh, a nationalist and populist, succeeded in nationalizing the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC).¹⁸ His success threatened the power of the Shah. The British-backed AIOC enjoyed a very advantageous sixty-year concession agreed decades earlier in 1933.¹⁹ Mossaddegh hoped to capitalize politically on nationalization of Iranian oil.²⁰ Instead, his move led to political polarization.²¹ Moreover,

¹⁵ Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, 118.

¹⁶ Ali Akbar Mahdi, "The Iranian Women's Movement: A Century Long Struggle," *The Muslim World* 94 (October 2004): 430.

¹⁷ Mahdi, "The Iranian Women's Movement," 431.

¹⁸ Siavush Randjbar-Daemi, "Death to the Shah," *History Today* 69, no. 4 (2019): 34.

¹⁹ Ervand Abrahamian, *Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 265.

²⁰ Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, 133.

²¹ Randjbar-Daemi, "Death to the Shah," 34.

Britain mobilized Western oil companies against Iran.²² It also enlisted the U.S., arguing that the Tudeh Party was behind Mosaddegh and preparing to take power. In 1953, capitalism, the Cold War, and a coup d'état brought down Mosaddegh and restored Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi to the throne, this time with much more power.²³ Iranians critical of the subsequent rule of the Shah deeply resented American intervention.²⁴

Feeling increasingly secure, the Shah moved to curb, if not crush, political and religious opposition. Certain women's organizations were subject to repression as well. However, by the 1950s, the educated Iranian elite was invested in Western lifestyles and culture. Women were employed in the education sector and in nursing and other care professions. These developments expanded the constituency for policies that supported at least some of women's interests.²⁵ In fact, women's organizations aligned with the government thrived.²⁶ As we shall see in this thesis, the Shah at the opening of the 1960s was about to renew the modernization of Iran and, like his father in the 1930s, believed that women were key to this project.

1.3 Women, Islam, Feminism, and Iran in Scholarship

Having explored the history of Iran and women before 1953, my thesis now focuses on memoirs written after the overthrow of Mosaddegh. These memoirs are contributions to a broader history of women in twentieth- and early twenty-first century Iran. Several studies have helped me frame my own project. For the genre of memoirs by women, there is Carol Heilbrun's

²² Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, 134.

²³ Randjbar-Daemi, "Death to the Shah," 34.

²⁴ Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, 141-42.

²⁵ Shojaei, Samsu, and Asayeseh, "Women in Politics, A Case Study in Iran," 260.

²⁶ Mahdi, "The Iranian Women's Movement," 432.

classic *Writing a Woman's Life*.²⁷ For analysis on women, Islam, and revolution, there are Leila Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam*, Lila Abu-Lughod's *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, and Haideh Moghissi's *Populism and Feminism in Iran*.²⁸ My discussion of these studies highlights how they have influenced the direction of my work.

Carolyn Heilbrun's *Writing a Woman's Life* demonstrates the ways in which women share their stories. She argues that women's lives and the stories of their lives have been saturated in the language and power of men. She argues that "women have been deprived of the narratives, or the texts, plots or examples, by which they might assume power over -- take control of -- their own lives." They lack the "power ... to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter."²⁹ As a result, these stories tend to be either contrived or unrealistic. Few narratives in Britain and the U.S. before the 1970s freely and openly addressed the achievements, ambitions, and experiences of women. Heilbrun's argument has helped me understand the environment in which women wrote, as well as why and how they wrote. Writing about the experience of living in a male-dominated society leaves its mark on the writing itself. I will foreground examples of this in my own analyses of Iranian women's memoirs.

Like Heilbrun, Leila Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam* discusses power dynamics between men and women and women's negotiation of their own voices. She covers the status and treatment of women from pre-Islamic Mesopotamia to the contemporary Middle East. The coming of Islam both improved and diminished the freedom of women. Significantly, as it

²⁷ Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 5.

²⁸ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 1; Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 4; Haideh Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 7.

²⁹ Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life*, 17-18.

spread, Islam adopted many misogynistic practices of the peoples and societies it incorporated into the new faith and polity.

Ahmed's most intriguing assertion is that "Islam encompasses two distinct voices and two competing understandings of gender."³⁰ On the one hand, there is the pragmatic regulation of society, such as the sexual hierarchy in the law and institution of Islamic marriage. On the other hand, there is the ethical and spiritual conception of life, such as the notion of the equality of believers, which is all too often ignored in conduct and practice. This discrepancy plays out in the tensions between Islam and what we call the West, for example, around the situation of women. "The unmistakable presence of ethical egalitarianism," Ahmed writes, "explains why Muslim women frequently insist, often inexplicably to non-Muslims, that Islam is not sexist. They hear and read in its sacred text, justly and legitimately, a different message from that heard by the makers and enforcers of orthodox, androcentric Islam."³¹ Ahmed's attention to conflicted views and experiences of Muslim women will help me read Iranian women's memoirs with greater sensitivity.

Lila Abu-Lughod's thought-provoking book *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* explores the political discourse around the Western notion that Muslim women need to be protected or rescued from Islam and Muslim men. An anthropologist whose fieldwork in the Middle East has illuminated Muslim women's situations, Abu-Lughod carefully investigates the intellectual, political, and cultural institutions and rhetoric that bolster this moral crusade to save Muslim women.³² The Western call to save Muslim women ignores the complexities of cultural difference and projects unexamined Western beliefs onto little understood Middle Eastern

³⁰ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 66.

³¹ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 66.

³² Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, 4.

societies. Western countries have even gone to war in the region in the name of “saving Muslim women.”³³ Abu-Lughod’s concerns are relevant to my topic because many memoirs reveal that Iranian women in Iran or in exile had to contend with Western norms and misconceptions and the ways that both the Shah and the Islamic Republic made use of these Western assumptions for their political agendas.

Turning from the Middle East and the Muslim world in general and to Iran in particular, Haideh Moghissi’s *Populism and Feminism in Iran* asks the question why the Iranian left was inadequately prepared to address questions of gender and sexuality at the time of the Iranian Revolution and how this led to the degradation of women’s rights in the early years of the Islamic Republic. A former revolutionary activist, Moghissi writes from a deeply personal standpoint and her study conveys the disillusionment that accompanied the transformation of a popular revolution against the monarchy into a repressive regime that re-subordinated women.³⁴

She begins by discussing the women’s movement in early twentieth-century Iran, and the reforms favoring women’s rights under the Pahlavi Dynasty. She then analyzes the gendered discourses of political organizations representing populist Shi’ism, socialism, and secular, intellectual liberalism before the 1978-79 Revolution. Finally, she examines the Fadayan, the largest and most popular leftist organization of the Revolution. She connects the ideas and rhetoric of both secular and religious-conservative male-dominated groups regarding traditional gender roles, which helps explain why leftist organizations became increasingly silent as the Islamic regime restricted women’s rights. Although leftists was not entirely indifferent to women’s rights, she makes it clear that the left was anti-feminist and shortsighted about the importance of women in making a revolution that would not simply exchange the rule of the

³³ Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, 55.

³⁴ Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran*, 15.

Pahlavis for the rule of Islamists.³⁵ *Populism and Feminism in Iran* provides more evidence of women's expectations of the revolution and the disappointments in what it eventually brought about.

1.4 Conclusion

My objective in this thesis is to analyze the ways female Iranian exiles exhibit commonalities and differences in their description of life in Iran and exile. In search of this goal, I investigate the memoirs of twelve female Iranian exiles. Said individuals are categorized into three cohorts - divided by time period and shared experiences. My chapters are arranged chronologically, beginning in chapter two with a focus on female Iranian exiles that are women of the Shah. Subsequently, I progress in chapter three to the following decades of women of the Islamic Republic. My fourth chapter explores individuals of the new generation, who experienced modern political events such as the Green Revolution (2009-10 CE). I conclude my thesis with a comparison of each cohort.

Each chapter is divided and organized with the presentation of its memoirs in chronological order. I begin each chapter with the historical context relevant to the specific cohort, then present and analyze each memoir and memoirist in their individual context. I conclude with comparisons of their expressions of experience to illustrate their commonalities as well as differences in class and background. Finally, in the conclusion of my thesis, I discuss the similarities and differences between each cohort and their expressions of experience. In doing so, I ask the following questions: how do the different generations of female Iranian exiles share their experiences of life in Iran and exile? What differences are evident, and how do they

³⁵ Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran*, 30.

influence their expressions of experience? What conclusions can be drawn from these individual's consciousness, sense of self, identity, and/or sense of belonging (as an individual person, a woman, an Iranian)?

Ultimately, there are both overall similarities and individual differences between the experiences, and expressions of experiences, of female Iranian exiles. Through careful investigation and analysis, I present evidence of these similarities. In doing so, I illuminate a unique perspective in the historical narrative of modern Iran, through the medium of memoirs that are both public and private.

2 CHAPTER TWO: WOMEN OF THE SHAH

The focus of this chapter is female Iranian exiles who experienced life in Iran under the Shah, prior to the Revolution. I've selected four women as representative of their counterparts. These are *Persian Girls*, by Nahid Rachlin, *The Good Daughter* by Jasmin Darznik, *Daughter of Persia* by Sattareh Farman Farmaian, and *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah* by Farah Pahlavi.

These women were born between the years of 1921 and 1946, and left for exile prior to, or around the same time as, the Revolution. Despite their distinctive backgrounds, they shared in the experience of the White Revolution, and the various reforms it either provided or imposed on Iranian women. Their experiences of the White Revolution depend on their class, education, and other circumstances. Despite these differences, these individuals still maintain great similarities in their expressions of experience. Their memoirs are best understood when contextualized in terms of this era in Iranian history.

2.1 Modernization and the White Revolution

A central objective of Mohammad Reza Shah was to strengthen the “three pillars on which he built his state - the military, the bureaucracy, and the court patronage system. Starting in 1953, the Shah embarked on fulfilling his father’s dream to build a massive state infrastructure.”³⁶ These dreams were largely funded by increasing Iranian oil revenues. In the course of the quarter century between 1953 and 1978, “oil revenues provided Iran with over \$55 billion, and on average, gave the government more than sixty percent of its revenues, and more

³⁶ Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 123.

than seventy percent of its foreign exchange.”³⁷ These changes forged Iran into a state bolstered on petroleum.

In his expansion of the state, the Shah focused much of his attention on security. Significantly, his relationship with the United States remained particularly close, which aided in this expansion. Consequently, the alliance would inspire tensions amongst Iranians which eventually culminated in the Revolution.³⁸ The military’s budget grew from “\$60 million in 1954 to \$7.3 billion in 1977,” and its troops strength increased as well.³⁹ The Shah became notorious for silencing opposition. He would either employ the service of SAVAK to enact repression or supply employment to his opposition in exchange for their silence.⁴⁰ The Shah placed his hand in economic matters through the third pillar of the state, court patronage.

In 1963, the Shah put forward a series of reforms, which are classified as the White Revolution. These reforms included land reform, financing land reform, literacy, education, and, most importantly for this thesis, the enfranchisement of women. Although the reforms were enacted under the banner of modernization, the Shah undoubtedly had political motives for the changes. First, he believed the White Revolution would legitimize the Pahlavi Dynasty. Secondly, he saw the reforms as a means to reduce the power and influence of social classes, who favored their former democratic system.⁴¹

Perhaps the most significant set of reforms enacted by the White Revolution were the land reforms, which opened up opportunities for small farmers and rural women. They limited the number of villages an individual landlord could hold. Instead, the land would be contracted

³⁷ Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 123.

³⁸ “Iran – the White Revolution” Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed November 3, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Iran/The-White-Revolution>

³⁹ Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 123.

⁴⁰ Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, 144.

⁴¹ Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 73.

for cash by the government. According to Said Amir Arjomand in, *The Turban for the Crown*, “these changes liquidated the landlords as a class, and landowning families, including the tribal chiefs, lost their socio-legal base, and were liquidated as a class as well. Such transformations were significant because they undercut the traditional peasant-landlord relationship, which was the power basis for the landlord class.”⁴² As such, it had an impact on the traditional patriarchal structures of previous decades, which were based, to some extent on rural agriculture. An unintended consequence of withholding land from the agricultural classes was mass migration from the countryside to the cities. This migration caused severe socio-economic stress, which would eventually contribute to the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

The tensions generated by the White Revolution are best understood through the realms of education and industrialization. Between 1953 and 1977, Iran’s education system grew tenfold. The growth in industrialization was equally impressive. Such expansion, coupled with the growth of the state bureaucracy, increased the ranks of two modern classes; the salaried middle classes and the urban proletariat. In 1953, the middle class had composed only 5.4 percent of the country’s labor force, but by 1977, the number had increased to nearly 6.7 percent. The working class was 5 percent of the country’s labor force in 1953, but over 14 percent by 1977.⁴³ These statistics suggest the tempo of the economic growth under the Shah. Despite this growth, however, the gap between the well-to-do and worker widened. Nonetheless, the growth of the middle class, if small, allowed for education of a wider swath of society and access to education for a larger number of women.

The White Revolution led to progress in the spheres of health, education, and public welfare. Although these great strides were made for many Iranians, the quality of life for many

⁴² Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, 74.

⁴³ Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 138.

Iranians did not improve dramatically. For instance, even though the literacy rate rose from 26 to 42 percent, millions of the adult population remained illiterate.⁴⁴

2.2 Women and the White Revolution

The reforms of the White Revolution included the enfranchisement of women and other reforms favorable to women. However, this came at a price. Women were not exempt from the authoritarian patriarchy of the Pahlavi regime.⁴⁵ As with other elements of his agenda, the Shah maintained all political control through repression and intimidation. Although women were granted suffrage in 1963, their vote was largely irrelevant, given they lived in a society which denied basic human rights and freedom, and excluded its citizens from decision-making processes. Specific changes in women's economic, legal, and political status eventually spurred their involvement in the Revolution because they were largely superficial, and only impacted a small portion of the population.⁴⁶ In examining these reforms, the possibilities and limitations for women under the Shah are highlighted.

Economic growth proved to be particularly influential on the status of women during the Pahlavi period. Iran engaged in the global economy and filtered more power to the state. More women, now unveiled and educated, joined the growing labor market. Emboldened by the new position of the state, and the move away from tradition, many middle- and upper-class women earned substantial freedom and autonomy over their own lives.⁴⁷ So, economic, social, and gender shifts of the Pahlavi era led to political shifts in regard to women's status. The policies in

⁴⁴ Ervand Abrahamian, "Structural Causes of the Iranian Revolution," *MERIP Reports* 87 (1980): 23.

⁴⁵ Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran*, 43.

⁴⁶ Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran*, 44.

⁴⁷ Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 109.

the White Revolution addressed gender issues in an effort to facilitate the participation of women in the labor market.⁴⁸

As a result, reforms on divorce, child custody, and polygamy were introduced during this time. The Family Protection Act (FPA) was passed by the Majlis in 1967, and slightly modified the civil codes in favor for women. Divorce became subject to court approval, and afforded women the same right as men to initiate divorce proceedings. The court was also granted authority over child custody rights. Although polygamy was not outlawed entirely, an additional wife now required the approval of a first man's wife. Despite advances, women's rights were highly restrictive. For instance, divorced women were not entitled to alimony, and their inheritance rights remained half of what was afforded to men.⁴⁹

Women's respect and social positions were still tied to the men in their lives. Divorced or single women struggled to exist outside of the familial structure. Furthermore, although women had begun to enter the labor market, most were far from economically independent from their male counterparts. Consequently, many Iranian women in poorer households were deprived of the benefit of economic change.⁵⁰

The Shah's reforms were implemented in a religiously conservative society, with a harsh division in the class structure. The reforms were contingent on the women's economic independence from men and on their class status. Thus, the majority of women were largely unaffected by the promises of the White Revolution. They experienced a lack of agency in issues of divorce, child custody, and polygamy, despite living through the modernization of the White

⁴⁸ Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*, 135.

⁴⁹ Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran*, 45.

⁵⁰ Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*, 135.

Revolution. These difficulties are exemplified in the memoirs *The Good Daughter*, *Persian Girls*, *Daughter of Persia*, and *An Enduring Love*.

2.3 *The Good Daughter*

Jasmin Darznik was born in Tehran in 1973 to a German father and Iranian mother. They brought her to the U.S. shortly before the Revolution at the age of five in 1978. She holds a B.A. in English from UCLA and a PhD from Princeton University. She is a writer and professor at California College of the Arts.

Darznik knew little about her family's past in Iran. After her father's passing in her early twenties, she discovered a photograph of a young Iranian girl dressed as a bride, standing next to an older man. She remarks that the girl could not have been older than fourteen, and her astonishment grew as she realized that the girl in the photograph was her mother, and she had once been this stranger's bride.⁵¹

When Darznik asked her mother of the photograph, she was told that it had nothing to do with her. However, shortly after, she returned to her home on the other side of the U.S., she began to receive tapes from her mother, telling the origins of their family in Iran. She recounts them as a memoir in *The Good Daughter*.

The text is organized by Jasmin's mother, Lili's life events include childhood, education, marriage, divorce, higher education, second marriage, Revolution, and exile. The style is unique as the narrator is not first person until the end when Jasmin grows into an adult. However, she writes from the perspective of Lili as if it were her own. She explains this style in the final chapter.

⁵¹ Jasmin Darznik, *The Good Daughter* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2011), vii.

For Lili, family and marriage were the cornerstones of her life. They drove her education, career, and travels, in a way which illustrates that her life was never of her own but belonged to those who she valued most. Lili touches on several political events in Iran, such as the White Revolution. However, her response is less than emphatic, as she seems to acknowledge its occurrence, but remains steady in her own traditions. She even characterizes the Revolution as “whispers.” As she lived prior to the gender reforms of the White Revolution, her experiences with women’s rights, or lack thereof, were evident through her experience with divorce, child care, and polygamy.

For instance, Lili became pregnant shortly into her first marriage, and had a daughter named Sara, with her abusive and neglectful first husband.⁵² Lili soon learned that her husband suffered from a mental illness, and she had no choice but to leave.⁵³ However as this was in 1953, prior to the White Revolution, Lili was unable to access the reforms in the FPL, which granted women access to divorce proceedings. She was only granted a divorce, after pleading with her father to request it on her behalf.⁵⁴

Her status following the divorce illustrated the status of women prior to the White Revolution. She explains the implications of their decision, and father’s hesitancy in the following: “I had nothing, I was no one. A divorcee was considered no better than a prostitute back then.”⁵⁵ Although divorce was permitted under the Pahlavi era, women’s status was still tied to their male counterparts, and they struggled to exist outside of the familial structure.⁵⁶ These were further illustrated in the legal decisions that were made, following the divorce. Despite the

⁵² Darznik, *The Good Daughter*, 72.

⁵³ Darznik, *The Good Daughter*, 94.

⁵⁴ Darznik, *The Good Daughter*, 97.

⁵⁵ Darznik, *The Good Daughter*, 111.

⁵⁶ Llan Pappé, *The Modern Middle East* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 237.

abuse, her husband kept control of the family finances, as well as custody of their daughter Sara. Lili would continue to fight for custody for the rest of her life in Iran.⁵⁷ Such issues evolved after the White Revolution reforms in 1963, as did her status as an Iranian woman.

In the days following their divorce, Lili worked to elevate her status, as to earn rights to her daughter. She was sent to Germany to stay with her brother and earn an education, as well as gain a new life.⁵⁸ After her studies, Lili returned to Iran, where she learned that her in-laws had taken Sara out of school, and by Lili's standards, turned her into a servant. In response, Lili set out in search of jobs as a midwife, with the determination to get Sara back into school. Lili succeeded, and was able to send Sara to a private boarding school in the suburb of Semoran. Her ex-husband allowed it, and Lili supported Sara for many years throughout her studies.⁵⁹

Lili's access to her daughter evolved with the reforms of the White Revolution, as well as her upward social mobility through education and paid employment. The FPL modified civil rights for women in Iran. In Lili's case, access was restricted to her ex-husband.⁶⁰ Further, her access was driven by her economic status, which allowed her to contribute to her daughter and ex-husband monetarily. Such was often a unique privilege in this period, as financially independent women, were almost exclusively from upper-class communities.

2.4 *Persian Girls*

Persian Girls, a memoir by Nahid Rachlin, depicts the lives of herself and her sister Pari growing up in Iran, and then traces their drastically different lives following adolescence. Nahid

⁵⁷ Darznik, *The Good Daughter*, 107.

⁵⁸ Darznik, *The Good Daughter*, 135.

⁵⁹ Darznik, *The Good Daughter*, 135.

⁶⁰ Robin B. Wright, *The Last Great Revolution: Turmoil and Transformation in Iran* (New York: Vintage, 2005), 156.

Rachlin was born to an upper-class Iranian family but was raised for a time by her maternal aunt, as she could not have children and her sister pitied her. She was then taken back by her father as a young girl at the age of nine. She went from sleeping on the floor in a tent with a traditional Muslim upbringing to living in a moderately progressive household, well off with money. She was close with her sister, Pari, and they both dreamed of marrying for love and abandoning the restrictions that came with much of Iranian culture.

Rachlin was sent to study in America, where she struggled with her identity as an Iranian and then as an American. She went to graduate school and met her husband, Howie - a Jewish American. Neither of them subscribed to the beliefs of their religious upbringings and married at city hall, without the permission or presence of their families. Her memoir is structured into three parts, corresponding to her residences in Iran and America. Her memoir covers the time from her childhood to the death of her sister Pari. The entirety of the text is focused on her relationships with her family, primarily her sister and her maternal aunt. These are above all the most important influences in her life, and all things point to them.⁶¹

Rachlin continuously relates her life to the timeline of political history in Iran. She writes of the White Revolution, SAVAK, censorship, the Revolution, and the Iranian Hostage Crisis. The memoir is characterized by the juxtaposition of Pari's life events with those of Rachlin's. It becomes apparent that Pari was one of the women who did not reap the benefits of the reforms of the White Revolution, while Rachlin, in contrast, became a beneficiary.

The reforms of the FPL failed to extend to women who were not financially independent from their husbands, as was Pari in the mid-1960s.⁶² Pari was married around the time of the White Revolution. However, shortly into their marriage her husband became abusive, and she

⁶¹ Nahid Rachlin, *Persian Girls* (New York: Penguin Press, 2007), 288.

⁶² Wright, *The Last Great Revolution: Turmoil and Transformation in Iran*, 157.

pleaded with her father to petition for a divorce. Her requests were denied, and several years later she wrote to Rachlin about the difficulty of her situation:

You know how impossible it would be for me to do it alone ... how would I make a living? I would be penniless ... Jobs wouldn't come easy to a young divorced woman here and the same with trying to rent a place and living alone, even if I could afford it ... A divorced woman living alone practically has the status of a prostitute.⁶³

Pari's letter epitomizes the shortcomings of gender reforms during the White Revolution. Meanwhile, the reforms on women's education seemingly provided Rachlin with an entirely different life.

Much of the White Revolution focused on gender reforms and education for Iranian women. In 1965, the Women's Organization of Iran undertook activities such as literacy classes, vocational training, and subsidiary programs in childcare, in an effort to educate and mobilize Iranian women.⁶⁴ Further, over the years of the White Revolution, education became more accessible to women. They became students at schools and universities, with the number of students increasing from 71,718 in 1941 to 1,816,560 in 1975.⁶⁵

Growing up in the Shah's Iran, Rachlin was afforded greater opportunities for education as a woman. Raclin's father placed a heavy emphasis on her education from an early age, sending her to the best private schools in Ahaz. She excelled, but her father initially refused to consider sending her abroad for higher education even though he afforded this opportunity to her

⁶³ Rachlin, *Persian Girls*, 159.

⁶⁴ Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*, 170.

⁶⁵ Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*, 122.

older brothers.⁶⁶ Their success in America spurred her to work harder, upon receiving first rank in her class.⁶⁷

Eventually, Rachlin asked her father outright to send her to America for college. He advised that she already knew that the answer was no. However, upon intervention from one of her brothers, he changed his mind and sent Rachlin abroad for higher education. Her path as well as Pari's were decisively affected by the reforms for women under the White Revolution. Thus, the memoir reflects the possibilities for women during the White Revolution. There are several other memoirs from female Iranian exiles that reflect similar experiences. I discuss one of them in the following section.

2.5 *Daughter of Persia*

Daughter of Persia: A Woman's Journey from Her Father's Harem through the Islamic Revolution by Sattareh Farman-Farmaian focuses on the author's unique perspective on the political and social disorder of twentieth-century Iran. Sattareh is the fifteenth of thirty-six children born to a Qajar prince by a wife who was a commoner. In 1944, she traveled to the U.S., where she became the first Iranian ever to study at the University of Southern California. After her education, she was employed by the United Nations and in 1958 she erected The Tehran School of Social Work.⁶⁸ "The institution was dedicated to the training of skilled social workers, a category of professional people then unknown to Iran."⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Rachlin, *Persian Girls*, 53.

⁶⁷ Rachlin, *Persian Girls*, 108.

⁶⁸ Sattareh Farman-Farmaian, *Daughter of Persia: A Woman's Journey from Her Father's Harem through the Islamic Revolution*. (New York: Broadway Books, 1993).

⁶⁹ R. M. Burrell. "Daughter of Persia. A Woman's Journey from Her Father's Harem through the Islamic Revolution by Sattareh Farman-Farmaian." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 4 no. 2 (July, 1994): 278.

After the Revolution of 1979, after serving the Iranian people for two decades, Sattareh was arrested as a counterrevolutionary and branded an imperialist by Ayatollah Khomeini's followers. She was subsequently forced to leave Iran and settled in California where she wrote her memoir as to fashion greater understanding between her Western and Iranian friends on the nature and complexity of Persian Society.⁷⁰ The text as a whole, serves its purpose in representing Iranian Women, as well as recounting her own experience of twentieth century Iran.

The memoir covers Sattareh's life from childhood to her time of exile. It weaves together the personal and political, as she frequently associates pieces of her life with larger events, such as the fall of the Qajar Dynasty, her family's relations and experiences with Prime Minister Mosadegh, the changes of the Shah's modernization, and the Revolution. Sattareh references the influence of her family frequently, with regard to her education, travel and residence abroad, and experience of repression during the Revolution. However, she focuses more on her duty as an Iranian and her devotion to her people. This reflects her sense of self as an Iranian woman.⁷¹

Sattareh could not ignore political affairs in Iran. She positions her social work experience in relation to the turmoil in her country. She writes of her awkward relationship with the Pahlavis, as they supported her work, but she did not agree with their methods of rule. Even though she remained quiet on most political issues, she found herself at odds with the revolutionaries who came to power in 1979 and ultimately drove her into exile.

Sattareh cites the U.S as influencing her with notions of freedom, self-determination, and selfless support for the people of Iran.⁷² Although she is shocked by much of the liberal behavior

⁷⁰ Farman-Farmaian, *Daughter of Persia*, x.

⁷¹ Farman-Farmaian, *Daughter of Persia*, 253.

⁷² Farman-Farmaian, *Daughter of Persia*, 50

observed at her University, she maintains her identity as a Persian, while gaining positive ideas and examples from her new environment. She describes the ways in which she is changed by her students and by her experiences as a social worker. For example, she notes her disappointment with their desire to earn a high salary, rather than live a life of service.⁷³

There are interesting parallels between Sattareh's memoir and *The Good Daughter* and *Persian Girls*. Sattareh is highly affected by Shah's White Revolution and the process of modernization that followed. The Tehran School of Social Work's educational research programs were influential across Iran. In 1961, on the eve of the White Revolution, the Shah's wife Farah Diba began to visit the municipal institutions that were run by Sattareh's school. These centers were established in the countryside and assisted Iranians with child care, education, and other basic needs. Farah saw that the regime funded these centers with enough money to provide a full-time permanent staff. In return, Sattareh ensured Farah would be in attendance for the school's commencement ceremonies.⁷⁴

The relationship between Sattareh and the Pahlavi regime became problematic in 1963, as the White Revolution began to unfold. She recalls her elation at the news that the regime had committed to improvements for human development, but this elation quickly turned to frustration as the Shah arrested the entire National Front leadership because they protested the effectiveness of such reforms. Subsequently, riots broke out in the city of Qom, and Sattareh's social workers were largely responsible for the relief efforts which followed. She calls the incident a tragedy, and emphasizes with the difficult position of many Iranians, who could not speak against the Pahlavi regime, but were disheartened at his actions.⁷⁵

⁷³ Farman-Farmaian, *Daughter of Persia*, 260.

⁷⁴ Farman-Farmaian, *Daughter of Persia*, 234.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 254.

The 1963 disturbances boosted the fortune of Sattareh's school. The relief efforts of her social workers forced favor with the Pahlavi regime, the school received a permanent budget, improved infrastructure, and greater resources.⁷⁶ It is significant, that she was critical of the Shah's autocratic behavior, despite the benefits she gained from her connections with the Pahlavis. The school continued to grow, and in 1966, Queen Farah, upon a visit to its family planning center, increased her interest in community welfare.⁷⁷ Unlike other memoirists who were affected by the White Revolution, Sattareh actually affected the White Revolution. In this sense, she is comparable to the last memoirist discussed in this chapter.

2.6 *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah*

Farah Pahlavi, born Farah Diba in 1938, served alongside her husband Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, as the queen of Iran from 1959 to 1979.⁷⁸ The culmination of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 saw the pair overthrown and exiled. The tumultuous period which led to the Revolution inspires the content of her memoir *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah*. Of particular interest, Pahlavi describes her position during the White Revolution, when she personally saw to the implementation of many of its reforms.

Pahlavi is different from her counterparts, because of her status as a prominent figure in the Pahlavi Dynasty. She received many privileges and much autonomy. For instance, she undertook many humanitarian initiatives, traveling throughout her country and learning various needs of their people, from medical aid to childcare. She refers to herself as a "soldier of the White Revolution."⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Ibid., 258.

⁷⁷ Ibid., *Daughter of Persia*, 261.

⁷⁸ Farah Pahlavi. "Farah Pahlavi," interview by Bob Colacello, *Interview*, December, 2013.

⁷⁹ Farah Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah: A Memoir* (New York: Miramax, 2004), 122.

Farah Diba was born in Tehran in 1938 to an upper-class family. She was an only child. Her grandfather was a diplomat, and her father was an officer in the Iranian Armed Forces. She notes the special bond she had with her father and was deeply affected by his death in 1948. Subsequently, her family experienced financial difficulties and lived in a small apartment in northern Tehran.⁸⁰ The family was heavily invested in her education. She started at Tehran's Italian School and then moved to a French boarding school for art at the age of 16 to study architecture. She was sponsored by the state. In fact, the Shah made frequent visits to the students, which is how he met Farah and they entered into a formal courtship. They married shortly afterwards and produced a male heir.⁸¹

The memoir is divided into three parts, dealing with her childhood, education, and her reign as the Empress of Iran. It is apparent that one of her main objectives is to elevate the life and leadership of her husband and remove him from responsibility for the Revolution.⁸²

Pahlavi is blindly unaware of growing opposition, not only in Iran, but also abroad. This is illustrated when she recounts an episode in which she and the Shah encountered protests during a visit to the White House in 1977. According to her, "President Carter and his wife begged us to forget the incident -- they were truly embarrassed -- but I thought to myself that in Richard Nixon's time the demonstrators would never have been allowed to come so close to us."⁸³

As with the other memoirists in this chapter, Pahlavi's life was inseparably linked with the events of the White Revolution. Given her status, however, she experiences these events from the inside. She did not participate in the initial years of the reforms, 1963-1965, due to the

⁸⁰ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 30.

⁸¹ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 107.

⁸² Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 205.

⁸³ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 270.

birth of her children, but she became active soon afterwards. When writing of the White Revolution, and her husband's modernization goals, she recalls her own childhood. Although she came from privilege, she remembers the poverty of Iran in her childhood and notes that it was imperative for Iran's development that they combat poverty with the same determination observed in Western countries.⁸⁴

Pahlavi committed herself to the White Revolution because of her professed love for her country. She was confident that this was the perfect opportunity to serve her country. The first campaign she carried out was against leprosy. She had been unaware that the disease was an issue in Iran. She visited the Leper Center in Tabriz. She recalls that she had never experienced such a feeling of humiliation and horror at the residents' treatment and was determined to improve their conditions. She hired medical specialists to investigate ways to improve their treatment, while simultaneously working to find better options for housing. Pahlavi worked with her husband to establish a village for these individuals, and notes that they received enough land in Gorgan province to house a community of over a thousand. The community was so successful that other people with leprosy began to visit the village to take advantage of its modern amenities. Pahlavi continued to visit the community regularly. She highlights the influence she had, specifically as an Iranian woman.⁸⁵

As the White Revolution continued, Farah began to travel throughout her country alone to understand its problems and envision solutions. Her security had trouble with her way of traveling, as she preferred to speak with individuals and such close contact was distressing to those responsible for her safety.⁸⁶ Pahlavi found that her work could be exhausting. It made her

⁸⁴ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 139.

⁸⁵ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 143.

⁸⁶ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 167.

more aware of what the village women endured. She loved these trips because she was in touch with the real Iran.

One of her most interesting encounters occurred spontaneously. As she was driving alone in the countryside, she came across a woman carrying a very heavy load. She asked if she could drive her home. As the woman did not recognize her, they were able to relate to each other as Iranian women. She spoke of her difficulties and everyday life. Later, as Pahlavi revealed her identity, she helped the woman who had spent her entire life in poverty buy her own house.⁸⁷ Stories such as these appear throughout her text, and underline the impact of the White Revolution on Pahlavi's life. Although much of her life was unique, given her position, she shares in the gender changes during the modernization process that the other memoirists experienced in this chapter.

2.7 Conclusion

In looking at the memoirs of Lili, Nahid Rachlin, Sattareh Farman-Farmaian, and Farah Pahlavi, it is apparent that there are remarkable similarities in the descriptions of life under the Shah. They emphasize the impact of the White Revolution's reforms for women. Yet there are significant differences in their experiences.

For example, in *The Good Daughter*, and *Persian Girls*, we observe one Iranian woman from a lower-middle-class family, and another from an upper-class family. Lili and Rachlin share the experience of education, arranged marriages, and most importantly, significant life changes stemming from the White Revolution.

⁸⁷ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love*, 173.

At the same time, they took entirely different paths to exile. Rachlin went abroad in the mid-1960s to pursue higher education and remained in the U.S. during the upheavals in Iran in the 1970s and 1980s. By contrast, Lili remained in Iran for most of her life. Even when she left for higher education abroad, she returned to Iran to have a family and to pursue a career for many years thereafter. In analyzing and comparing these texts, one thing that stands out is that the relationships between Lili and her daughter Jasmin, and Rachlin and her sister Pari make their stories more than individual, inward-looking accounts.

Daughter of Persia, and *An Enduring Love* take us into the Iranian elite. Sattareh Farman-Farmaian, and Farah Pahlavi came from upper-class backgrounds, and knew each other socially and professionally. However, their experiences were distinct. Although both held prominent positions in the White Revolution, Sattareh benefited from the reforms, whereas Farah helped shape them. Sattareh worked in the humanitarian efforts and welfare sector, while Farah was a significant political actor in her own right. Perhaps this makes their subsequent expressions of exile so poignant. They achieved a lot as women in a patriarchal society, and they lost their power and sense of agency when the Shah, on which they depended, was overthrown.

Finally, all four of the memoirists provide evidence of the impact of the White Revolution on women which, although imperfect, still improved the legal status of women. Each memoirist marks this period as a high point to their life experiences. Despite significant differences, their common shared identity as women meant that their stories reveal hardships and breakthroughs that a gender analysis can illuminate.

3 CHAPTER THREE: WOMEN AND KHOMEINI'S IRAN

The focus of this chapter is female Iranian exiles who experienced life during the Iranian Revolution and Khomeini's Islamic Republic in the 1980s. I've selected four women as representative of their counterparts, as is shown through their memoirs. These memoirs are *Iran Awakening* by Shirin Abadi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* by Azar Nafisi, *The Complete Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, and *Journey from the Land of No* by Roya Hakakian.

These individuals were born between the years of 1947 and 1969 and left for exile in the early years of the Islamic Republic. This group of women directly experienced the Iranian Revolution and the Islamization of life under Khomeini. Their experiences of these events differ greatly according to their family, background, class and individual circumstances. In spite of these differences, the women maintain remarkable continuity in how they depict their experience. The historical context which illuminates these shared experiences encompasses the Iranian Revolution and the formation of Khomeini's Islamic Republic.

3.1 The Iranian Revolution

The historian Errand Abrahamian describes this revolution as one of the most dramatic revolutions in the modern age.⁸⁸ Internal forces, unaided by outside armies, took down the foundations of the Pahlavi regime, through popular demonstrations and general strikes. Women were a major force for change during the revolution. Many mobilized against the Shah prior to the start of the Revolution. The monarchy, so tied to the West, was replaced just months later by the Islamic Republic - an autocratic, Islamic government, which was voted in by a nationwide

⁸⁸ Ervand Abrahamian, "Structural Causes of the Iranian Revolution," *Middle East Research and Information project* (1980): 23.

referendum with ninety seven percent support.⁸⁹ The reasons for the Revolution and the unparalleled turn of events lie in the nation's political history.

The lack of support for the Shah was not inherent, but rather an accumulation of widespread frustration after decades of socioeconomic development, political underdevelopment, and popular oppression.⁹⁰ In the 1970s, leading up to the Revolution, the Shah made several steps towards dictatorship. He abolished the two-party system in Parliament and replaced it with the Rastakhiz (Resurgence) party in March of 1975. Within a few months, the party had created bodies for farmers, women, youth, and industrial workers - with the intent to ensure that all aspects of Iranian life were in line with the objectives of the Shah.⁹¹ These changes affected women in particular and resulted in their radicalization during the Revolution.

The Rastakhiz attacked the *ulama* in particular. This divide of state and the religious elite made larger portions of Iranian society to feel threatened.⁹² One of them was the cleric Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who had been a critic of the Shah since the early 1960s. Things were only made worse by the mysterious death of Khomeini's son in 1977. He called for "death to the Shah." Although he was in exile, his followers began to protest in his place in the City of Qom. By 1976, the economy was overheating. Inflation was particularly high on items such as food and housing. The Shah blamed profiteering by shopkeepers.⁹³

Protests escalated in many cities in 1978. By September, troops opened fire on demonstrators and the prospects of a negotiation settlement disappeared.⁹⁴ The final weeks of 1978 marked the culmination of anti-Shah mobilization as supporters assembled a vast demonstration

⁸⁹ Michael Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran: A History of the Islamic Republic*, 16.

⁹⁰ Abrahamian, "Structural Causes of the Iranian Revolution," 24.

⁹¹ Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 90.

⁹² Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 97.

⁹³ Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 97.

⁹⁴ Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 115.

in Tehran and elsewhere on Ashura.⁹⁵ It became clear to protesters that it was time for the Shah to go. The Ayatollah Khomeini returned from exile on 1 February 1979, the remaining supporters of the Shah stepped aside, and an Islamic Republic was forged.⁹⁶

3.2 Women and the Iranian Revolution

As many Iranian women mobilized against the Shah between 1977 and 1978, religious leaders worked closely with the Ayatollah Khomeini to provoke actions, especially from religious women, who prior to the Revolution had supported the religious leaders but avoided the public arena. The Shi'ite *ulama* elevated women as symbols of resistance to unjust rule, and thereby brought these women into open demonstrations against the Shah. Even younger, secularized, female revolutionaries veiled themselves in solidarity with the religious-minded masses. The veil became a symbol of defiance against the Shah's Westernized dictatorship.⁹⁷

The demonstrations against the Shah saw engagement with women which spanned over a variety of classes and age groups. This participation generally corresponded to the individual's specific characteristics of age, class, and even religious adherence. For instance, younger women who were secular leftists or socialist Islamists joined the Organization of Iranian People's Fedayee Guerrillas or the Iranian People's Mujahedin Organization and took part in armed struggle against the Shah's security forces. This startling development radicalized women through the 1970s and continued to the Revolution.⁹⁸

Consequently, gender dominated political cultural issues after the Revolution. The Iranian Revolution established temporary unity amongst its religious forces, gender, classes, and

⁹⁵ Randjbar-Daemi, "Death to the Shah," 40.

⁹⁶ Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 130.

⁹⁷ Mahdi, "The Iranian Women's Movement: A Century Long Struggle," 433.

⁹⁸ Mahdi, "The Iranian Women's Movement: A Century Long Struggle," 434.

various political organizations. Women's goals were parallel to the objectives of men, as both rallied for anti-Shah, nationalist, and anti-imperialist platforms. While the unity of women emerged as strong at the start of the Revolution, their solidarity declined with the fall of the Pahlavi regime. Women's rights were subsequently subject to the Islamic Republic and the Islamization program of the Ayatollah Khomeini.⁹⁹

3.3 The Islamic Republic and Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamization Policy

The Revolution in 1979 ushered in the need for a new form of government. Such a need brought conflict between the conservative Ayatollah Khomeini and other liberal and radical anti-Shah forces. Khomeini envisioned a conservative government, which would run in accordance with sharia law, his Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan sought civil liberties and democratic rule. Consequently, a government was established, which included a freely elected provisional government and an appointed council of conservative clerics.¹⁰⁰

In the spring of 1979, the country held a referendum on the creation of an Islamic Republic. The result was a landslide in favor of the Islamic Republic. Later that year, an assembly was elected to draft the constitution. The majority of seats were won by close followers of Khomeini.¹⁰¹ The new constitution was a hybrid, composed of the democratic ideals of Bazargan and the Islamic government of Khomeini, called *Wilayat el Faqih* (rule by the faqihs or religious scholars).¹⁰² By the fall of 1979, a new development changed the course of regime-building.¹⁰³ Unfortunately, these changes often impacted women for the worse as the

⁹⁹ Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*, 204.

¹⁰⁰ Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 194.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁰² Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 165.

¹⁰³ Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 167.

Islamization of women emerged. The U.S. allowed the Shah into the country for medical treatment in October. The Khomeini forces interpreted this event as a sign that the U.S. was intervening against Iran.¹⁰⁴ Student radicals believed the Shah's presence in the U.S. to be evidence of a coup and took the initiative to occupy the U.S. embassy in Tehran in November. This was the start of the Iranian Hostage Crisis.

Khomeini hailed the take-over as a second revolution and praised the student's actions. The crisis reignited the revolutionary fervor of the previous year and discredited Khomeini's moderate rivals as supporters of the U.S. The crisis lasted for 444 days and left a deep impression that the U.S. was interfering with Iranian affairs.¹⁰⁵ A year later, in September 1980, Iraq invaded Iran. The conflict would last eight years. Revolution had given way to repression and war. Although at the vanguard of the revolution, women's legal protections after the heady days of change and revolution were changed for the worse.

3.4 The Islamization of Women

Although upholding women as symbols of Shi'ite Islamic values, the Islamic Republic was particularly detrimental to the legal status of women. However, the Islamic Republic's position on gender issues is far from black and white. Initially, the new regime inseparably connected women's rights with conservative adherence to Islam. Consequently, mandatory veiling and enforcement of sharia law became effective. Moreover, the image of Iranian women as veiled and Islamic became an important symbol of success of the Revolution.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 169.

¹⁰⁵ Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 170.

¹⁰⁶ Sanam Vakil, *Women in Politics and the Islamic Republic of Iran* (New York: Continuum Press, 2011), 52.

Women became symbols of the legitimacy and success of the Revolution for three reasons. Scholar Hamideh Sedghi explores these in *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*. First, the veiling of women showed commitment to Islamic morality and Shi'ia heritage. Sedghi notes that veiled women were “bearers of cultural purity and authenticity.”¹⁰⁷ Secondly, veiling articulated an anti-Western political stance. Finally, the veiling of women relayed the “purification” of society and rejection of the Western values as a whole. Furthermore, this “gender reconstruction accompanied consolidation of state power, state-building, and the creation of new institutions.”¹⁰⁸

The Islamization of women under Khomeini's Islamic Republic is especially prominent for the cohort of memoirists I discuss in this chapter. Many of these individuals took part in the Revolution, with the belief that their fight would lead to greater opportunities for women under the new regime. Their frustration and disappointment with the events that followed, especially the Islamization of women in Iran, is apparent in their memoirs. I investigate these expressions of experiences in the remaining sections below.

3.5 Iran Awakening

Shirin Ebadi was born on 21 June, 1947, to an upper-class Iranian family and was raised in a large, servant-lead household in the capital of Tehran.¹⁰⁹ She recalls of her childhood that her family broke cultural standards, by not providing their male children with an exalted status over the girls in the family. Her education was prioritized, and she entered law school in the year of 1965. In this environment, Ebadi is surprised at the unusual concern many students have with

¹⁰⁷ Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*, 206.

¹⁰⁸ Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*, 206.

¹⁰⁹ Shirin Ebadi, *Iran Awakening: One Woman's Journey to Reclaim Her Life and Country* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2007), 9.

Iranian politics. She learns of socio-economic issues, along with the abuses of SAVAK that were tied to the Pahlavi regime. At Tehran University, she describes the environment of mixed genders and political activism to be horrid in the eyes of the clergy. However, her account illustrates the efforts at modernization the Shah had made throughout the 1960s.¹¹⁰

Ebadi became a judge in 1970, at the age of twenty-three, and began work at the Ministry of Justice. Her work was interrupted by the Iranian Revolution at the end of the decade. As with many female Iranians, Ebadi supported the Revolution initially, and participated as a revolutionary against the Shah's regime. However, like other female Iranians, she did not realize that in doing so, she was supporting a cause that would eventually take away her freedom and rights.¹¹¹

One of the first reforms enacted by Ayatollah Khomeini was the elimination of women from the judicial system. As a result, Ebadi was rejected from her work and spent many years in the 1980s under pressure from the Islamic Republic.¹¹² In the 1990s, the Islamic Republic reasoned that they needed women to return to the labor force, and Ebadi was able to return as a civil rights attorney. Ebadi litigated an extensive number of human rights cases, pro bono, and became a prominent human rights activist in Iran.¹¹³ Of great significance, Ebadi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 and was the first Muslim to receive this recognition. Her award led to persecution from the Islamic Republic. This was the catalyst for her exile in 2009.¹¹⁴

Iran Awakening by Shirin Ebadi is her first memoir, published in 2006. The scope of the text covers events from her birth in 1947 to her Nobel Prize win in 2003. It is divided into twelve

¹¹⁰ Ebadi, *Iran Awakening*, 17.

¹¹¹ Ebadi, *Iran Awakening*, 25.

¹¹² Ebadi, *Iran Awakening*, 112.

¹¹³ Ebadi, *Iran Awakening*, 110-111.

¹¹⁴ Shirin Ebadi, "Shirin Ebadi," interview by Amitabh Pal, *The Progressive* 68, no. 9 (2004).

chapters, which correspond to significant political changes in Iran's tumultuous history. The style of the memoir is personal, yet clearly politically oriented, as her writing presents her life in the context of professional and public struggles against conservative authorities. Apart from the reflections in the first two chapters, Ebadi does not give much attention to the relationships with her family. She does, however, assign weight to the influence of her husband, children, and friends, including countless anecdotes of the ways in which they are affected by the Islamic Republic.

One of the most pertinent aspects of Ebadi's memoir is her personal experience with the political changes that occurred during her life in Iran. She had great enthusiasm for the Iranian Revolution and participated as a revolutionary against the Pahlavi regime. Ebadi provides vivid and emotional memories, in which she expressed her distaste for the monarchy. She refers specifically to President Carter's "Island of Stability" speech, the fire at Cinema Rex in 1978, and the articles published against the Ayatollah Khomeini, which caused the initial demonstrations of the Revolution.¹¹⁵

Ebadi provides several insights into the mind of the revolutionaries, which help us understand the divide between the hopes of the Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic. For instance, she writes of her thought process in supporting the Ayatollah Khomeini at the start of the Revolution.

I found myself drawn to the opposition voices that hailed Ayatollah Khomeini as their leader. It seemed in no way a contradiction for me - an educated, professional woman - to back an opposition that cloaked its fight against real-life grievances under the mantle of religion... Who did I have more in common with, in the end; an opposition led

¹¹⁵ Ebadi, *Iran Awakening*, 25.

by mullahs who spoke in tones familiar to ordinary Iranians or the gilded court of the Shah, whose officials cavorted with American starlets at parties soaked in expensive French champagne?¹¹⁶

She expresses her frustration and disappointment with the outcomes of the Revolution, upon realizing that she had “enthusiastically participated in my own demise.”¹¹⁷ Indeed, Ebadi was stripped of her judgeship in 1980, shortly after Khomeini took power and eliminated women from the judiciary.

She writes of her dismissal, when she was advised by a handful of male judges over whom she had presided in the past. She could return to the legal office as a judiciary clerk after her maternity leave ended. She was six months pregnant at the time, and the male judges remarked at her audacity to take a vacation, in the form of maternity leave. Further, they discussed their complaints against women in the judiciary system in front of Ebadi. She recalls walking out of the meeting and experiencing a subsequent blackout, after which she recalls being at her home, traumatized from the event. The irony of Ebadi fighting in the Revolution for rights, which she then lost, represents the authoritarian power wielded by the state over the status of women during this time. Her experience runs parallel to other memoirists, which I discuss in the following sections.

3.6 *Reading Lolita in Tehran*

Azar Nafisi was born on 1 December 1948 in Tehran, to an upper-class Iranian family. Her father became the youngest mayor of Tehran in the years 1961 to 1963, and her mother

¹¹⁶ Ebadi, *Iran Awakening*, 33.

¹¹⁷ Ebadi, *Iran Awakening*, 37.

became one of the first women elected to parliament in 1963.¹¹⁸ Growing up, she had a tumultuous relationship with her mother and a loving one with her father. At the age of thirteen, she moved to Lancaster, England to finish her secondary education. She then received a degree in English and American Literature from the University of Oklahoma.¹¹⁹ Nafisi first married a man she did not love in 1965 but divorced shortly after and married her current husband in 1977.

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During her time at university, Nafisi was politically active and joined an Iranian student organization to participate in protests against the Vietnam War and the Pahlavi regime.¹²¹ She slowly became homesick and returned to Iran in 1979, after the Revolution to teach English Literature at Tehran University. Nafisi remained at the university for sixteen years, grappling with persecution from the Islamic Republic, until her resignation in 1995.¹²²

Reading Lolita in Iran documents the ways in which the changes brought about by the Revolution affected her students and herself. She begins with a focus on a secret weekly gathering of students she held in her home to teach them Western literature. Their lives collectively become intertwined with the stories of the characters in the novels they read, as life in Iran brings new interpretations to their meanings.¹²³

The text is divided into four sections, with a varying number of chapters for each. The first section centers on her secret literature group, the second describes her time as a professor at Tehran University, the third section chronicles her daily struggle with repression and interference from the government, and the fourth explores the political history of repression under the Islamic

¹¹⁸ Azar Nafisi, *Things I've Been Silent About* (New York: Random House Inc., 2008), 97.

¹¹⁹ Nafisi, *Things I've Been Silent About*, 224.

¹²⁰ Nafisi, *Things I've Been Silent About*, 207.

¹²¹ Nafisi, *Things I've Been Silent About*, 204

¹²² Azar Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (New York: Random House Trade, 2003), 3.

¹²³ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, 15.

Republic. She explains the reasons for her departure for exile. The style of the memoir is similar to Ebadi's, as it is both deeply personal and deeply political. Nafisi also conveys a great love for her students, friends, and family. Her memoir serves as a tribute to their courage and resilience in the face of oppression.

As with Ebadi, Nafisi connects much of her life to the Revolution and the changes it brought about. She tells her girls why she supported the Revolution and the greater opportunities and rights it promised.¹²⁴ Further, she conveys her disappointment and frustration with the oppression and degradation of rights that she worked to bring about. In the 1990s, limited reform and relaxation of the regime took hold. Nafisi notes that the younger generation, which her girls belong to, does not remember the horrors of the Shah's regime.

Many revolutionaries and young Iranians began to reevaluate the West, as they became exhausted with the harsh political control and poor economic conditions. Specifically, Nafisi begins to blame the Islamic Republic as the root of all problems.¹²⁵ She and her girls begin to discuss leaving Iran. Many, including Nafisi, conclude that there is no other option. As with Ebadi, the experiences of the Iranian Revolution, and the Islamization of life under Khomeini change her life fundamentally. Such a realization is similar for many female Iranian exiles, I explore additional examples in the section below.

3.7 *The Complete Persepolis*

Marjane Satrapi was born on 22 November 1969 to a middle-class Iranian family in Rasht, but spent her childhood in the capital city of Tehran. Her parents were politically active

¹²⁴ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, 260.

¹²⁵ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, 276.

and supporters of the Marxist causes against the regime.¹²⁶ After the Revolution in 1979, they felt defeat and frustration as the Islamic fundamentalists took control. In her childhood, she was exposed to the brutalities of both the Pahlavi Dynasty and the Islamic Republic. She had family members and friends who were arrested, tortured, imprisoned, and even executed. Satrapi was particularly fond of her paternal uncle, Anoosh, who was a political prisoner of SAVAK and lived in exile for many years in the Soviet Union.¹²⁷

Satrapi grew up in the early days of the Islamic Republic and was an especially rebellious child. She took much issue in her youth with the oppression of Khomeini's regime. She writes amusingly of instances of her childhood education when she mocked the daily rituals imposed by the government. In one of her classes, instead of participating in their daily mourning of the dead from the Iran-Iraq War, her dissident attitude leads to her suspension.¹²⁸ For fear that her strong-willed nature would lead to serious persecution from the regime, her parents sent her abroad to finish her studies in Vienna. Satrapi remained in Vienna for the entirety of her high school years and only returned to Iran to be with her family after graduation.¹²⁹

The Complete Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi encompasses her entire coming of age story, from the time of her childhood, starting in 1980 directly after the Revolution to her self-chosen exile in Paris in 1995. This famous memoir is presented in the format of a graphic narrative, illustrated as well as authored by Satrapi. It is divided into two sections, *The Story of a Childhood* and *The Story of Return*. The two sections were originally published as separate texts. The tone of the memoir is a juxtaposition between the innocence of a child narrator and the

¹²⁶ Simon Hattenstone, "Confessions of Miss Mischief," *The Guardian* (March 2008), 1.

¹²⁷ Marjane Satrapi, *The Complete Persepolis* (Paris: La Association, 2002), 54.

¹²⁸ Satrapi, *The Complete Persepolis*, 97.

¹²⁹ Satrapi, *The Complete Persepolis*, 249.

disturbing nature of her situation in both Iran and Austria. Nevertheless, Satrapi manages to inject humor and irony into the challenges of repression in Iran and loneliness in Austria.

Spending much of her youth in Vienna had a significant impact on the life and perspective of Satrapi. As she moved from the oppressive and strict Islamic Republic to the open and individualistic Europe, she utilized the new-found freedom to push her rebellious nature to its limits. Satrapi becomes highly Westernized in her encounters, participating in partying, taking drugs, and dating. There are times when her Iranian heritage seemingly ceased to exist. She does, however, maintain her heritage underneath, even admitting of the extreme guilt she felt at her behavior. She felt she'd betrayed her family, who sent her away to enjoy safety from the war as well as have freedom to be herself.¹³⁰

One of the most interesting features of Satrapi's text is her juxtaposition of public life and private life under Khomeini's Islamic Republic. Her parents were leftist opponents of the Shah's regime and diverged from Khomeini and his Islamist movement. Their hopes and desires for the Revolution revolved around increased freedom and rights. Satrapi saw this in their private lives. For instance, she recalls many a time when her parents attended secret parties involving alcohol, music, and dancing.¹³¹ In these instances, they created a private space for the freedom they once sought to have throughout Iranian society.

She juxtaposes this inner freedom with the outer oppression of the Islamic Republic. One time when they are pulled over by patrol officers on suspicion of drinking, the officers followed them to their home to search for contraband. Satrapi and her grandmother managed to enter and pour away all of their wine before the officers gained access.¹³² This juxtaposition represents the

¹³⁰ Satrapi, *The Complete Persepolis*, 190.

¹³¹ Satrapi, *The Complete Persepolis*, 110.

¹³² Satrapi, *The Complete Persepolis*, 115.

hopes of the Revolution being eliminated by the reality of the Islamic Republic. As with Ebadi and Nafisi, Satrapi experienced serious life changes from the Revolution and the Islamic Republic. My final memoirist shares these experiences as well. I discuss her case in the following section.

3.8 *Journey from the Land of No*

Roya Hakakian was born in 1966 in Tehran to a middle- upper-class Jewish Persian family. She was a teenager during the Iranian Revolution and due to anti-Semitism, socio-economic issues, and the ongoing war with Iraq, immigrated to the U.S. with her family as political refugees. Her parents were intellectuals, her father was a writer and poet. Her and her brother's education was prioritized. Hakakian recalls ever as a child being read material that was critical of the Shah's regime. She was told by her father not to share this information outside of their home.¹³³

Journey from the Land of No is her memoir published in 2004. The text covers the years 1977 to 1985, encompassing her teenage life at the start of the Iranian Revolution to her immigration to the U.S. at the height of the Iran-Iraq War. It is chronological and evokes optimism and beauty in the face of tragedy and oppression. Hakakian spends much of the text focused on her family, to whom she gives much credit for opposing the Islamic Regime's efforts to diminish intellectual thought and the autonomy of women.¹³⁴ She begins her recollections of 1977 Tehran, with her feelings of anxiety from an unknown source. She later comes to realize this dread marked the start of the Iranian Revolution.

¹³³ Roya Hakakian, *Journey From the Land of No* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2004), 24.

¹³⁴ Hakakian, *Journey From the Land of No*, 30.

Similar to Nafisi, Hakakian discovers the power of literature and writing during the hard times of the early Islamic Republic. She observes that it is the power of language which guided her through the political upheavals of Iran to her life in the present-day U.S. Throughout her memoir, she writes of multiple instances where the power of words had the ability to change people. For example, she speaks of a time in her childhood where someone had marked an anti-Semitic slur on the outside of her family home. Subsequently, the proliferation of such rhetoric following the Revolution caused her family to feel extremely unsafe in their own country.¹³⁵

Hakakian was a girl at the time of the Revolution and only came of age during consolidation of the Islamic Republic. She felt excitement and a sense of possibilities when the Revolution came. Before 1979, her three older brothers had gone into exile when they were threatened over anti-Shah rhetoric. Thus, she opposed the Pahlavi regime from a young age and welcomed the idea of a new government.

Growing up in the atmosphere of a revolution, taught Hakakian, at least initially, that revolution was a path to freedom. She writes, “This was 1979, the year that showed us we could make our own destinies... Together as girls, we had found the courage we had been told was not in us.”¹³⁶ Her perspective was shattered as the new regime took hold from 1980 onward. Hakakian, as with all women, was forced to cover herself in public. Each school day began with a frisking from the “Members of the Islamic Society,” and Jews began to be singled out as non-Muslims and unclean.¹³⁷ The text ends with her father burning her entire collection of writings and books, deeming them unsafe to keep, and then declaring that it is time for them to leave for

¹³⁵ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 134.

¹³⁶ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 169.

¹³⁷ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 211.

America.¹³⁸ As literature was the very symbol of her life and hope, it is telling that the Islamic Republic at least indirectly destroyed her library and with it her dreams of revolution.

3.9 Conclusion

In reviewing the memoirists of this chapter - Shirin Ebadi, Azar Nafisi, Marjane Satrapi, and Roya Hakakian - one can draw many comparisons about their experiences and ways of telling the story of these experiences during the Iranian Revolution and Khomeini's Islamic Republic. These women, despite difference of class and family background, felt similar hopes and expectations from the Iranian Revolution, which were later destroyed by the hardline of the Islamic Republic.

For example, the authors of *Iran Awakening*, and *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, both emerged from middle to upper-class families in Tehran. Both Ebadi and Nafisi were well-educated, intellectual, and held valued professional positions. At the same time, these women were also very different and had different experiences of revolution. Ebadi was a revolutionary who demonstrated in Tehran during the Revolution, while, Nafisi experienced the Revolution at a distance, participating in Iranian student groups in the U.S. Ebadi remained in Iran until the late 2000s, when she was forced into exile against her will. While Nafisi had already left Iran in 1995, of her own accord, out of frustration with the Islamic Republic.

Other comparisons emerge from the memoirs *The Complete Persepolis*, and *Journey from the Land of No*. Both Satrapi and Hakakian were children during the Revolution and in the beginning of the Islamic Republic. Both women came from middle- to upper-class families in the capital city of Tehran that were opposed to the Shah. Not surprisingly, they greeted the

¹³⁸ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 227.

Revolution with high hopes. The Islamic Republic, however, was not the fulfillment of these hopes.

Satrapi was sent abroad, and spent most of her youth in Europe, Hakakian remained in Iran. Satrapi maintained some sense of autonomy in her life decisions and returned to Iran after her time abroad. By contrast, Hakakian experience the change and was forced into exile with her family. Only later did Satrapi leave Iran again. Both women remained abroad, in the U.S. and France.

The women of the revolution embody numerous differences of class, background, and life experiences. Despite these differences, they share remarkable similarities in their expressions of experiences with the Revolution. The main similarity is the rollercoaster ride of revolution and regime-building, the hopeful opening up of possibilities during the Iranian Revolution and the disillusioning shutting down of these possibilities during the Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini.

4 CHAPTER FOUR: WOMEN BETWEEN IRAN AND EXILE

This chapter investigates a cohort of female Iranian exiles who spent much of their life living outside of Iran, in either France or the U.S. These women were born between the years of 1940 and 1980, and returned to Iran, or visited for the first time, later in their adult lives. Each individual experienced what it is like to be Iranian during the time of the Islamic Republic in the context of the Iranian diaspora. I review the following memoirists: Azadeh Moaveni, Delphine Minoui, Sara Saedi, and Haleh Esfandiari.

The women in this chapter experience the consequences of a mixed ethnic identity because of their lives in exile. Each of them struggles to reconcile their Iranian identity with their lives outside of Iran. Their experiences are distinctive to their class and background, however, despite these differences, the memoirists share remarkable similarities in their expressions of experience with being Iranian under the Islamic Republic. Further, their experiences are best understood in the context of the political tensions which accompanied Iran from 1989 to 2009. I discuss these issues in the following sections.

4.1 Iran in the 1990s and 2000s

The dilemma which plagued Iran in the 1990s was the future of the Islamic Republic following the death of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, in 1989. Historian Anoushiravan Ehteshami observes that Iran has experienced a crisis of succession and political continuity since Prime Minister Mosadeq's overthrow in 1953.¹³⁹ The issue became critical with the establishment of the Islamic Republic following the Iranian Revolution in 1979. This was due to the nature of the Republic's political structure as fashioned by the Ayatollah. In doing so,

¹³⁹ Anoushiraven Ehteshami, *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1.

Khomeini dealt with two burgeoning concerns – his own aspirations for the Islamic Republic’s political structure, and the intricate actuality of Iran’s sociopolitical issues which followed the Revolution.¹⁴⁰ Although the regime’s stances on many sociopolitical issues were patriarchal, the decade included a few reforms, such as the Family Planning Program, that did impact Iranian women in a positive manner.

Shortly after seizing power, the Ayatollah eliminated all independent political parties in 1981, and eradicated any remaining parties by the mid-1980s. Since this time, Iran has operated as a unique state which functions apart from any official political party.¹⁴¹ Instead, the nation is directed and lead by a number of political factions which determine not only the direction of the state, but also the fate of the Iranian people. While Khomeini limited the power of these groups during his regime and lead with an interventionist approach, his absence allowed for the flourishing of Iranian independent factions.¹⁴² As Eteshami astutely observes, “in pre- and post-revolutionary Iran, control of the state machinery has enabled a particular class to control virtually all aspects of national life – economic, political, ideological, cultural, and social.”¹⁴³ It is thereby essential for scholars to dissect the political factions which dominated post-Khomeini Iran, to understand the experience of the Iranian people during this time period.

Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran, scholar Mehdi Moslem observes several characteristics which define factions in Iran. The most significant attribute being that they do not control the state in any official capacity, but rather, each faction contains individuals who hold varying degrees of power in different leadership roles. Perhaps of even greater importance, the

¹⁴⁰ Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 11.

¹⁴¹ Sepehr Zabih, “Reviewed Work: After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic,” *Middle East Journal* 49, no. 4 (Autumn 1995): 465.

¹⁴² Ehteshami, *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic*, 27.

¹⁴³ Ehteshami, *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic*, 17.

factions are not under the control of a single individual – with the exception of the moderate right faction which was led by President Rafsanjani in the early 1990s.¹⁴⁴ Iranian women varied in their choice of factions. This decision for most women was shaped by religious beliefs, stances on human rights, and many others.

Generally, the first period of post-Khomeini Iran can be defined by the presidency of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, lasting from August 1989 to August 1997.¹⁴⁵ Following the death of Khomeini, serious constitutional reforms took place because of his issuance of a “Council for the Revision of the Constitution,” on his deathbed. Notably, the changes included adjustments to the appointment of the Supreme Leader, the elimination of a Prime Minister post, and the establishment of a Supreme National Security Council.¹⁴⁶ The changes thereby resulted in an increase of power for the presidency, and a decrease of power for the Supreme Leader.

It was understood at the time of the Ayatollah’s death he would be succeeded by Ali Khamenei as the Supreme Leader. Khamenei position, however, proved to be starkly different from his predecessor. Despite being favored by majority of the political factions, his leadership in the 1990s proved to be far from “powerful and commanding.”¹⁴⁷ The Supreme Leader failed to declare any substantial decrees for any sector of society. Given Khamenei’s passive leadership, President Rafsanjani thereby established the position of the Iranian state after Khomeini.¹⁴⁸

In August 1989, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani inherited a war-ravaged, isolated, and economically struggling Iran. Many felt that the fervor of Revolution was over and had not

¹⁴⁴ Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 95.

¹⁴⁵ Nikkie Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 263.

¹⁴⁶ Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009). 293.

¹⁴⁷ Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, 88.

¹⁴⁸ Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, 89.

delivered on much of what it promised. Further, many others were disappointed in the results of the Iran-Iraq war, as it had not brought the economic flourishing they had hoped for.¹⁴⁹

Historian Michael Axworthy notes in *Revolutionary Iran*, that the war cost Iran an estimated \$200 billion. Further, the war significantly decreased the value of Iran's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Finally, the government controlling prices of consumer products during the War weakened the non-oil sector of the economy an estimated \$120 billion in capital had been sent out of the country by 1988.¹⁵⁰

The state of affairs caused Rafsanjani to begin his presidency focused on the Iranian economy. He and his regime implemented a five-year plan which was to “moderate government economic supremacy and relax some of the heavy restrictions on the market.”¹⁵¹ While Rafsanjani succeeded with slight economic improvements, his accomplishments in other areas such as domestic and foreign policies, and civil rights fell short of his campaign promises.¹⁵² These shortcomings thereby served as a catalyst for the reformist presidency of Mohammad Khatami in 1997.¹⁵³

The period of Rafsanjani's presidency is known as the Second Islamic Republic. Scholars describe the period which began with the election of Mohammad Khatami in 1997 as the Third Islamic Republic.¹⁵⁴ This was largely due to the fact that the Khatami era ushered in systematic change and a shift in Iranian politics.

As previously mentioned, Rafsanjani's regime focused their attention on the improvement of Iran's economy. In his first term, he achieved economic progress which can be

¹⁴⁹ Home Katouzian, *Iran a beginner's guide* (London: Oneworld Publications: 2013), 147.

¹⁵⁰ Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 297.

¹⁵¹ Katouzian, *Iran a beginner's guide*, 150.

¹⁵² Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, 265.

¹⁵³ Katouzian, *Iran a beginner's guide*, 152.

¹⁵⁴ Ghoncheh Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 40.

illustrated by statistics. Scholar Ghoncheh Tazmini observes in his monograph *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, "Societal indicators proved promising: infant mortality was cut in half, and consumption of staples such as meat, sugar, and rice, increased dramatically."¹⁵⁵ However, despite such changes, Rafsanjani's second term proved to be far less successful. This term saw little to no economic, social, or political change, because of factional politics and the limitations enforced by Iran's governmental structure. These issues paved the way to Khatami's election in 1997, as Iranians saw the need for serious reform.¹⁵⁶

Given the circumstances which surrounded Iranian politics in the 1990s, it can be argued that the political landscape extended as a continuity of the Iranian Revolution. Such is illustrated by the central demands which dominated the 1997 elections – "political freedom, the rule of law, individual rights, transparency in the behavior of governmental agencies, and the need for an active civil society."¹⁵⁷ Further, these issues were promoted by Iranian women, as was the case with the Revolution.¹⁵⁸ Their participation inserted women into the center of Iranian politics in the 1990s.

Khatami himself is an enigma of an Iranian leader. He serves as an amalgamation of the conservative clerics and reformist liberal thought. This can be attributed to his upbringing, as he was born to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khatami, a significant Iranian cleric. Later in life, Khatami studied in the city of Qom under the clerics Montazeri and Mottahari. Additionally, he studied Western thought such as philosophy and secular scholars such as Kant, Hegel, and Rousseau.¹⁵⁹ With this background, Khatami served as an embodiment of the Revolution due to his

¹⁵⁵ Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, 41.

¹⁵⁶ Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, 42.

¹⁵⁷ Zabih, "Reviewed Work: After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic," 198.

¹⁵⁸ Daniel Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 120.

¹⁵⁹ Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran: A History of the Islamic Republic*, 326.

commitment to greater political freedom, whilst also diverging from its aversion to Western ideology. However, his ability to appeal to the masses and polarized political factions, as well as Iranians need for systemic reform, secured his presidency in 1997.

Although it was widely believed that the *majles* or council speaker, Ali-Akbar Nateq Nuri, was to win the 1997 election, Khatami, as the popular candidate won in a landslide victory in May of 1997. His landslide victory set a record for the number of eligible voters and received sixty-nine percent of vote. For perspective, Nuri received only 7 million votes to Khatami's 29.7 million.¹⁶⁰ Despite his popularity and the unquestionable support he received in his candidacy, Khatami struggled to enact many of his reforms after his election. As explained by scholar Ghoncheh Tazmini, this struggle illustrated the contention between the elected and unelected bodies of power in Iran's governmental structure. Labeled as, "the paradoxes of the power structure," Tazmini explains that "because of the unequal distribution of power among the branches of government, the Iranian polity is riddled with inefficiencies, factionalism, and systemic paradoxes."¹⁶¹

Khatami's presidency itself reinforced the dissension between the Iranian factions. His victory validated "the left, the modern right, Islamic intellectuals, and progressive clergymen."¹⁶² The remaining factions were labeled as guardianship defenders. The factional divide inside of the Iranian government widened to the point that Khatami's policies became ineffective, superficial, and vexatious to Iranian people.¹⁶³ Disillusionment and unrest followed.

Iran's conservative faction has historically yielded a great amount of power in the Islamic Republic, in spite of the lack of popular support. This is because these individuals have

¹⁶⁰ Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, 270.

¹⁶¹ Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, 99.

¹⁶² Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, 252.

¹⁶³ Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, 254.

successfully monopolized the top Islamic governmental entities, which are a part of the non-elected sector. More specifically, the conservatives controlled the clergy inside of the government, as well as “law enforcement establishments, Revolutionary Guards, foundations (in particular, the Foundation of the Disinherited with its unmatched economic and financial resources), traditional merchants, and vigilante organizations,”¹⁶⁴ outside of the government.

These resources and connections allowed the conservatives to rally against Khatami’s reforms and slow progress through intimidation.¹⁶⁵ For instance, conservatives reacted to the 1997 election with backlash and violence aimed at the reformist newspaper *Salaam*. Further resistance came in the form of judicial charges against Khatami allies, which caused tension within the government, specifically the clerics. At this time, they called for changes in governmental structure and withdrawal of support for the Islamists surrounding Khatami.¹⁶⁶

Apart from the tensions between the conservatives and reformists during Khatami’s first term, Iran experienced an upsurge of reforms during this time. The 1997 election was followed by additional victories by the reformists in obtaining 75 percent of the vote in the local elections of 1999, 80 percent of the vote in the parliamentary elections of 2000, and in 2001, Khatami won his second term with more than 80 percent of the vote.¹⁶⁷ He subsequently used these victories to open up foreign relations and internal politics. A unique facet of his campaign was that his wife served as a symbol of visibility of women for the Iranian people. Her presence influenced women’s position in society, as well as their hopes for the future.

¹⁶⁴ Mehran Tamadonfar, *Islamic Law and Governance in Contemporary Iran: Transcending Islam for Social, Economic, and Political Order* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 2015), 231.

¹⁶⁵ Tamadonfar, *Islamic Law and Governance in Contemporary Iran: Transcending Islam for Social, Economic, and Political Order*, 232.

¹⁶⁶ Mark J. Gasiorowski, “The Power Struggle in Iran,” *Middle East Policy Council*, Winter, 2000, <https://mepc.org/journal/power-struggle-iran>

¹⁶⁷ Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 188.

Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) wielded great influence during Khatami's presidency. In a report published by the Library of Congress in 2012, MOIS emerged out of SAVAK, the Shah's secret police dissolved after the Revolution.¹⁶⁸ The organization was established in 1984, and Mohammad Reyshahri was elected as the first minister of the new Ministry of Intelligence and Security. Following the *majles* elections of 1992, Reyshahri became associated with a phenomenon known as the New Left. This favored egalitarian and redistributive social and economic policies, with a totalitarian ideological line - including harsh repression of dissent and a strong commitment to the supreme leader.¹⁶⁹

The 2000s election was an overwhelming victory for the reformists and serious pushback from the conservatives, as the Guardian Council took months to ratify the results, and attempted to manipulate the outcome, whenever possible. In particular, women's participation was at an all-time high and influenced the results greatly. The results of the 2000 elections reflected the two inflexible principles that triumphed the 1979 Revolution - the principles of democracy versus religious authority. The conservatives responded to their loss in the *majles* with a crackdown and increased restrictions on freedom of the press. By August of 2001, the last reformist newspaper, called *Bahar*, had been shut down.¹⁷⁰

Notwithstanding the conservatives' tactical interventions in the regime's reform efforts, Khatami and the *majles* accomplished several feats of victory during their time. Specifically, reformists saw success economically, socially, and internationally. For instance, the price of oil per barrel went from \$10 in 1997 to \$65 in 2003, and development programs for education, electrification, housing, rural constructions, and nuclear installations continued to expand.¹⁷¹ "By

¹⁶⁸ "Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security: A Profile," *Library of Congress* (December 2012): 7.

¹⁶⁹ Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 343.

¹⁷⁰ Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran*, 459.

¹⁷¹ Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 190.

2000, 94 percent of the population had access to medical facilities and safe water; 97 percent of those between six and twenty-nine were literate; the mortality rate was the best in the Middle East; and women formed 63 percent of university students, 54 percent of college enrollment, and 45 percent of doctors. The governmental also put aside a portion of the oil revenues for emergencies.”¹⁷²

Khatami also launched a campaign to improve foreign relations, and paid state visits to Tokyo, Moscow, Madrid, Rome, and Paris. Britain restore full diplomatic relations, which had been shut down since 1979, and Khatami made progress with relations between Iran and the United States.¹⁷³ He resolved much of the rivalry which divided Iran and Saudi Arabia over the Persian Gulf. By attending the the summit of the Emir of Kuwait and Crown Prince Abdullah iben Abdel Aziz of Saudi Arabia, Khatami extended Iran’s support for Saudi Arabia, which later resulted in the latter’s rejection of allegations against Iran regarding the “the bombing of the US military housing at al-Khobar in Saudi Arabia in 1996.”¹⁷⁴ Ultimately, these strides reflect the systemic changes which occurred during Khatami’s period of reform.

Internally speaking, the *majles* passed over 100 reform bills. These included the exclusion of all forms of torture and physical coercion - including sleep deprivation, blindfolding, and solitary confinement - the right of political prisoners to have legal counsel, access to family, and a trial by a judge with at least ten years’ experience; the establishment of a special press court to handle issues of censorship and libel; the right of all accused to jury trials with strict separation between judges and prosecutors; and the presidential authority to remove activist judges who blatantly interfere in politics and over extend their judicial powers. They also

¹⁷² Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 190.

¹⁷³ Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran*, 460.

¹⁷⁴ Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran*, 463.

attempted to remove the Guardian Council's authority to oversee elections, and to vet candidates to the interior ministry.¹⁷⁵

Khatami's progress with foreign relations and the reformists' majority abruptly ended in 2002, as George W. Bush identified Iran as a "sponsor of terrorism" in his "Axis of Evil" speech. He called for an "international condemnation of the Iranian leadership."¹⁷⁶ The speech grouped Iranians in line with Saddam Hussein and the Taliban, which came as a shock to Iranians who had been working with the U.S. to eradicate the latter's influence in Afghanistan. It became more difficult for Khatami to push for his democratic ideals, and many Iranians spoke of the need for a militant campaign or a referendum.¹⁷⁷ Ghoncheh Tazmini accurately discusses the consequences in *Khatami's Iran*, noting that the move changed "the domestic debate in Iran, radicalizing borderline 'conservative-moderates' who had not completely dismissed the possibility of a dialogue with the US government."¹⁷⁸ Consequently, the infighting with the reformist party and the attack from the U.S. provided the conservatives space to insert their agenda.

Conservatives thereby utilized this space to win a series of elections with municipal councils in 2006, the *majles* in 2004, and the presidency in 2005. Consequently, the country fell into the hands of "conservative hardliners," despite their lack of popular support.¹⁷⁹ The central reason for the victory was the absence of women, college students, and other members of the middle class who chose not to participate. The percentage of voters for the *majles* in 2004 was one of the lowest recorded percentiles since the 1979 Revolution.¹⁸⁰ Mahmud Ahmadinejad won

¹⁷⁵ Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 191.

¹⁷⁶ Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, 91.

¹⁷⁷ Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 192.

¹⁷⁸ Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, 91.

¹⁷⁹ "Iran Hardliner Sweeps to Victory," *BBC News*, June 25, 2005,

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4621249.stm.

¹⁸⁰ "Victory for a Religious Hardliner in Iran," *The Economist*, June, 27, 2005,

<https://www.economist.com/news/2005/06/27/victory-for-a-religious-hardliner-in-iran>;

Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 193.

the presidential elections in 2005 and ran on a campaign with promises to increase national security and fulfill populist promises from the Khomeini era. His election was definitive proof that the conservatives were successful in their objectives to discourage the reformers from political participation.¹⁸¹

4.2 Women and the Age of Reform

Rafsanjani's regime, in the 1990s, perpetuated human rights abuses from the Khomeini era. Much of this can be traced to the issues with factionalism and influence of the conservatives. Despite these restrictions, his regime also aimed to bring a degree of cultural openness and relaxed regulations on personal life.¹⁸² Such changes led to the road to reform, with minor changes taking place during Rafsanjani's presidency.

The most significant change for women during this period was the government's new family planning program in 1989. It encompassed comprehensive family planning and sex education for "brides and grooms before marriage, freely and widely advertised contraception, and an end of payments for children after the third. The program combined with other factors such as rapid urbanization and expanded girls' education, to contribute to the rise in average marrying age and lowered the Iranian birth rate significantly."¹⁸³

The push for democracy in the post-Khomeini era heavily emphasized the involvement of women. Their demands for equality steadily increased throughout the 1990s. Specifically, great strides were made with regards to women's education, beginning with *The First Economic*,

¹⁸¹ Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 194.

¹⁸² Sanam Vakil, *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 104.

¹⁸³ Nikkie Keddie, "Iranian Women's Status and Struggle Since 1979," *Journal of International Affairs* 60, no. 2 (2007): 26.

Social, Cultural Development Plan of the Islamic Republic (1989-93).¹⁸⁴ The plan put forth a list of goals for women's education which pushed for a higher level of participation in economic, social, and cultural affairs.¹⁸⁵ These goals were furthered by second and third plans during Khatami's era.

Significant changes in the social norms regarding gender occurred throughout the post-Khomeini era. Initially, Rafsanjani fostered an increase of women's participation in schools, sports, and higher education by altering their legal statuses.¹⁸⁶ What followed in Khatami's Iran is debatable. Such is the case because the progress attained during this period is primarily intangible. According to women activists, Khatami inspired confidence and traction for their platforms by bringing their issues to the table, however, little to no legal change took place.¹⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the years of the 1990s, and even the 2000s saw significant changes in women's organizations. Under Khatami's regime from 1997 to 2005, women's organizations, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), multiplied significantly. In the post-Khomeini years, women activists have joined the women in governmental positions to push reforms for women.¹⁸⁸

Perhaps the most significant change which occurred for women during this period was their ability to influence the election of Khatami himself. The election of 1997 marked a turning point in Iranian history because so many Iranians took part.¹⁸⁹ Millions of the voters were participating for the first time because of the election's emphasis on gender issues. Many

¹⁸⁴ Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, 66.

¹⁸⁵ Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, 66.

¹⁸⁶ Haleh Esfandiari, "The Women's Movement," *The Iran Primer*, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/womens-movement>.

¹⁸⁷ "Iran: Women Weigh Khatami's Legacy on Gender Issues," *RadioFreeEurope Radio Liberty*, August 03, 2005, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1060385.html>.

¹⁸⁸ Keddie, "Iranian Women's Status and Struggle Since 1979," 28.

¹⁸⁹ Shaul Bakhash, "Iran's Unlikely President," *The New York Review of Books*, November 05, 1998, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1998/11/05/irans-unlikely-president/>.

contend that Khatami's victory was undoubtedly secured by the women's vote.¹⁹⁰ This argument is bolstered by the elections in 2004 as many reformists and even representatives were disqualified, causing a large portion of Iranian women to boycott their votes. Consequently, this led to the conservative presidential victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005.¹⁹¹

4.3 The Iranian Green Movement

The presidency of Ahmadinejad from 2005 to 2009 is described as having brought basic human rights protections to a new low.¹⁹² The number of juvenile executions increased significantly and the persecution of women's rights activists intensified, with large numbers being beaten, harassed, prosecuted, and imprisoned.¹⁹³ The economy under Ahmadinejad also suffered significantly. Despite his campaign promises to improve the economy, unemployment increased during his second as well as his first term.¹⁹⁴

The elections of 2009, contrary to the 2005 elections, voter participation was exceedingly high. However, the results were disputed.¹⁹⁵ Reformist supporters flooded the streets of Tehran in protest. It soon became apparent that the outrage was widespread, "from the privileged and secular to the university student populace". The security forces responded with aggressive suppression. Protesters were arrested and imprisoned, and television broadcasts were even illegally altered to conceal the color green. The color Green had been the official campaign color

¹⁹⁰ Vakil, *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, 135.

¹⁹¹ Keddie, "Iranian Women's Status and Struggle Since 1979," 27.

¹⁹² "UN Hold Ahmadinejad Accountable for Iran Human Rights Crisis," *Human Rights Watch* (2009): 1.

¹⁹³ "UN Hold Ahmadinejad Accountable for Iran Human Rights Crisis," *Human Rights Watch* (2009): 1.

¹⁹⁴ Victor H Sundquist, "Iranian Democratization Part I: a Case Study of the Iranian Green Movement," *Journal of Strategic Security* 6, no. 1 (2013): 28.

¹⁹⁵ Thomas Erdbrink, "Iran Election in Dispute as Two Candidates Claim Victory," *The Washington Post* (June 2009): 1.

for Ahmadinejad's main opposition candidate, Mir-Houssain Mousavi, and was revived as a historic symbol of Islamic freedom following the disputed elections.¹⁹⁶

Many scholars argue that the Green Movement (2009-10 CE) is distinctive from previous revolutionary movements as the purpose was not to completely overthrow the current regime, but to implement democratic reforms.¹⁹⁷ The movement is connected to the 1979 Revolution because many feel it shapes the same ideology. Iranians, including women, in the Revolution fought against the Pahlavi dynasty for their democratic right to choose and exercise individual freedom. Some argue that once the monarchy was eliminated, these rights "were hijacked by radical clerics" after the Revolution.¹⁹⁸ Similarly, the Green Movement fought for these same rights as Iranians rallied against the same individuals – the Islamic leaders and clergy who merely took the place of the monarchy.¹⁹⁹

The Green Movement protests expanded into a larger challenge against Ahmadinejad's regime and Khomeini's leadership as the supreme leader. Scholar Victor H. Sundquist observes that the rapid growth of the movement, meant that it became more difficult to control as the intensity built within the unorganized masses."²⁰⁰ On 15 June 2009, over 200,000 Mousavi protesters occupied Azadi (Freedom) Square to peacefully protest the election results. The government responded with violent attacks on the demonstrators, which lasted for several weeks. By the end of June, there were over forty reported deaths, with twenty-seven taking place in the first four days.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁶ Sundquist, "Iranian Democratization Part I: a Case Study of the Iranian Green Movement," 29.

¹⁹⁷ Hamid Dabashi, "What Happened to the Green Movement in Iran?" *Al Jazeera*, June 12, 2013, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/05/201351661225981675.html>.

¹⁹⁸ Haleh Esfandiari, "The Women's Movement."

¹⁹⁹ Haleh Esfandiari, "The Women's Movement."

²⁰⁰ Sundquist, "Iranian Democratization Part I: a Case Study of the Iranian Green Movement," 29.

²⁰¹ Sundquist, "Iranian Democratization Part I: a Case Study of the Iranian Green Movement," 30.

Demonstrations in Friday prayer, and ordered an immediate end to the opposition. Demonstrators remained vigilant, and over the two months that followed, authorities arrested over 4,000 people. Nevertheless, demonstrations continued for several months despite a crackdown on activists, intellectuals, and media. The Green Movement eventually turned into a political party, “The Green Path of Hope,” led by Mousavi. It exists as an ongoing aspect of the fitful democratization of the Islamic Republic.²⁰²

4.4 Women in the Green Movement

Women’s participation in the Iranian Green Movement was the culmination of their fight for women’s rights which started in the 1906 Constitutional Revolution. Their activism and participation in political movements has over 100 years of recorded history. Their participation in the Green Movement was not groundbreaking, but vision for women’s rights were revolutionary because they went beyond faction and party, ideology and religion, and violence and civility to affirm a gender-conscious program of change.²⁰³ For the first time in Iranian history, women from all backgrounds and beliefs, came together under the banner of increased women’s rights under the constitution and democratic law.²⁰⁴ The nature of the 2009 movement illustrates the evolution of the struggle for women’s rights since the 1906 Constitutional Revolution.

Iranian women had already played a particularly influential role during the 2009 presidential elections. They unified to form a coalition known as the Convergence of Women

²⁰² Victor H Sundquist, “Iranian Democratization Part II: a Case Study of the Iranian Green Movement,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 6, no. 1 (2013): 39.

²⁰³ Nayereh Tohidi, “Iran’s Presidential Elections: Women’s role in the Pre- and Post- Election Politics,” *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars* (Fall 2009): 4.

²⁰⁴ Tohidi, “Iran’s Presidential Elections: Women’s role in the Pre- and Post- Election Politics,” 5.

and posed two demands. The new regime was to ratify the UN's CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and it was to revise four articles of the Iranian constitution which discriminated against women.²⁰⁵ The coalition inserted itself into the media and utilized new technologies. Many candidates made women's issues a central issue in their platforms.²⁰⁶

Not surprisingly, women were very active in the post-election demonstrations. These individuals served as "political actors, journalists, lawyers, and activists," and demonstrated the influence and evolution of Iranian women in post-Khomeini Iran.²⁰⁷ They were so visible that sadly an Iranian woman became the face of the Green Revolution. Neda Agha-Soltan was a 27-year-old philosophy student who happened to be in the vicinity of the demonstrations when she was fatally shot by a government-controlled militia.²⁰⁸ She became a worldwide symbol for the fight against tyranny and inspired many subsequent demonstrations. The participation of women in the Green Movement illustrates the change which has occurred in Iranian society over the past century. Further, it inspires hope for the possibilities of Iran's future.

4.5 Lipstick Jihad

Azadeh Moaveni was born in 1976 in Palo Alto, California to a middle-upper-class family of Iranian exiles. Growing up, she struggled with her identity as an American-Iranian, shifting between the conservative Islamic world of her home life and the Americanized liberal

²⁰⁵ Equal Rights Is Our Minimum Demand: The Women's Rights Movement in Iran, 2005, 124.

²⁰⁶ Tohidi, "Iran's Presidential Elections: Women's role in the Pre- and Post- Election Politics," 4.

²⁰⁷ Tohidi, "Iran's Presidential Elections: Women's role in the Pre- and Post- Election Politics," 6.

²⁰⁸ Nazila Fathi, "In a Death Seen Around the World, a Symbol of Iranian Protests," June 22, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/23/world/middleeast/23neda.html>

community of her friends. Moaveni never felt completely herself in either respect and struggled with social anxiety throughout her adolescence.²⁰⁹

Moaveni became a journalist, writer, and reporter. She received a Fulbright scholarship to the American University in Cairo in 1998. Moaveni was reporting in Cairo during the political upheavals in Iran during the year 1999. She traveled to Iran to cover the student riots at Tehran University and remained in the country for several years as a Middle East correspondent for *Time Magazine*. Notably, she was the first American journalist to obtain such access.²¹⁰

Moaveni's memoir, *Lipstick Jihad*, explores the complications of growing up in separate worlds, the Iranian exile community, the culture clashes of a new generation born to Iranian immigrants, and the Iranian reform movements of the 1990s and 2000s. The scope of the memoir extends from Moaveni's childhood to her first departure from Iran in the early 2000s. Its focus is the internal struggle for belonging and identity in a hybrid of different cultures and influences.

Moaveni engages with the tumultuous political upheavals of Iran from 1998 to 2001. She observed firsthand the injustices and human rights violations perpetrated by the Islamic Republic against the Iranian people. For instance, Moaveni observes a young man tied to a tree and whipped, in front of a crowd of 400, for owning and selling alcohol. She comments that Iran is full of violence, as every few months there are incidents in which drug smugglers hanged or women murdered for dressing immodest.²¹¹ Moaveni also witnesses the suppression of reformists, activists, and newspapers in the buildup to the 2001 presidential elections. In response, she became a participant in the women's movement by voting for Khatami.²¹²

²⁰⁹ Azadeh Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad* (Cambridge: Perseus Books Group, 2005), 12.

²¹⁰ Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 42.

²¹¹ Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 110.

²¹² Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 130.

A central theme of her memoir is Moaveni's struggle for identity as an American-Iranian woman. She makes the crucial observation that these issues are intensified by the Islamic Republic, because of its influence over women's behavior, appearance, and position in society. Further, Moaveni is viewed as an American and a foreigner in Iran, despite her ethnicity. Towards the end of her memoir, Moaveni becomes frustrated with the discrimination she faces in Iran, as it was intensified following the attacks on September 11th. As such, this became the catalyst for her to leave Iran for the United States in the early 2000s.²¹³ Moaveni's memoir represents the experience of being a woman in the post-Khomeini Islamic Republic and the struggle over the status of Iranian women at this time. Her struggle is shared by many other female Iranian exiles. I discuss some of these individuals in the section below.

4.6 I'm Writing You from Tehran

Delphine Minoui is an award-winning author and journalist, whose work focuses on Iran and the Middle East. Minoui was born in Paris in 1974 to a French mother and an Iranian father.²¹⁴ Her memoir, *I'm Writing You from Tehran*, presents her return to Iran in 1998 after the death of her grandfather. At the age of twenty-two, Minoui planned to visit for a week to connect with her heritage and begin her career as a journalist. Her week-long vacation evolved into a ten-year stay, during which she uncovers her own identity, a deep love for her homeland, and a connection between her late grandfather and herself, which she realized from re-living much of his concealed past. The memoir is written in the form of letters to her grandfather.

Pieces of Minoui's past are revealed at the start of her memoir, as she discusses her childhood visits to Iran to see her extended family. She observes that her last visit was in August

²¹³ Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 230.

²¹⁴ Delphine Minoui, *I'm Writing You From Tehran* (New York: Editions de Seuil, 2019), 7.

1978, just prior to the Revolution. Notably, just after January 1979, her father attempted to purge all remnants of his Iranian heritage from his life, changing his name to conceal his ethnicity.

Minoui remarks that in her Paris home Iran became a taboo subject.²¹⁵

As an adolescent, Minoui concludes that she is French, one-hundred percent, as she had nothing in her life to indicate otherwise. Throughout this time, she and her grandfather exchanged letters, although his visits to France diminished significantly. As a young adult, she gained consciousness of her ethnic origins, and in the 1990s, she began to experience subtle indications of the French public's negative perception of the Islamic Republic. From this, her curiosity grew and culminated with her grandfather's death, leading her to set out for Iran in 1998.²¹⁶

In sharp contrast to her childhood memories, Minoui observes the impact of the Revolution and the Islamic Republic on Iran, as it is entirely different than the country she remembers. Her experiences in Iran juxtapose the differences of private versus public life. As public life is shaped by restrictions under the Islamic Republic, in private life much of the Iranian population participates in behaviors deemed to be immoral, such as partying, drinking, and gender mixing.²¹⁷ Notably, their behaviors illustrate the evolution of Iranian society, what was once open has become hidden.

Because the memoir is written in the form of letters to her grandfather, her voice is deeply personal in tone. As a journalist, Minoui experiences the harsh realities of the Islamic Republic, with her press badge being revoked and then reinstated on a regular basis. She is subject to interrogations and censorship. Many times, she finds her friends have been imprisoned

²¹⁵ Minoui, *I'm Writing You From Tehran*, 9.

²¹⁶ Minoui, *I'm Writing You From Tehran*, 10.

²¹⁷ Minoui, *I'm Writing You From Tehran*, 25.

or untraceably disappeared.²¹⁸ With persecution intensifying, she learns of her grandfather's own persecution from SAVAK. Of which she writes, "like grandfather, like granddaughter."²¹⁹

As with Moaveni, Minoui places a heavy emphasis on identity, and her own struggles with having a mixed Iranian-French ethnicity. She gains pieces of herself throughout the memoir, as she learns more of her Iranian culture and deepens her love for Iran. In the final part of the text, Minoui experiences the Iranian Green Movement, which then solidifies her identity as an Iranian woman. Her experience is reflective of several things - the oppression and brutality of the Islamic Regime, the evolution of the people of Iran, and the new status of Iranian women in their modern society.

Minoui participates in the demonstrations in June, which followed the 2009 elections, and observes the range of Iranians who protested. Everyone was involved, from grandmothers in overalls, to teenagers in modern fashion. She describes the passion exuding from Iranians. Specifically, she describes the new position of women in the protests, as these individuals arrived without fear and many became a symbol for democracy and hope for the future.²²⁰ Much of the same is divulged in the remaining memoirs in this chapter. I discuss the parallel experiences in the following section.

4.7 Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card

Sara Saedi was born in Tehran in 1980 to an upper-middle-class family. They immigrated to the U.S. in 1982 due to the ongoing Iran-Iraq War and the understanding that their children would not be afforded the same freedoms as they had prior to the Islamic Republic.²²¹

²¹⁸ Minoui, *I'm Writing You From Tehran*, 78.

²¹⁹ Minoui, *I'm Writing You From Tehran*, 167.

²²⁰ Minoui, *I'm Writing You From Tehran*, 271.

²²¹ Sara Saedi, *Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018), 15.

Unfortunately, because of the ongoing war, Iranian borders were closed and they would have been forced to wait years if they had applied for green cards. Instead, they fled as political refugees and settled in California. The ensuing battle for their citizenship in the U.S. is the central topic of Saedi's memoir, *Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card*.²²²

The scope of her text ranges from her birth in 1980 to her ceremony for American citizenship in 2005. Its tone is colloquial and comedic, with Saedi exuding her quick wit and humor in every paragraph. A central theme of the text is the importance of family. She continuously writes of the impact her family has on her life and identity, with several chapters of the text being devoted to her individual siblings and her parents. Much of her familial structure is influenced by her Iranian background and reflective of their culture. For instance, she writes of the close relationships she shared with her cousins, which came from the "true patriarch" of her family, Dayee Mehrdad. According to Saedi, "I grew up among nineteen first cousins, and they each played a pivotal role in my childhood and teen years."²²³

As with the other memorists in this chapter, Saedi struggled with the complexities of an American-Iranian identity. This is demonstrated in her problems as a teenager. Saedi expresses the crippling fear she experienced upon learning that she was an undocumented immigrant and risked being deported at any time.²²⁴ The fear kept her awake at night. It was balanced, however, by her other fears, such as being the only one of her friends without a high school prom date.²²⁵

Saedi's memoir ends with an epilogue in the form of a letter to herself, or the "Sara who never left Iran."²²⁶ Here, she depicts the divergence between her Americanized self and the

²²² Saedi, *Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card*, 16.

²²³ Saedi, *Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card*, 151.

²²⁴ Saedi, *Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card*, 5.

²²⁵ Saedi, *Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card*, 222.

²²⁶ Saedi, *Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card*, 269.

Iranian identity she could have had. Towards the beginning of her adult life, Saedi comments on her loss of Iranian-ness in many forms, such as her inability to read or write Farsi and her instinct to eat rice with a fork. She juxtaposes the congratulatory comments from friends at her citizenship ceremony, which noted that she was finally one of them, with the disappointing remarks from her parents that she was becoming too much like one of them.²²⁷ She comments on the Iranian person that she had missed becoming in America, but concludes with the hopeful remark that they may meet someday and she will be able to take this identity on as her own.²²⁸ My last memoir speaks to the complicated relationship between Iran and the United States in the following section.

4.8 *My Prison, My Home*

Haleh Esfandiari was born 3 March 1940 to an upper-class family in Iran, living there until 1980, when she, her husband, and her daughter immigrated to the U.S. because of the Revolution. Esfandiari met her husband, Shaul Bakhash, in Iran in the 1960s, as they both worked for the newspaper *Kayhan*.²²⁹ Prior to leaving Iran, Esfandiari worked as a journalist and taught at the College of Mass Communication in Tehran. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Vienna and pursued an academic career, following her move to the U.S. In the years between 1980 and 1994, Esfandiari taught courses on Persian language and literature at Princeton University. Notably, she was the founding director of the Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.²³⁰

²²⁷ Saedi, *Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card*, 264.

²²⁸ Saedi, *Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card*, 273.

²²⁹ Haleh Esfandiari, *My Prison: My Home* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 35.

²³⁰ Esfandiari, *My Prison: My Home*, 56.

In May 2007, Esfandiari was detained and held in solitary confinement at Evin Prison for 105 days. Her memoir, *My Prison, My Home* is an account of this experience. The scope of the book encompasses her lengthy interrogation, arrest, and incarceration at the hands of the Iranian ministry of intelligence. Esfandiari also writes of her childhood in Iran during the 1940s, her career beginnings, involvement with the WOI during the Pahlavi era, the Revolution, the political tensions in Iran under the Islamic Republic, and the complex relationship between Iran and the U.S. She provides an explanation for why the Islamic Republic persecuted her in 2007 and accused her of trying to ferment a pro-democracy revolution.²³¹

Esfandiari observes the brutality and oppression of Ahmadinejad's Islamic Republic in detail as she recounts the rise of the intelligence ministry under his regime. Noting Ahmadinejad strengthened the hand of the radical hard-liners and maintained an ever-increasing paranoia of American intervention in Iranian affairs.²³² In her account of the history between Iran and the U.S., she writes of the ways in which her country pivoted between repression and reform, largely because of American policy in the Middle East.²³³

While in Evin Prison, Esfandiari experienced the severe brutalities of Ahmadinejad's Islamic Republic. An incident of particular significance occurred when she was forced into recording an interview by her interrogators. The film would be doctored and broadcast to serve as propaganda for the regime.²³⁴ Indicative of the evolving Iranian people under Ahmadinejad's regime, Esfandiari learned upon her release that large numbers of Iranians supported her and viewed her as a symbol for democracy. Notably, the Republic's attempts at propaganda seemingly had the opposite effect, as media coverage of the Ukrainian and Georgian pro-

²³¹ Esfandiari, *My Prison: My Home*, 140.

²³² Esfandiari, *My Prison: My Home*, 141.

²³³ Esfandiari, *My Prison: My Home*, 121.

²³⁴ Esfandiari, *My Prison: My Home*, 173.

democracy movements inspired many Iranians towards civic engagement in demonstrations and protests.²³⁵ The failed attempts by the Islamic Republic to control the Iranian people in the ways of Khomeini's Republic illustrate the new identity these individuals held. As my analysis of the previous memoirs shows, this would become even more clear in the demonstrations in the Iranian Green Movement in 2009.

4.9 Conclusion

The memoirs in this chapter - *Lipstick Jihad* by Azadeh Moaveni, *I'm Writing You from Tehran* by Delphine Minoui, *Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card* by Sara Saedi, and *My Prison: My Home* by Haleh Esfandiari - embody numerous similarities and differences in their expression of experience of being Iranian during the post-Khomeini Islamic Republic. All of the memoirists belong to the worldwide Iranian diaspora, a new phenomenon in the history of Iranian women. They all struggled with issues of identity, especially those who grew up in France or the U.S.

For example, the expressions of experience in *Lipstick Jihad* and *I'm Writing You from Tehran* are nearly comparable as both women were raised outside of Iran, came from upper-middle-class backgrounds, and returned to Iran after Khomeini died in 1989. Moaveni and Minoui were similarly persecuted by the Islamic Republic and left the country for exile thereafter. By contrast, these women were raised in different countries, with Moaveni in the U.S. and Minoui in France. Their families dealt with culture and identity in different ways. Moaveni grew up with an Iranian culture at home and struggled with her mixed identity of Iranian

²³⁵ Esfandiari, *My Prison: My Home*, 210.

American. Conversely, Minoui grew up in a household that rejected their Iranian identities, and so in her youth concluded that she was purely French.

Further comparisons can be made considering *Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card* by Sara Saedi. Saedi relates to Moaveni and Minoui in her identity struggles with being Iranian and American. She sought to hide her Iranian heritage at times, for shame over foreign impressions of Iran. At the same time, Saedi gains much of her identity through her experiences with Iranian culture. Unlike the other two memoirists, Saedi does not return to Iran in her adult life, but rather experiences the difficulties and consequences of being Iranian during the post-Khomeini Islamic Republic in the context of ignorance and hostility in the U.S.

My Prison: My Home by Haleh Esfandiari exhibits remarkable similarities to those of her counterparts in this chapter. She is, of course unlike, the other memoirists in this chapter in that she was born nearly thirty years earlier, left for exile as an adult, and experienced Iran, firsthand, prior to the Islamic Republic. She does, however, share with two of the other women in this chapter, the experience of persecution by the post-Khomeini Islamic Republic. Moreover, she experiences the suspicion that as an Iranian American, she is not really an Iranian but an agent of America.

The women discussed in this chapter vary in background, class, and life events. Despite these differences, their memoirs convey significant similarities when it comes to the question of being Iranian during the time of the post-Khomeini Islamic Republic. The central continuity is that these women sought to explore their sense of identity, event to the extent of three of them visiting and working in Iran, and risking repression by the authorities. What is striking is that all these women found personal meaning in Iranian culture, despite a legacy of patriarchy, an

Iranian state given to authoritarian actions, and a wider world still not fully accepting of the people of Iranian heritage who live abroad.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This thesis has analyzed and contextualized the memoirs of twelve female Iranian exiles over a span of seven decades. These individuals are categorized by three distinctive time periods and other qualifications. I discuss women under the Shah and their experiences with the White Revolution, women from the Iranian Revolution to Khomeini's Islamic Republic, and finally a cohort of women who grew up or at least lived for a long period, in the worldwide Iranian diaspora.

These individuals exhibit distinctive backgrounds, classes, and life experiences, but still maintain remarkable similarities in their expressions of experience in their memoirs. So far, I have highlighted several commonalities and variations between the women of each cohort. Notably, the memoirists share threads of similarities and differences not only within their own cohorts, but also across the three cohorts. I present these findings in this concluding chapter.

5.1 Iranian Politics and Life Experiences

A defining feature for nearly every memoirist discussed in this thesis is the connection between their personal life experiences and Iranian politics. For instance, the memoirists from women under the Shah experienced significant life changes with the implementation of the White Revolution. In this, the protagonists illustrate the power of the Iranian government to define their status as Iranian women and the way that government has defined the possibilities of womanhood. Lili from *The Good Daughter* experienced these changes in her personal life with the FPL, Raclin's sister Pari in *Persian Girls* experienced a similar change. Sattareh from *Daughter of Persia* was defined by the White Revolution as her entire livelihood in social work

was encouraged and funded by the Shah's, and Pahlavi in *An Enduring Love* defined her life partially by the White Revolution as she was one of the central figures carrying out the reforms.

Women of the Islamic Republic in Khomeini's Iran shared the expression of connecting Iranian politics to their daily life. These women were influenced greatly by the shift from the Iranian Revolution to the Islamic Republic. Many of them define their lives by the oppression and difficulties of Khomeini's Iran, which destroyed their idyllic dreams from the Revolution.

For instance, in *Iran Awakening*, Shirin Ebadi experiences drastic changes in her personal life following the Revolution, as she was removed from her position as a judge and subsequently persecuted in her pursuit of human rights activism thereafter. Similarly, Azar Nafisi from *Reading Lolita in Iran* connects her personal life with that of Iranian politics, as she faces discrimination in Khomeini's Islamic Republic for not complying with his Islamization of women. Marjane Satrapi presents a similar narrative, as many of her serious life events occurred because of the changes in Iran's political experiences. Including her being sent to Vienna during the rise of Khomeini and her family being persecuted throughout her childhood for their reformist beliefs. Lastly, Roya Hakakian from *Journey from the Land of No* presents a similar argument as her coming of age was entirely dependent on the political changes simultaneously occurring with the Islamic Republic.

Women between Iran and exile share this connection between Iranian politics and their personal lives as well. To start, Azadeh Moaveni in *Lipstick Jihad* is displaced and moved to exile after the dramatic regime changes during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Delphine Minoui describes similar experiences in her memoir *I'm Writing You From Iran*, as her identity and life is defined by the evolution of the Islamic Republic during the same time. Similar to Moaveni, her life is displaced by Iranian politics as she leaves for exile after the Green Movement in 2009.

Sara Saedi writes of a similar experience in a different situation in the memoir *Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card*. She experiences the connection of Iranian politics with her social life as she struggles with immigration and identity issues stemming from her status as a political refugee. Consequently, she earned this status because of the dangers of the Iran-Iraq War. Lastly, Haleh Esfandiari, is personally persecuted and forcefully displaced by the Islamic Republic in 2007. She connects the timeline of her life's interaction with Iranian politics to explain how this situation came about.

5.2 Patriotism and Identity

Another significant commonality shared by the memoirists in this thesis is a love for their country and Iranian identity despite their struggles with particular Iranian governments. Such features are illustrated in *The Good Daughter*, as Lili maintains her Iranian culture and roots after she fled for exile. She continuously reminds her daughter of their Iranian-ness and retorts her fear of losing their culture. This idea is also explored in *Persian Girls* by Nahid Rachlin as the author's adult life is haunted by her Iranian past to the point of obsession. Sattareh Farman-Farmaian exudes a similar quality in her text *Daughter of Persia* as she devotes her life to improving the conditions of her country. Finally, in this cohort, Farah Pahlavi continuously speaks of her patriotism and pride as an Iranian woman, and even writes her memoir to demonstrate this truth.

The quality of love for Iran and one's Iranian identity is also shared among the memoirists in Khomeini's Iran. Specifically, Shirin Ebadi demonstrates as much in *Iran Awakening*, as she refuses to leave her country, in spite of the persecution and violence which surrounds her. Azar Nafisi does the same in her memoir as she struggles to leave for exile

because of her connection with Iran. Marjane Satrapi in *The Complete Persepolis* highlights her Iranian roots and pays tribute to her country in the recounting of her personal life. Roya Hakakian illuminates her Iranian identity through evoking her childhood before the Revolution, in *Journey from the Land of No*, emphasizing the love she has for Iran.

Lastly, memoirists from my chapter, *Women Between Iran and Exile*, exude these qualities most clearly. For example, Azadeh Moaveni, Delphine Minoui, and Haleh Esfandiari maintain their presence in Iran in the face of persecution and oppression because of their pride and love for their country. Sara Saedi maintains these qualities through her Iranian identity as an Iranian American citizen, growing up in California.

5.3 Shared Perspectives on Iranian Identity

A final commonality shared by all memoirists in this thesis is their personal perspective on Iranian history. These narratives are marked with disappointment and frustration with Iranian's tumultuous history in the twentieth century, even as they maintain hope for Iran's possible future. For the memoirists in my second chapter, the turn of Iranian history with the Iranian Revolution left them exiled from their homeland, and a loss of a place they will never see again.

For instance, Lili in *The Good Daughter* does not speak of returning to Iran, but her rhetoric and telling of her past reflects her longing for that which she left behind. Specifically, she is dissatisfied with the events which led to this change in her life. In *Persian Girls*, Rachlin expresses her disdain for the path Iran took with the Islamic Republic, as it led to the demise of her sister Pari. She writes of her disappointment at the changes made by Khomeini, such as her needing the permission of her husband to travel between Iran and the U.S., the mandatory hijab

she wears while in Iran, and the diminishing of human rights under Khomeini's Islamic Republic.

Sattareh in her memoir *Daughter of Persia* writes of the loss of progress made during her time in Iran, and the degradation of human rights which followed the Revolution. As it was her life's mission to improve the conditions of the Iranian people, she struggles with the regression of the Islamic Republic. Lastly, Farah Pahlavi speaks of her disappointment with Iranian history more explicitly than the other memoirists. As one of the central figures of modern Iranian history, she writes of her devastation over the new position of the Islamic Republic. Further, she maintains that she has hope for its future, and will see Iran rise from its ashes.

My second cohort of memoirists demonstrate similarities in their disappointment with Iranian history. Notably, they do not renounce the society itself, but rather the oppressive measures of the Islamic Republic. Specifically, Ebadi writes of the persecution she and many other Iranians faced under the Islamic Republic and follows such thoughts with her disappointment with the outcome of the Revolution. Similar sentiments are shared by Azar Nafisi, as she returned to Iran in 1979 with the hope of a new Iran that the Revolution would bring. Instead, she returned to be persecuted and oppressed by Khomeini's Islamic Republic. Her reaction was one of dissent and alienation.

Marjane Satrapi extends their feelings of the turn of Iranian history, as she recounts her country's past and juxtaposes it with her status under the Islamic Republic. As with the others, she contends that Iran used to be a great nation, but under the Islamic Republic it has diminished into factionalism and persecution. Similarly, Roya Hakakian expresses her discontent with the turn of Iranian history with a discussion of its former glory days which she experienced as a child.

Lastly, my third cohort of writers share these sentiments as they are experiencing the Iran of today. Azadeh Moaveni, Delphine Minoui, and Haleh Esfandiari express their discontent with the superficiality and oppression of the Islamic Republic in the 1990s onward. As they experience the modern functioning of democratic elections, they maintain a degree of hope for Iran's future. However, simultaneously, they experience rigged elections, and underground persecution from the regime. This creates feelings of discontent with the frustration of Iranian's political history.

5.4 Differences

Given the remarkable similarities between the female Iranian exiles explored in this thesis, it might seem that there would be no stark differences in many areas. However, this is not the case. To start, there are generational gaps which separate the women. Some, such as Ebadi, were born into the simpler time of 1940s Iran. While others such as Saedi were born in the middle of the Iranian Revolution. While these differences do provide them with varying perspectives, they share what we may call an Iranian character, which is passed from generation to generation. Thus, we observe individuals such as Satrapi, who did not experience the Revolution as an adult revolutionary, but carry with her the burden of this event for what it meant to be an Iranian woman.

A significant contrast between the various memoirists is their different experiences of exile. For example, they left Iran for exile at different times in history. These different exits from Iran resulted in different circumstances, which in turn define their experience of exile. If we contrast the exile of Rachlin, with that of Ebadi, we observe that Rachlin experienced much prejudice from her host country because she was exiled in the U.S. during the Iranian hostage

crisis of 1980. Conversely, Ebadi left Iran in 2009 and did not experience similar hostility. Infact, she thrived in the Western environment as an academic, activist, and beloved public figure. These differences make the similarities between these women even more remarkable, as they represent something deeper about female Iranian exiles in general.

5.5 Conclusion

As stated in my introduction, the memoirs by women have become a global phenomenon since the 1980s. The trend to write memoirs for a broad audience has become increasingly important for women to have a voice in their place in history. For Iranian women, this is even more significant, as they fight to negotiate their place in the public discourse of Iran. As these women present their stories through their memoirs, their remarkable similarities are apparent. Despite their differences in background and class, these female Iranian exiles share similar expressions of experiences in their lives in Iran and exile.

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