

Janet Afary, "Foundations for Religious Reform in the First Pahlavi Era," *Iran Nameh*, 30:3 (Fall 2015), XLVI-LXXXVII.

## Foundations for Religious Reform in the First Pahlavi Era

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### Introduction

War, occupation, and famine in the aftermath of World War I pushed aside lofty constitutional debates about democracy and civil liberties that had begun in 1906. As Nikki Keddie has argued, the central government in Tehran weakened and tribal chiefs and landlords reasserted their power. Also, inspired by the events in the north and the emergence of the Soviet Union, a variety of autonomous movements emerged in the country. In response, Britain encouraged a coup led by Reza Khan and Seyyed Zia al-Din that could bring about a strong central government, one that was capable of suppressing

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<sup>1</sup>Thanks to Homa Katouzian, Habib Ladjevardi, Ali Gheissari, Mehdi Khalaji who read various drafts of this article. Thanks also to Elham Malekzadeh and Navid Yousefian for research in Iranian libraries and Rita Sindelar and Mir Yarfitz for editorial assistance.

ISSN 0892-4147-print/ISSN 2159-421X online/2015/30.3/XLVI-LXXXVII

“leftist or autonomous movement.”<sup>2</sup> Constitutional monarchy came to a halt soon after Reza Shah Pahlavi (r.1925-41) established the Pahlavi monarchy in 1925 and expanded his prerogative through military control. By the early 1930s, Reza Shah had subverted the democratic process and dramatically reduced the constitutional authority of the Parliament. Ministers and MPs relinquished many of their constitutionally allocated rights, while the shah gained greater authority.

Intellectuals have paid close attention to the discontinuity between the two periods and to the fact that the highly authoritarian Pahlavi regime increasingly reduced constitutionalism to a façade. However, there was also a significant degree of continuity and overlap between the Pahlavi agenda for reform and that of the constitutionalists two decades earlier. These included the establishment of a modern nation state, one characterized by security and a strong and stable government, an industrial economy, and the institution of modern educational and legal systems. Indeed, despite the shah’s increasingly authoritarian rule, the Pahlavi regime continued the constitutionalists’ reform agenda *sans democracy* in a number of areas.<sup>3</sup>

But where did the Pahlavi regime stand on the subject of religion and religious reform? Did the constitutional era’s debates and proposals on religious reform continue in this period?<sup>4</sup> Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, standard historiography of the Pahlavi era has painted the monarch as anti-clerical and even anti-religion. These sources argue that Reza Khan presented himself as a devout Shi’i in the early 1920s when he needed the support of

<sup>2</sup>Nikki Keddie, *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 87. Includes a section by Yann Richard.

<sup>3</sup>Reza Shah’s ascent to the throne depended in large part upon support from constitutionalists (including several socialist MPs), clerics, and the British government. As we will see, a group of liberal members of the intelli-

gentsia, who fully backed the ill-educated but energetic monarch, was responsible for much of his early success.

<sup>4</sup>For a discussion of religious reform in the Constitutional era see Janet Afary, “The Place of Shi’i Clerics in the First Constitution of Iran,” *Critical Research on Religion*, 1:3 (2013), 327-346.

the ulama to become the new ruler of the nation, but then turned his back on religious institutions when he embarked on his project of creating a modern and secular Iranian nation. Based on more recent scholarship and a careful reading of publications from the 1930s, this article makes two arguments: First, whether intended or not, many social and cultural reforms of the period had dramatic and lasting implications on day-to-day religious practices of the nation, changes that ultimately contributed to the reform of Shi'ism. Second, the Pahlavi regime was not at all hostile to every ranking religious figure. It only clashed with orthodox clerics and politically reform-minded ones who publicly expressed their opposition to the regime's social and cultural reforms. In contrast, the regime lent its support to advocates of a rationalist school of thought in Shi'ism that had begun in the late nineteenth century with clerics such as Sheikh Hadi Najmabadi. These rationalist religious thinkers of the Pahlavi era were open to social and cultural reforms carried out by the state, and if they disagreed they often kept their opinions to themselves. The regime promoted this type of thinking. Advocates were provided with speaking and publishing opportunities and encouraged to continue their activities, whereas many nationalist, leftist, or religious figures who openly criticized the state, such as Seyyed Hasan Modarres, were imprisoned or even murdered.

This article is composed of two parts. Part I will summarize some of the social and cultural reforms of the Reza Shah that paved the way for religious reform. Part 2 will turn to the project of religious reform in Qom, and specifically the circle around Ayatollah Abdolkarim Haeri, who turned the city of Qom into a rival for the Atabat in the 1920s. Haeri became popular in Qom because of his strong commitment to public welfare. By 1935 there were hundreds of students studying in the city's various theological seminaries. In addition, Qom briefly housed the monthly journal, *Homâyoun* (1934-35), which became an instrument through which the more reform-minded clerics advocated a new code of conduct for Shi'i Muslims. The publication of this journal at a time when a vast majority of newspapers of Iran were banned merits closer attention.

By the time the Allies forced Reza Shah into exile in Johannesburg in 1941, these reforms of the state coupled with the work of the religious intellectuals had helped pave the way for dramatic future change and contributed to the project of a new “hegemonic masculinity.”<sup>5</sup> This new masculinity involved the acceptance of a limited number of modern practices in medicine, health, and hygiene; practices that had hitherto been shunned as anti-Islamic, but were now accepted by some theologians in Qom. However, this group, which we may call the Qom Rationalists, remained vehemently opposed to many other aspects of this hegemonic masculinity, including the sartorial reforms of the regime, the greater emphasis on women’s rights and education, and practices that interfered with the heterosocial milieu and exclusively male bonding common at the seminaries.

### **Social and Cultural Reforms, 1925-1941:**

#### **Reza Shah’s Early Attitude Towards Religious Rituals**

Amin Banani, author of the classic 1961 study of the Reza Shah era, argues that the shah was generally hostile toward the clerics and at best indifferent toward religious obligations.<sup>6</sup> An admirer of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the modern Turkish Republic, Reza Shah is remembered for his opposition to many orthodox Shi’i clerics and for his attempts to modernize the nation and replace the sharia courts with secular ones. But as Banani and others have pointed out, he was also not averse to the use of religion for political purposes.

Even before becoming monarch, Reza Khan knew how to use the power of religion when it was necessary to achieve his purposes. In 1924 the campaign for republicanism in Iran collapsed. What contributed to this collapse was more than the emergence of a new republic in neighboring Turkey in 1922. It was Ataturk’s abolition of the caliphate, the Sunni Islamic equivalent to the Vatican, in March 1924, that brought deep tremors to the Muslim world,

<sup>5</sup>For a fuller discussion of the concept of hegemonic masculinity see the introduction to Sivan Balslev, “Javanmard, Fokoli, Boy Scout: Changing Masculinities in Modernizing Iran, Circa 1870-1940,” (PhD dissertation, The Zvi

Yavetz School of Historical Studies, Tel Aviv University, 2015).

<sup>6</sup>Amin Banani, *The Modernization of Iran, 1921-1941* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 40.

including Iran. The Shi'i ulama were horrified by Ataturk's example and feared the adoption of similar measures by Iranian politicians toward their centers in Najaf, Karbala, and elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

The cleric Seyyed Hassan Modarres, led the Reformist Party (*Hezb-e Eslâhtalabân*), which was backed by bazaar merchants, guild members, and junior clerics. The Reformist Party opposed republicanism and the abolition of the caliphate as measures that could undermine the Shi'i establishment. When the newspaper *Setâreh Iran* defended republicanism, Modarres wrote a blistering response, where he denounced similar changes in neighboring Turkey and accused proponents of republicanism of wanting to destroy Islam:

These lackeys of Western powers are determined to eliminate Islam. In the name of republicanism they wish to destroy the Shi'i nation [of Iran] as they did with the Ottoman nation. In the name of [republicanism] they abolished the Caliphate, removed the turbans from the head of the clerics, and now want to do the same in a Shi'i nation.<sup>8</sup>

Modarres went further and in a revisionist interpretation of the Constitutional Revolution, credited all of the ulama, including the anti-constitutionalist Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri (d. 1909), for the great achievements of that revolution. He claimed that Nuri had foiled a Baha'i plot to dismantle Islam and reminded his audience that this ranking mojtahed had been executed:

When the [First] Parliament was formed and decided to write a constitution, foreign enemies and supporters of Bahaism planned such a republicanism for the nation and were plotting to carry it out. The ulama realized this and alerted the nation to this predicament. The martyred Sheikh [Fazlollah Nuri] stated in the [Supplementary] Constitutional Laws that Islam was the official religion of the nation, to protect Muslims from

<sup>7</sup>Cyrus Ghani, *Iran and the Rise of Reza Shah: From Qâjâr Collapse to Pahlavi Power* (London: Pearson Education, 2003), 38.

<sup>8</sup>Hassan Modarres, *Modarres va Majles: nâme-ha va asnâd* (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye pazhuhesh va motale'at-e farhangi, 1994), 100.

the advances of foreigners and the machinations of the Baha'is. Also, in several articles of the Constitution monarchy became the prerogative of the Qâjâr family. This was done to protect Muslims from the torment of the Baha'is if one day they plotted to destroy [our] religion as they did with our traditions . . . Now, in the name of republicanism, the same external and internal enemies want to remove these [constitutional] articles for which much blood was spilled and for which a cleric, an authentic mojtahed, and a deputy of the Imam (nayeb-e Imam), was hanged.<sup>9</sup>

Modarres was backed by several ranking ulama in Qom, who likewise denounced republicanism. Followers of Modarres instigated angry outbursts and smear campaigns in Iran, turning public opinion against republicanism. Reza Khan, who had been willing to become the country's first president until this period, was personally maligned as a "Babi [who] conspired to destroy Islam."<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, some of the ulama let it be known that they would acquiesce to installing Reza Khan as ruler of a new monarchy rather than as president of a republic.

Reza Khan realized that his future ambitions depended on appeasing the clerics. To achieve his goal, he feigned excessive religiosity, traveled to Qom, and promised the ulama who backed him, that he would abandon republicanism, and uphold Article 2 of the Supplementary Laws as monarch.<sup>11</sup> Soon after, an incident in the Fifth Majles (1924-26), in which the progressive modernists and Socialist parties held a majority, ended any chance of further pursuing the goal of republicanism. During a heated parliamentary

<sup>9</sup>Modarres, *Modarres va Majles*, 100-101. For an overview of Nuri's life see Vanessa Martin, "Nuri, Fazl-Allâh," in *Encyclopaedia iranica*, at [www.iranicaonline.org/articles/nuri-fazl-allal](http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/nuri-fazl-allal).

<sup>10</sup>Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, 42.

<sup>11</sup>Mostafa Alamouti, *Iran dar asr-e Pahlavi* (2nd ed.; Peka Press, 1990), vol. 1, 154-172; Mostafa Alamouti, *Iran dar asr-e Pahlavi*,

(London: Peka Press, 1988), vol. 2, 172; Ghani, *Iran and the Rise of Reza Shah*, 315; Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921: The Pahlavis and After* (London: Pearson Education, 2003), 38; Muhammad Zerang, *Tahavvol-e nezâm-e qazâyi-ye Iran: az Mashruteh ta soqut-e Reza Shah* (Tehran: Markaz-e asnâd-e enqelâb-e Islami, 2002), vol. 1, 402-406.

debate a fist fight ensued between a majority deputy and Seyyed Hasan Modarres, leader of the conservative party. News of this altercation enraged bazaar merchants, clerics, and the ordinary public who took to the streets, permanently dashing all hopes for republicanism at this historic juncture.<sup>12</sup>

### **Major Reforms of Reza Shah and their Religious Implications**

Almost immediately after Parliament voted to transfer the monarchy from the Qâjâr to the Pahlavi family in 1925, Reza Shah and his supporters embarked on a massive program of structural and social reforms. By 1927, these reforms were causing frequent clashes with the ulama and tribal leaders. Most of these projects had long been on the agenda of the constitutionalist and socialist reformers, many of whom now backed the shah. Many leftists and democrats went so far in their enthusiastic support to argue that the shah represented the rising bourgeoisie. They argued the monarch was dismantling archaic and “feudal” economic and social relationships in order to lay the groundwork for a form of capitalist modernization. Their communist education had inspired them to support a capitalist mode of economy in the hopes that it would lead to the expansion of trade unions and ultimately a socialist revolution.

Most reform projects were intended to refashion Iran as an industrial, urban nation. National infrastructure was improved, often with little concern for indigenous architecture and historic sites. Likewise, in the process of modernizing the national identity, new values were forcibly grafted onto long-standing cultural and social practices. Despite the ruthless manner of their implementation, these reforms did help unify the nation and fulfill some of the constitutionalists’ aspirations. In addition, as we shall see below, whether deliberate or not, these changes also altered many sacrosanct religious traditions, as well as Shi’i practices and beliefs, reforms that continued in the 1940s after Reza Shah was removed from power.

<sup>12</sup>Zahrâ Shaji’i, *Nemâyandegân-e Majles-e qânuqozâri* (Tehran: Mo’aseseh-ye motale’ât va tahqiqât-e ejtemâ’i, 1985), 149-150.

## Modernizing the National Identity

Reza Shah was committed to building a unified nation state that maintained continuity with its pre-Islamic past and also benefited from the technologies of the modern world. This meant constructing a new national identity but not necessarily anti-Islamic identity that unified people of all ethnicities and religions under his command, moving them away from control by the other two patrimonial powers, the ulama and the tribal leaders.

In addition to modernizing Iran's commercial and communications infrastructures (roads, bridges, railroads, telephone, and telegraph) and implementing administrative reforms, Reza Shah recruited a new generation of intellectuals into his service. Three influential men in particular, Ali Akbar Dâvar (1888-1937), Abd al-Hussein Teymurtâsh (1883-1933), and Prince Firouz Nosrat al-Dowleh Farmanfarmâian (1889-1937), became architects of the new order. Minister of Justice Dâvar was a Swiss-educated lawyer, Minister of Court, and later Acting Foreign Minister. Teymourtsh was the scion of a wealthy aristocratic landowning family. Educated in Russia, he knew multiple languages, translated Russian literature into Persian, and had been inspired by the example of the Soviet Union. Finally, Foreign Minister Nosrat al-Dowleh Farmanfarmâian was a progressive Qâjâr aristocrat who had studied law in Beirut. This "potent triumvirate" guided and shaped Iranian politics behind the scenes.<sup>13</sup> Educated young men and women were employed to propagate a new nationalist identity, one that drew its inspiration not from Islam but from the ancient Persian Empire. The new ideology glorified the pre-Islamic "Aryan" heritage of Iran, changing the country's official name abroad from Persia to Iran, a name the Iranians had always used.

In addition, the new state was committed to improving the lot of Iran's minorities. *Jaziyeh* (religious taxes) on non-Muslims were abolished, overt persecution of religious minorities was reduced, Baha'is (while still not officially recognized), Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians were integrated

<sup>13</sup>Ansari, *Modern Iran*, 34, 43.

into mainstream society and their standard of living dramatically improved. All these were seen as a direct affront to the clerical establishment.

Even the language of the Qur'an was not immune. A national academy, the Farhangestan (Center for Culture), coined new Persian words to replace many words of Arabic origin and encouraged a strong sense of linguistic nationalism. Here the state was attempting to be even-handed in its treatment of the religious practices of Muslims and non-Muslims. In an attempt to culturally and linguistically unify the nation, Reza Shah banned the schools of religious minorities and closed down the printing presses of both religious and ethnic minorities, among them Armenian Christians, Baha'is, and Shi'i Azeris, who published in a language other than Persian or propagated non-Islamic religious traditions.<sup>14</sup> Minorities now sent their children to mixed public schools. Many took jobs in the civil service, entered professions like law or medicine, or started private businesses

In addition, new rituals had to be created or resurrected to strengthen a common sense of national identity, as against an exclusively Shi'i solidarity. Under the Pahlavis, many religious rituals were restricted while self-flagellation in Muharram was banned. Even individuals who held large religious commemorations (*rowzeh kvâni*) in their homes had to acquire permits from the municipality.<sup>15</sup>

Instead, the state encouraged national festivals like Nowruz (Persian New Year) and invented new ones, such as the birthday of the king; events that competed with religious commemorations for the public's attention.<sup>16</sup> By elevating national festivities above religious ones, the Pahlavis sought to foster a new and more inclusive ethnic identity. These policies and

<sup>14</sup>Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 163. For a discussion of how these changes impacted the Bahâ'i community and schools see Soli Shahvar, *The Forgotten Schools: The Baha'is and Modern*

*Education in Iran, 1899-1934* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

<sup>15</sup>Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, 40.

<sup>16</sup>Hamid Basiratmanesh, "Ravand-e kashf-e hejâb va vakonesh-e rowhâniyân," *Târikh-e mo'âser-e Iran*, 1:2 (1997), 73-92.

ceremonies antagonized the Shi'i establishment by dissolving the long-term political alliance between the shah and the ulama that had been a prominent feature of the Safavid and Qâjâr eras.

### **Modernizing the Army**

Until the rise of the Pahlavi dynasty, Iran had been ruled through tribal affiliations.<sup>17</sup> The establishment of a compulsory military draft was one of Reza Shah's most significant reforms. In June 1925, the Parliament established a national draft for men once they reached the age of twenty-one. A third of the national budget was devoted to the military. Additional sums were spent on communication, transportation, and industrialization projects that enhanced the nation's military capability. Now, for the first time, entire regions of the country, such as the south (the domain of tribal leaders), and all social classes were included in the army.

Initially the ulama, full-time theology students, and minority clerics were exempted from military service, but in 1938, despite great protests by many clerics, junior clerics were also drafted for the two years of active duty. Soon the army, which numbered 127,000 in 1941 (400,000 including reserves), became a vehicle of secular nationalism, and its growth influenced the nation's class, ethnic, and religious structures. The draft and the modern army contributed to urbanization. A new generation of Persian-speaking officers, trained mostly by Western advisors, replaced the old Cossack Brigade and the gendarmerie. Soldiers were enrolled in two-year literacy classes and given training in rudimentary trade skills. Modern schools had been an urban phenomenon until this time and most peasants acquired basic reading skills in religious classes. This was another way in which the state interfered in the religious domain. Rather than returning to their villages after completing their required service, many remained in cities and towns. Those who did return to their home villages shared their experiences of living in the more urban and secular culture of the army with others.

<sup>17</sup>Ansari, *Modern Iran*, 28.

Life in the barracks was rudimentary. Recruits were harshly treated, poorly fed, often inadequately trained, and kept in dilapidated barracks. Sanitation and medical care were scarce, if available at all. Morale was low when Reza Shah left in 1941. When the Allies invaded Iran in that year, the army, which had trained to be loyal first to the shah and then to the nation, simply collapsed. Many officers and soldiers deserted their barracks and returned to their towns and villages before the Allies reconsolidated them into a new military.<sup>18</sup> Yet, while the army crumbled in the face of foreign occupation, it continued to remain an agent of reform as young recruits carried back to their towns and villages the new urban training they had acquired.

### Sartorial Reforms

Clothing reforms were part of Reza Shah's project of modernizing the nation. The establishment of a universal dress code for urban men was enacted through a law ratified by the Seventh Majles (1928-1930), an entity now purged of vocal clerical opposition to the shah.<sup>19</sup> Adult urban men, except certified clerics, were ordered to wear European clothes and a hat that came to be known as the Pahlavi cap. Men felt awkward about the modern dress code and were reluctant to remove their headgear, a status symbol in Iran, and to shave their beards, a marker of adulthood. The form-fitting modern suits and accompanying hats were seen as undignified by the clerics and common folk, as they revealed too much of the shape of the body, and were deemed inappropriate for daily prayer. The beard was a sign that a boy had successfully transitioned to the status of respectable manhood, and could no longer be the object of desire by older men.<sup>20</sup> As a result,

<sup>18</sup>Stephanie Cronin, "Conscription and Popular Resistance in Iran, 1925-1941," *International Review of Social History*, 43 (1998), 470; See also Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, 54-57.

<sup>19</sup>Houchang E. Chehabi, "Staging the Emperor's New Clothes: Dress Codes and Nation-Building Under Reza Shah," *Iranian Studies*, 26:3-4 (1993), 209-233.

<sup>20</sup>For a discussion of premodern sexual practices see Everett Rowson, "The Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity," in *Medieval*

*Arabic Vice Lists: in Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991), 50-79; Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 15-17; Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 88-89.

the traditional middle classes resisted the modern attire and regulations defining proper appearance.

However, once the new dress code was adopted in urban society a series of other changes ensued that interfered with religious and status hierarchies. Uniform clothing erased the visual markers that had distinguished different social classes and ethnicities from one another. Articles of clothing or accessories such as headwear, robes, belts, and sometimes patches had separated young and old, poor and rich. They had also demarcated Jews, Zoroastrians, and Armenians from Shi'i Muslims. Because religious and ethnic minorities could not be distinguished by their different skin color, physical characteristics, or height, the adoption of men's European suits and hats accelerated social desegregation. Soon non-Muslim men were able to move out of their communities, attend school with Muslims, and go to the same bathhouses, coffeehouses, and pools; actions that violated Shi'i purity laws.<sup>21</sup>

In 1936, the shah encouraged a series of ministerial directives calling for an unveiling campaign; an even more controversial step in the eyes of the religious authorities. Iranian women's rights advocates had supported unveiling for more than a decade through gradual reform.<sup>22</sup> The directives called for the unveiling of female students, teachers, and wives of public employees, including civil and military officials. Unveiling meant removing the long enveloping *chador* and the *rubandeh* face cover. The state presented the new dress code as compatible with the shari'a and various directives called on the police to act cautiously in implementing the measure. Still various reports suggest that the police was often quite zealous in implementing the measure, not only removing face veils, and chadors but even head scarves

<sup>21</sup>For impact on the Jewish community see Habib Levy, *Târikh-e Yahud-e Iran* (Los Angeles: Sâzeman-e farhangi-ye Iraniân-e yahudi dar Kaliforniâ, 1984), vol. 3, 960-962.

<sup>22</sup>Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi and Afshin Martin-Asgari, "Unveiling Ambiguities: Revisiting

1930s Kashf-i hijab Campaign," in *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Muslim World: Gender, Modernism and the Politics of Dress*, ed. Stephanie Cronin (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 121-148.

worn in the dead of the winter. As far as the ulama were concerned, the order to unveil was a flagrant violation of shari'a law. The veil had set the physical boundary between acceptable and unacceptable gender roles. At the turn of the 20th century, upper class women had worn the full veil, while police arrested prostitutes who dared do the same. The unveiling campaign of the 1930s thus resulted in a severe crisis of identity and morality for many women and men.<sup>23</sup>

The Western aesthetics of the female body were not easily embraced, nor were the financial burdens of acquiring multiple outfits. Whether noncompliance arose from cultural clashes or financial hardships, local authorities arrested those who failed to conform. Soon urban women who persisted in wearing the veil were barred from cinemas, stores, bus stations, and even religious shrines. In an ironic twist, respectable women were ordered to unveil, while unmarried prostitutes were ordered to remain veiled. As Houchang Chehabi has argued, the purpose of the state was to "prevent the association of unveiling with unwholesome mores but traditional Iranians saw it as an attempt to turn the symbol of virtue into a symbol of vice."<sup>24</sup> In the holy cities of Qom and Mashhad, the new dress code resulted in major protests by the ulama and theology students and provoked altercations that the police violently suppressed, resulting in several deaths.

Like other reforms of this era, sartorial reforms yielded mixed results. The unified dress code was intended to foster a more cohesive and modern sense of national identity, but the new directive also created social turmoil and confusion. At the same time, the new dress code undermined appearance-

<sup>23</sup>Several documentary collections published in Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution described the authoritarian manner in which the police removed women's veils and the anger of lower class women who had little else to wear. See, for example, Morteza Ja'fari, Soghra Esmâ'ilzâdeh, and Ma'sumeh Farshchi, *Vaqe'eh-ye kashf-e hejab* (Tehran: Enteshârât-e sâzeman-e madârek-e farhangi-ye

enqelâb-e Islami, 1992). See also Reza Vatan-doust, "The Status of Iranian Women During the Pahlavi Regime," in *Women and the Family in Iran*, ed. Asghar Fathi (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 107-30; Vida Hamrâz, "Nahâdhâ-ye farhangi dar hokumat-e Reza Shah," *Târikh-e mo'aser-e Iran*, 1:1 (Spring 1997), 57.

<sup>24</sup>Houchang Chehabi, "Staging," 219.

based status, religious, and tribal distinctions, and substantially reduced gender and religious segregations.<sup>25</sup>

### **Health Reforms: Rules of Hygiene vs. Regulations of Purity**

Health reforms were among the most important achievements of this period. Unlike India, the adoption of modern sciences was not strictly a colonial project decided by imperialist institutions. But the experience was also not entirely along Western patterns. The application of modern sciences was “colonial” in the sense that it was limited to uses of science for remedying existing problems, rather than research and innovation.<sup>26</sup> But even within this limited scope, the results were remarkable. In an astonishingly short time, the state trained many new doctors, built new hospitals, and provided rudimentary health services in urban areas. The focal points of these initiatives were sanitation, immunization, and measures to curb venereal diseases. Many of these sanitary reforms, such as vaccination, involved the use of alcohol to clean the skin or treat infections and conflicted with Muslim law banning the use of alcohol.

With gradual education about health and hygiene, Iranian society became more socially integrated. Public bathhouses (now equipped with showers), coffeehouses, restaurants, and other public areas now served members of various religious minorities as well as women alongside Muslim men. Many in the bazaar and among the old and more religious middle classes resented these measures, although they acquiesced to them. They outwardly behaved as modern citizens of the state, ignoring religious hierarchies in daily trade with women and minorities, and thus publicly disregarded the taboos prohibiting shaking hands with them or sharing a meal. But they remained in a constant state of anxiety for fear of voiding their prayers and supplications

<sup>25</sup>Chehabi, “Staging,” 209-229; Haideh Sahim, “Clothing and Makeup,” in *Esther’s Children: A Portrait of Iranian Jews*, ed. Houman Sarshar (Los Angeles and Philadelphia: Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History and the Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 175-196.

<sup>26</sup>Cyrus Schayegh, *Who Is Knowledgeable Is Strong: Science, Class, and the Formation of Modern Iranian Society, 1900-1950* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 197.

to God, since they had ignored the proper rituals of purification and had intermingled with *najes* (impure) individuals.

## Modern Education and Sciences

The educational reforms in the Pahlavi era served the dual functions of modernizing society and curtailing the extensive authority of the ulama.<sup>27</sup> In 1926, elementary education became compulsory, and more than one percent of land taxes were devoted to its development. By 1933, more than 50,000 girls were attending 870 girls' schools, most of them public.<sup>28</sup> Still, these efforts benefited a minority of the population, and in 1940 only ten percent of all children were attending school.<sup>29</sup> Between 1936 and 1940, Iran also initiated an extensive campaign for adult literacy, which was mandatory for government employees. This campaign included reading, writing, arithmetic, and instruction in what was deemed essential to be a proper citizen.

The purpose of a modern, secular education in the Pahlavi era was not to foster critical thinking but to shape loyal Iranian citizens who would unquestioningly follow the shah's vision of development and nationalism.<sup>30</sup> To achieve this aim, a new body known as the Institute for the Development of Thought (*Sâzeman-e Pavarish-e Afkar*) became active in academic circles, alongside the new schools and colleges. Headed by the Germanophile Ahmad Matin Daftari, it comprised six committees. Its primary responsibility was to encourage modernity, nationalism, and loyalty to the shah through public lectures, radio programs, newspapers and magazines, textbooks, theatrical performances, and patriotic music.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup>David Menashri, *Education and the Making of Modern Iran* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

<sup>28</sup>Eliz Sanasârian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini* (New York: Praeger, 1982), 62.

<sup>29</sup>Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, 96-106. See also "Country Studies," published by Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress located at [www.country-studies.com/iran/](http://www.country-studies.com/iran/)

education.html. Retrieved on June 27, 2007.

<sup>30</sup>Menashri, *Education*, 111; Nikki R. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, 95; Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), 39-42.

<sup>31</sup>For the organization's by-laws and various reports of activities, see Mahmoud Delfâni, *Farhang setizi dar dowrân-e Reza Shah* (Tehran: Sâzeman-e asnâd-e melli-ye Irân, 1996), 1-3.

Leading intellectuals formed the central committee of the institute, which provided detailed guidelines to local branches.<sup>32</sup> Educators delivered weekly lectures under the supervision of the respective provincial governor.<sup>33</sup> Here again the state had made inroads into an area that until then had been within the exclusive purview of the religious establishment, which set guidelines for appropriate practices of the community.

It would be wrong to dismiss the Institute as an instrument of fascist propaganda, modeled after those in Central Europe. Many of the lectures were clearly beneficial and spoke to the basic needs of the community. Topics included first aid, bodily hygiene, kindergarten education, adult literacy, physical activity for the elderly, and warnings about alcoholism and prevention of venereal diseases. Here again the inclusion of non-Muslims and members of non-Persian ethnicities helped break down segregation and fostered a greater sense of tolerance and an inclusive form of nationalism. Similarly, the admission of women, both as lecturers and students, along with various lectures on the role of women in family and society, helped to improve women's public visibility and social status. Finally, these lectures and assemblies allowed young men and women (who otherwise attended sex-segregated schools) to socialize and thus encouraged modern companionate marriage as opposed to arranged marriages.

Some of the Institute's policies were, however, reminiscent of the state-imposed cultural measures adopted in the Soviet Union and later in Maoist China. According to the writer Saeed Nafisi, a member of the institute's

<sup>32</sup>Among them were Badi 'al-Zamâm Foruzânfar from Tehran University, the journalist Abdol Rahmân Faramarzi, and writers Muhammad Hejâzi and Saeed Nafisi. See Delfâni, *Farhang setizi*, 1–3.

<sup>33</sup>In 1939, the subjects emphasized were "Iran's Progress under the Pahlavi Regime" (fifteen lectures), followed by mandatory talks on "National Treasures" (ten lectures), "Biographies of Great Figures" (ten lectures), "History" (eight lectures), "Fighting Superstition and Worthless Belief" (six lectures), and

"Health and Hygiene" (six lectures). This programming was reinforced through radio programs that broadcasted news, music, theatrical productions, and brief educational programs. Large numbers participated. For example, in May of 1940, over 87 lectures were delivered in Tehran and the nation's provinces to more than 140,000 people. In March and April of 1941, 2,300 lectures were presented to more than 390,000 people. See Delfâni, *Farhang setizi*, 5, 30–34; Vida Hamrâz, "Nahâdhâ-ye farhangi," 62.

central committee, the new organization's purpose was "to unify the thoughts, desires, and wishes of people so as to achieve true unity among them. There were to be no differences or dualities among educated people insofar as thoughts, wishes, and desires were concerned."<sup>34</sup> Hence, the institute's goal was to create standardized individuals who would not dare to challenge the regime, or its regime of truth. At the same time, the Institute was challenging the hegemonic position of the *marja' taqlid* (source of emulation), to whom believers turned for guidance about significant matters.<sup>35</sup>

Reza Shah was nearly revered in this educational campaign. The state's carefully scripted lectures encouraged quasi-religious expressions of devotion to the shah. Iranians were supposed to "worship the king" and hope "they were worthy of sacrificing their lives to him." With bent heads, they vowed to "devote their lives to him."<sup>36</sup> Students wrote compositions expressing their adoration of the shah.<sup>37</sup> Thus gradually the shah and the state were taking over the space which had hitherto been reserved for senior and junior clerics.

### **Legal Reforms: Moving beyond the 'Urf and Shari'a Divide**

If there was any question about the extent of these reforms, and the challenge to the clerical establishment, the legal reforms of the 1930s left no doubt. Minister of Justice Ali Akbar Dâvar pushed for reforms that incrementally moved the judiciary away from the religious establishment. Dâvar had a

<sup>34</sup>Membership and regular participation in the meetings of the association were obligatory for teachers and academics. Governors, ministers, and high-ranking civil servants were required to attend with their wives. High school and elementary school instructors who attended received a certificate that facilitated promotions and pay raises. Teachers whose salaries exceeded 1,000 *rials* were required to subscribe to the institute's glossy journal, *Iran-e Emruz [Today's Iran]*. Civil servants, teachers, and academics who did not readily attend were tracked and reprimanded for their "lackadaisical" attendance. Hamrâz,

"Nahâdhâ-ye farhangi," 57.

<sup>35</sup>Delfâni, *Farhang setizi*, 87.

<sup>36</sup>Lecture by Hussain Mo'tamedi entitled "Sense of Devotion to the King and the Nation," in Delfâni, *Farhang setizi*, 56-60.

<sup>37</sup>Traditional limits enforced by the state also interfered with creative expressions. When a group of actors performed a love story in a theater, the Institute sent a directive banning the performance of "love scenes" in public. This meant many classical Persian epics, such as Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, or Nezami Ganjavi's *Khosrow and Shirin*, could not be performed. Delfâni, *Farhang Setizi*, 126.

distinguished pedigree. Before going to law school in Switzerland, he attended the elite Dar al-Fonun school of higher education in Tehran. In the 1920s, when he returned from Geneva, he served two consecutive terms in the Fourth and Fifth Parliament. He was also a leading figure of the Radical Party (1921) and publisher of the newspaper *Mard-e Azad* (1923).<sup>38</sup>

Dâvar dismantled the old Ministry of Justice and created a new one in an attempt to dislodge the clerics from their position of authority. Lawyers, prosecutors, and judges, many of them clerics, either left the system or adapted to the new situation. Dressed in Western suits, aspiring clerics received crash courses in modern law. New courts were formed throughout the nation, which maintained regular hours and aimed at speedy resolution of cases, sometimes through arbitration.

A new Civil Code replaced some shari'a laws with modern ones while unifying and codifying others. The Civil Code was derived from a variety of European sources, such as the Code Napoleon and the French Court of Cassation (Court of Appeals), as well as the shari'a.<sup>39</sup> Iranian minorities (including Sunnis) were permitted to follow their own religious requirements in personal and family matters, such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Although this provision delayed the adoption of modern universal marriage and divorce laws for Iranian women, it encouraged minorities to bring their disputes before the new courts.

<sup>38</sup>Dâvar remained the principal legal architect of the regime. In 1923, he had presented a novel interpretation of the 1907 Supplementary Laws to permit Reza Khan to become both minister of war and prime minister. In 1925, he engineered the Constituent Assembly, which transferred the monarchy to the Pahlavis, despite vehement opposition by stalwart constitutionalists such as Taqizadeh and Mossadeq. In 1927, he helped the shah abrogate the infamous Capitulation Rights, which for a century had granted extra-territorial jurisdiction to European employees

and Iranians under Western protection, Westerners could now be held accountable for breaches of the law in Iranian courts. See Zerang, *Tahavvol*, vol.1, 348–58.

<sup>39</sup>Zerang, *Tahavvol*, vol 1, 284. Also see Ali Gheissari, "Constitutional Rights and the Development of Civil Law in Iran, 1907-1941," in *Iran's Constitutional Revolution: Politics, Cultural Transformations, and Transnational Connections*, eds. H. E. Chehabi and Vanessa Martin (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 78.

The new Civil Code benefited women in other areas. In 1930, registering formal marriages (*'aqd-e da'em*) and divorces became mandatory. This reduced the problem of undocumented (formal) wives, who previously could not prove their marital status, but did not address the problem of men secretly taking temporary wives. Once marriage contracts were registered in civil bureaus, it became easier for urban women to include stipulations in these contracts, such as the right to divorce if the husband took a second formal wife.<sup>40</sup> In urban middle-class areas, the median age of marriage for girls had risen to about fifteen or older. In response, the state raised the legal age of marriage for girls from nine to thirteen. It also set up special courts whose sole purpose was to enforce the new family laws. These family courts prosecuted both the men who married underage girls and the parents of such girls.<sup>41</sup>

As Reza Shah's power grew, his authority superseded that of local governments and paved the way for a more centralized judicial system. Many Qâjâr princes and provincial authorities, who had refused to abide by the rulings of the Ministry of Justice in the Constitutional era, had no choice but to do so. Resistance to central government officials was declared a crime. With the exception of the shah, the royal family, their cronies, and the police, those who flouted the law could receive a prison sentence; this also included some clerics who had lost their privileged status before the law.

Although the judicial reforms of this era are regarded as some of the most important accomplishments of the First Pahlavi Era, grave miscarriages of justice were also carried out in the name of the law. To defend the interests of the state, a series of special tribunals was established. Dâvar frequently bent the law to fit the shah's agenda and give it a veneer of

<sup>40</sup>Baqer 'Aqeli, *Ruz shomar-e târikh-e Iran* (Tehran: Namak, 1990), vol. 1, 260; Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, 98; Sanasârian, *The Women's Rights Movement*, 62. This right to a prenuptial contract had been granted to

women under Islamic law but was not always practiced.

<sup>41</sup>See *Mozâkerât-e Majles [Proceedings of the Ninth Majles]* (1923-1925), vol. 9, 1718-1726.

constitutionality. A special tribunal confiscated land and property for the shah on various pretexts. Another special tribunal tried elite members of the government bureaucracy and often handed down lenient sentences. Finally, a military tribunal processed civilian complaints against members of the military and often safeguarded military interests in such cases.<sup>42</sup>

Though known for his own financial honesty and integrity, Dâvar reluctantly compiled dossiers against friends when the shah ordered him to do so. He charged close friends with embezzlement, and then helplessly stood by as old confidants were imprisoned by the state or suddenly died in prison.<sup>43</sup> In the first few years of the shah's reign, some constitutionalists, including Mossadeq, stood up to Dâvar and questioned the unlimited authority and power he had allocated to the judiciary. But most dissenters soon became quiet, fearing for their lives. In the end it was all too much for Dâvar, who took his own life, joining the sad end of Teymurtâsh, Firuz, and numerous other intellectuals who were imprisoned or lost their lives in this tragic pact with authoritarianism which aimed at achieving secularism and reform in Iran.

### ***New Religious Discourses: Qom and Tehran***

The Pahlavi project of creating a modern nation state was combined with support for clerics who advocated a rationalist reading of Islam and did not challenge the regime. Since these religious reformers continued to work and even flourish in the 1920s and 1930s, we may conclude that a more direct path towards religious reform was continued alongside state building.

A key reformer of the period was Shariat Sangelaji of Tehran who built on the earlier arguments of the rationalist school until his untimely death in 1944.<sup>44</sup> In his classic work, *Key to an Understanding of the Qur'an* (1940),

<sup>42</sup>See Zerang, *Tahavvol*, vol. 1, 467.

<sup>43</sup>Baqer 'Aqeli, *Dâvar va 'Adliyah* (Tehran: Elmi, 1990), 270-310.

<sup>44</sup>Unlike 'Ali Akbar Hakamizâdeh, editor of *Homâyoun*, and Ahmad Kasravi, Sangelaji remained a cleric throughout his life.

Sangelaji made space for science, including social science, and argued for its co-existence with the Qur'an.<sup>45</sup> Much like Sheikh Hadi Najmabadi, Sangelaji interpreted the concept of *towhid* to mean a strict monotheism that disapproved veneration of saints and imams. He devoted an entire book to the rejection of intercession (*shafa'at*) and challenged common practices associated with it.<sup>46</sup> He also took issue with the institution of *taqlid* (emulation), the idea that in all significant matters of daily life each Shi'i practitioner must scrupulously emulate one particular *marja'* (source of emulation). In this way Sangelaji undermined some core principals of Usuli Shi'ism and paved the ground for a Pan-Islamic discourse.

Sangelaji gave public sermons and published his views freely at a time when the state banned most other forms of dissent. As a result, some have argued that he worked for the state, while others have accused him of harboring Babi and Baha'i sympathies and trying to gain supporters for these dissident religions.<sup>47</sup> Ehsân Tabari (1917-1989), a founding member and key theoretician of the Tudeh Party as well as an open atheist, provides a different interpretation of Sangelaji and religious reformers of this period:

To some extent, and indirectly, Reza Shah encouraged religious "reform." When individuals such as Shariat Sangelaji and Seyyed Ahmad Kasravi . . . disseminated their views without any fear and propagated a new religious discourse, they must have had the approval of the police. This does not mean that Sangelaji or Kasravi were voicing the opinions of the state, far from it. There was simply an agreement of opinions,

<sup>45</sup>I have consulted the fifth edition of this work. See Shariat Sangelaji, *Kelid-e fahm-e Qur'an be enzemâm-e barâhin-e Qur'an* (5th ed.; Tehran: Danesh Press, SH 1323/1944), 201-202. For a detailed study of Sangelaji see Ali Rahnama, *Shi'i Reformation in Iran* (Surrey: Ashgate Press, 2015), who kindly shared his monograph with me before publication.

<sup>46</sup>See Shariat Sangelaji, *Towhid, ebâdat (yektâ*

*parasti*) (3rd ed.; Tehran: n.p., SH 1327/1948). I have not seen the first edition, which seems to have appeared in 1943.

<sup>47</sup>For an example of the latter argument see the conclusion to Seyyed Meqdad Nabavi Razavi, "Negâhi tahlili be takâpuhâ-ye fekri-ye Shariat Sangelaji," *Emamat pajuhi*, 7:1 (Winter SH 1390/2011): 249-271.

each from his own perspective, as happens quite often in history . . . Reza Shah, who was opposed to religion in its conventional form and in the form that Seyyed Hassan Modarress represented, wanted to cultivate a religious interpretation that agreed with his views, the better to serve his politics.<sup>48</sup>

Another individual who made a more visible contribution to the project of religious reform was Ayatollah Abdol Karim Hâeri of Yazd (1859-1937 CE), the ranking cleric who expanded the Qom center of religious learning. Under the leadership of Hâeri, Qom became an important *howzâ*, i.e., a major center of Shi'i learning with multiple seminaries where several ayatollahs resided. The remainder of this article will explore the views of Hâeri and his circle and the project of creating a modern Shi'i discourse in Qom.

### **The Qom Rationalists: Ayatollah Hâeri, *Homâyoun*, and the *Howzâ***

Hâeri was born near Yazd and studied in Najaf where he became a distinguished *marja'*. He then received patronage from the family of Aqa Mohsen (d. 1910), a member of the upper classes of the city of Arak, and moved to establish a religious seminary there at the urging of Aqa Mohsen's son. His arrival in Arak, about 175 miles south of Tehran, coincided with the Constitutional Revolution. Hâeri enthusiastically joined the constitutionalist cause and became a leader of the newly formed *anjoman* (council) of the town.<sup>49</sup> This political involvement ended badly for him. Not only was he criticized by the traditional religious establishment, but also by Aqa Mohsen, who sided with the anti-constitutionalists. Subsequently, Aqa Mohsen withdrew his financial support, forcing Hâeri to quietly leave town with his family.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup>See Ehsân Tabari, "Shariat Sangelaji," in *Jame'eh-ye Iran dar dowrân-e Reza Shah* (n.p.: Hezb-e Toudeh Iran, 1978), 91-96, available at Enteshârât-e anjoman-e doustdârân-e Ehsân Tabari, [www.tabari.blogspot.com/](http://www.tabari.blogspot.com/)

<sup>49</sup>See the account by a historian of Arak, Ebrahim Dehgân, *Noor-e mobin* (Arak: Farvardin

Press, SH 1331/1953), 19-20, cited in Farhang Rajaei, *Islamism and Modernism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 53-54.

<sup>50</sup>See Rajaei's interview in 1990 with Ayatollah Hassan Bâdkoobei of Arak, one of the contributors to the journal *Homâyoun*, in Rajaei, *Islamism and Modernism*, 54.

Though there is no evidence that he abandoned his reformist views, this chapter of Hâeri's life made him quite cautious about overt political engagement. Hâeri settled in Karbala and preoccupied himself with religious activities, rather than in nearby Najaf where the ulama were embroiled in constitutional debates. After the death of Aqa Mohsen, he returned to Arak, where his reputation grew steadily.

Eventually Hâeri was invited to Qom, where he settled in 1921. In the decade that followed, he invited other clerics to join him and help to make Qom a recognized religious center. In 1923, Qom's reputation was enhanced when nine clerics, including two prominent marja's from Iraq sought protection there after issuing a fatwa against British mandate in Iraq. Their extraordinary stay in Qom, which lasted a year, boosted the town's reputation and many eager theology students and clerics moved there to be in proximity of these learned Najaf ulama. However, neither Haeri, nor Reza Khan showed much enthusiasm for the continued stay of these clerics and within a year they were ushered back to Iraq.

Biographies of Shi'i dignitaries published in Iran since the Islamic Revolution have trouble explaining Hâeri's relative freedom during the Reza Shah period and are at great pains to explain his amicable relations with the state. Since historians writing in Iran over the last thirty years have generally had to portray Reza Shah as hostile towards Islam, it is hard to explain why the Pahlavi regime allowed Qom to become a major religious center rivaling Najaf. Ali Davâni, in his multi-volume *History of the Clerical Movement* in Iran, devotes a scant two pages to the founder of the Qom theological seminaries, and much of this focuses on the anti-clericalism of Reza Shah and Atatürk. Davâni tries to justify Hâeri's actions by concluding that he compromised with the Pahlavi regime so he could achieve his goal of training a future generation of "activist clerics for Iran and the Shi'i world."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup>Ali Davâni, *Nehzat-e rowhâniyun-e Iran* (SH 1377/1998), 559. (Tehran: Markaz-e asnâd-e enqelâb-e eslâmi,

But Hâeri's amicable relationship with the Pahlavi regime, as with Sangelaji's, may have stemmed from their general agreement with many Pahlavi reforms; something many historians writing in the Islamic Republic cannot admit. We know Hâeri approved of modern science and medicine, and encouraged the abandonment of those Shi'i rituals and practices that could spread disease. Hâeri also continued the practice of building institutions devoted to social welfare, an early goal of the constitutionalists. Eventually Qom became something of a refuge for clerics from Tehran, Mashhad, and elsewhere who fled the onslaught of what Farhang Rajaee has called the "expansion of secular modernism in all aspects of Iranian life" under Reza Shah.<sup>52</sup> But another attraction might have been the fact that under Hâeri's leadership Qom embarked on the project of becoming a center of Shi'i modernism.

Hâeri established the first privately funded hospital, the first public cemetery, the first public library, and also built houses for the poor and especially for homeless widows and children.<sup>53</sup> When a 1934 flood destroyed many homes in Qom, residents received immediate and efficient relief from the howzâ, far better than what the central government provided.<sup>54</sup> Using Shi'i religious taxes from the community, Hâeri also established a regular stipend for theology students, which they continued to receive until they reached a position of leadership in the community or passed away. By 1935, Qom boasted fourteen ranking mojtaheds teaching 700 students in more than a dozen religious seminaries and clerical homes.<sup>55</sup>

In the same period Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949), a local teacher and imam in Egypt, built the Muslim Brotherhood through similar social and philanthropic activities and thus created a powerful dissident organization. Unlike the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, however, the Qom howzâ remained a center of religious learning.

<sup>52</sup>Rajaee, *Islamism and Modernism*, 55.

<sup>53</sup>Abdolrafi' Haqiqat (Rafi'), *Târikh-e nehza-tha-ye fekri-ye Iranian dar dowreh-ye qâ-jâri-yeh* (Tehran: Sherkat-e mo'alefan va motarjeman-e Iran, 1989), vol. 3, 1481.

<sup>54</sup>For a description of the raised funds, see Mirza Abdol Hussein ibn al-Din, "Rowhâniyat dar Iran," in *Homâyoun*, 3 (Azar SH 1313/1934), 8.

<sup>55</sup>For a list of the schools, see Mirza Abdol Hussein ibn al-Din, "Rowhâniyat," 8.

Moreover, Hâeri maintained amicable relations with the Pahlavi regime. For example, in 1924, when Reza Khan, at the urging of major clerics such as Hâeri, withdrew his support for republicanism and asked to be named the new monarch, the Qom establishment silently approved. Likewise, when a majority of clerics criticized the military draft in 1925 and demanded to be exempted as a class, Hâeri remained silent. But there was a limit to Hâeri's modernism. Gender reformed a red line for Shi'i modernism. Hâeri objected to the 1936 policy of unveiling. He sent a telegram stating that, "Although until now I have not interfered in any [public] affairs, I hear that these days some measures that explicitly contradict the Ja'fari path [the major Shi'i school of jurisprudence] and Islamic law have been adopted, which will be hard to tolerate and remain restrained about."<sup>56</sup>

To gauge the degree to which Hâeri and other proponents of Shi'i modernism were willing to incorporate new scientific, educational, and social paradigms of secular modernity into their teachings, we will now turn to the respected Qom journal *Homâyoun* (October 1934- July 1935), which provides a surprisingly candid view of the howzâ in the 1930s. The diverse articles in this journal suggest there was a plurality of views on modernity among howzâ scholars, but they also divulge areas where compromise with modernity seemed impossible.

### ***Homâyoun* and Religious Reformers in Qom**

Hâeri never published a treatise outlining his views on Shi'i modernity. But *Homâyoun*, which was published with the blessing of the howzâ and occasionally quoted Hâeri, is a good place to sample his views and those of other reformists in Qom. The financial backer of the paper was Muhammad Homâyounpour from Qom, after whom the paper was named. The editor was Ali Akbar Hakamizâdeh, who published a diverse number of views on Shi'i modernism, including followers of Sangelaji and those of another well-known reformer, Seyyed Ali Akbar Borq'e'i.

<sup>56</sup>Mohammad Razi, *Âsar al-hojja, ya târikh va dâyerat al-ma'âref-e howzeh-ye elmiyeh-ye*

*Qom* (Qom: Dâr al-Ketâb, SH 1332/1953), 51, quoted in Rajaei, *Islamism and Modernism*, 59.

*Homâyoun* appeared as a small booklet of about 30 pages. Soon the monthly journal found readers outside Qom and Tehran. By spring of 1935, it had representatives in 11 other cities, including Tabriz, Rasht, Isfahan, Ardabil, Langarud, Bam, Golpaygan, and Gonbad Qabus.<sup>57</sup> *Homâyoun* paid lip service to the idea of monarchy and cited relevant hadiths to suggest that God had required respect even for pagan kings, thereby providing justification for its friendly attitude towards Reza Shah without vouching for his piety.<sup>58</sup> There were articles in support of Iranian nationalism, the Persian language and Persian literature, essays on traditional and modern ways of maintaining health and hygiene, reports and translations that introduced modern science and occasional satirical vignettes that revealed what passed as a joke in the 1930s among seminarians.

As the discussion below will demonstrate, the journal followed five main objectives in its short history: (1) it continued Najmabadi's project of creating a more rationalist Shi'i discourse; (2) it built on the tradition of Jamal al-Din Afghani to establish a Pan-Islamic discourse that united Sunnis and Shi'ites; (3) it continued the social democrats' criticism of unfettered capitalism, but focused more on the ethical and spiritual shortcomings of a free market economy. At the same time, it lambasted "Godless materialism" and attempted to discourage youth from joining socialist groups; (4) it also backed the modernist goal of popularizing science, especially modern medicine, and placed great emphasis on health, hygiene, and sports. All of these goals were in general harmony with those of the state and indeed facilitated the regime's agenda of creating a modern nation state that fought the expansion of communist ideology among its youth.

### **Continuing the Project of Building a Rationalist Shi'i Discourse**

The primary goal of *Homâyoun* was to continue the rationalist Shi'i discourse, despite some of its differences with Najmabadi, Dehkhoda<sup>59</sup>, and

<sup>57</sup>See *Homâyoun*, 7 (Farvardin SH 1314/1935), back cover page.

<sup>58</sup>Mirza Ali Va'ez Esfahâni, "Ma'mure fâzeleh," *Homâyoun*, 3 (Azar SH 1313/1934), 9-10.

<sup>59</sup>For Dehkhoda's contribution to the project of

religious reform see our forthcoming introduction to Janet Afary and John R. Perry (eds.), *Ali Akbar Dehkhoda's Charand o Parand* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

Sangelaji. To bring back the youth to the religious fold, *Homâyoun* appealed to spiritual, ethical and medical arguments as justifications for religious practices. Each issue discussed one particular ritual or theological practice and analyzed it in light of modern scientific or psychological findings. Various articles suggested that prayer and fasting had intrinsic spiritual values as well as moral and physical ones. The journal provided healthful guidelines for religious practices, advising believers to avoid *qosl* (ritual immersion) in a dirty pool of water, for example, and gave instructions on how to maintain sanitary bathing and drinking water. These articles indirectly supported the new state projects of the Pahlavi era, which encouraged greater hygiene and avoidance of public bathhouses at a time when the state was busy installing running water for showers in urban homes.<sup>60</sup>

*Homâyoun* adopted psychological, scientific, and spiritual discourses in its discussions of God and Islam and avoided traditional strictures, which emphasized fear of God's punishment in the afterlife or promise of paradise. It argued that a Shi'ism based on reason (*kherad*) and social welfare (*mardomi*) was a balm to many injuries of the modern world.<sup>61</sup> God was to be comprehended through scientific principles of the universe and not through fear, superstition, or belief in miracles. Fasting in the month of Ramadân had benefits, for it improved digestion and strengthened one's resolve. Ramadân was also a time for reflection about life, for thinking about the spiritual aspects of existence. The problem was that most practitioners ignored such spiritual dimensions. *Homâyoun* therefore criticized the nightly festivities after breaking of the fast (*iftar*) that continued till early morning, when people partied, drank alcohol and gambled, and then slept during the day.<sup>62</sup>

*Homâyoun* also called for the "purification" of Islamic texts by removing irrationalities. In the tradition of the Mu'tazilites, Hakamizâdeh argued

<sup>60</sup> Ali Akbar Hakamizâdeh, "Din va donyâ," *Homâyoun*, 1 (Mehr SH 1313/1934), 30.

<sup>61</sup> Tantâvi Jowhari, "Ainstain," *Homâyoun*, 8 (Ordibehesht SH 1314/1935), 13.

<sup>62</sup> Mirza Abd al-Hussein ibn al-Din, "Mâh-e Ramadân va rouzeh gereftan-e mâ," *Homâyoun*, 4 (Day SH 1313/1934), 5.

that “most prophetic hadiths were fabricated” and had to be purged from scripture. Scholars had to systematically analyze the chain of transmission accompanying each hadith, to determine its accuracy and trustworthiness. Then the unsubstantiated ones should be eliminated from the Shi’i corpus. To proselytize Islam in the Western world, one had to “first cleanse Islam of these pollutants, then send it to the market.”<sup>63</sup> Otherwise, not only would the Muslim world fail in attracting new converts, but Muslim youth would also abandon the faith and gravitate towards materialist ideologies.<sup>64</sup>

Traditionally, the miracle of the Qur’an has been linked to the lyrical beauty of its pronouncements. A more advanced rationalist reading of the Qur’an paid attention to the substance of the text, which was less understood by previous generations. *Homâyoum* embarked on an early hermeneutical discourse to make this point clearer, suggesting that each generation read and understood the text in a different way: “the Qur’an reveals itself according to the understanding of its audience and not the [depth] of [the Qur’an].”<sup>65</sup> In another article M. Shirazi argued:

Each person has access to the truth that is visible in the horizon of that individual . . . If an animal, a child, a farmer, and an engineer enter a prairie they all look around but each sees a different thing. The animal thinks only of eating and grazing, the child thinks of playing and running, the farmer of the crop and what the land might yield, and the engineer of the geometrical properties of the land in comparison to other properties. The Qur’an is the same. Each person sees it according to his own vision.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup>Ali Akbar Hakamizâdeh, “Maqsud-e man,” *Homâyoum*, 8 (Ordibehesht SH 1314/1935), 11.

<sup>64</sup>Hakamizâdeh, “Maqsud-e Man,” 10-12.

<sup>65</sup>A. H., “Qur’an va do doust-e nâdan,” *Homâyoum*, 4 (Day SH 1313/1935), 12. A. H. probably stands for Hakamizâdeh, Abdolvahhâb Farid Tonekâboni, a student of Sangelaji, occasionally contributed to the journal and argued for a Pan-Islamic position and an end

to Shi’i-Sunni divide. This was probably an indirect way for Sangelaji’s views to get aired in the journal. See Abdolvahhâb Farid Tonekâboni, “Ekhtelâfât-e dini,” *Homâyoum*, 6 (Esfand SH 1313/ 1935), 17.

<sup>66</sup>M. Shirazi, “Qur’ân va belâghat va ma’ni-ye sathi-ye,” *Homâyoum*, 4 (Day SH 1313/1935), 24-25.

Finally, the beginnings of a non-intercessory interpretation of the Muharram story and the martyrdom of Hussein also appear in some of the articles by Hakamizadeh. People generally tolerated an unbelieving ruler, he wrote, but not a cruel one. The Umayyads were not very committed to Islam and did not deserve to remain rulers but the community did not see them as excessively cruel, despite all the atrocities they had committed towards the family of Ali. Hussein could only prevail if he proved the cruelty of the Umayyads. To accomplish this deed he chose to face death with his seventy-two male companions, and deliberately brought some of their women and children into the battlefield. His brother Hassan did not have such a choice. The Sixth caliph, Mu'awiyyeh, was an astute man and would not have made a martyr out of Hassan. Rather, if the second imam had not compromised, Mu'awiyyeh would have initially captured and then released Hassan, in a magnanimous gesture, further insulting the clan of Ali. But Yazid fell into Hussein's moral trap, killing him and his followers. Yazid therefore brought eternal shame to the Ummayyads, something which eventually undermined their rule.<sup>67</sup>

Hakamizadeh's new interpretation of the story of Muharram achieved two goals. It called for a rationalist reading of the story of Muharram, and thereby continued the journal's argument that a belief in saintly intercession (*shafa'at*) to absolve one's personal sins was akin to polytheism. The new narrative also turned Hussein into a political figure in an ethical battle. Hussein was a willing agent in his own death, not a victim, a shrewd political figure who fought for the abstract cause of establishing the Shi'i version of Islam as the true faith. In this way Hakamizadeh placed the founding blocs for a rationalist and universalist Shi'ism, capable of evangelizing to a more educated youthful population, and thereby recruiting a new generation into what would eventually be called Political Islam.

<sup>67</sup>Ali Akbar Hakamizâdeh, "Fadâkâri barâ-ye din," *Homâyoum*, 8 (Ordibehesht SH 1314/1935), 30-32.

## Building on Afghani's Discourse of Pan Islamism

One of the most important goals of *Homâyoun* was to unify the Muslim community by narrowing the wide gulf between Sunnis and Shi'is. Building on the earlier work of Jamal al-Din Afghani, *Homâyoun* cultivated an anti-colonial and Pan-Islamic discourse. The editors hoped that a unifying Pan-Islamic discourse would help the Middle East prevent excessive Europeanization. To accomplish this goal, which had the explicit blessing of Hâeri, *Homâyoun* embarked on a three-pronged strategy: First, it played down the historical differences between Sunnis and Shi'is, calling them irrelevant and outdated. The two branches of Islam agreed on the principles that mattered, i.e., concepts such as the one-ness of God, the prophecy of Muhammad, and Judgment Day. Their differences were predominantly over "subsidiary" issues: For example, Shi'is did not recognize the legitimacy of the Sunni caliphs, while Sunnis did not recognize the descendants of Ali and Fatimah as divinely anointed leaders of the Muslim community. But times had changed. The Sunni caliphate had come to an end with the fall of the Ottoman Empire, and there was no (Shi'i) Hidden Imam in the horizon. Why, therefore, should the two fight over such non-existent issues?<sup>68</sup> *Homâyoun* concluded this argument with a statement from Hâeri, "It is better for Muslims today in our world to refrain from such conflicts."<sup>69</sup>

A few other "subsidiary" issues were matters of eschatology, including the concept of bodily resurrection. Writers in *Homâyoun* maintained that while belief in resurrection was a requirement of the faith, belief in bodily resurrection was not, certainly not in the way that *towhid* or the recognition of Muhammad's prophecy were. Here, the journal and howzâ scholars were upholding what medieval Iranian philosophers such as Fârabi and Avicennâ and some Mu'tazilites had maintained, that a denial of *physical* resurrection was permissible.<sup>70</sup> Hâeri

<sup>68</sup>Seyyed Mostafâ Safâ'i Khwânsri, "Ekhtelâfât-e dîni," *Homâyoun*, 5 (Bahman SH 1313/1935), 2-3.

<sup>69</sup>Khwânsârî, "Ekhtelâfât," 3.

<sup>70</sup>See Marcia Hermansen, "Eschatology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 319.

contributed to this debate. His position was that while he himself believed in (bodily) resurrection, such a belief was not a requirement of Islam or Shi'ism. In addition, "believers were *not* required to have an opinion on this matter" based on the recommendation of their designated *marja'*, and could choose not to have a position at all. Hâeri concluded, "In our time we must protect people's religion in other ways and such discussions have no benefit other than creating divisions among Muslims and fomenting dangerous enmity."<sup>71</sup>

A student of Sangelaji also contributed to this discourse. Sangelaji had rejected the idea of bodily resurrection in his well-known sermons and even questioned the return of the Hidden Imam.<sup>72</sup> To protect himself from the wrath of the orthodox clerics, his views were initially published under the name of his student, Farid Tonekâboni, in a book entitled *Islam and Return*.<sup>73</sup>

Tonekâboni joined the discussion in Homâyoun. He argued that a much more substantial reform was needed. Usuli Shi'ites had to stop offending Sunnis and other schools of Shi'ism and return to the Qur'an and prophetic hadiths, ignoring the vast majority of subsequent religious texts. If Iranian Shi'ites stopped cursing the sixth caliph, Yazid, and his deputy Shemr ibn Dhi al-Jawshan, who were regarded as responsible for the death of Hussein, and if they showed respect towards the prophet's wife, Aisha, then perhaps these enmities between Sunnis and Shi'ites would subside.<sup>74</sup> Tonekâboni additionally called on the Shi'ite community to refrain from "misrepresenting the Qur'an" by claiming that the designation of Ali as the divinely appointed successor of Muhammad had originally been in the text, but was deleted during Uthman's caliphate (r. 644-656). This minority Shi'i position had been advocated by some Shi'i clerics including Ya'qub al-Kulayni (d. 941), the most reknown compiler of Shi'i hadiths and author of *Kitab al-*

<sup>71</sup>See the statement by Hâeri in *Homâyoun*, 5 *roj'at*. (Tehran: n.p., n.p.).  
(Bahman SH 1313/1935), 1.

<sup>72</sup>Nabavi Razavi, "Negâhi," 253-254.

<sup>73</sup>Abdolvahhab Farid Tonekâboni, *Islam va*

<sup>74</sup>Aisha is a reviled figure in Shi'ism because she fought Ali in the Battle of Camel in 656 CE. See Tonekâboni, "Ekhtelfât-e dini," 18.

*Kâfi*. Later, some Sunnis had used this particular claim to accuse Shi'is of believing in an altered Qur'an which amounted to calling them apostates.<sup>75</sup>

Hence Hakamizâdeh and Tonekâboni (the voice of Sangelaji), with occasional brief confirmations from Hâeri, tried to eliminate major points of contention between the two branches of Islam. These essays were both in harmony with *Homâyoun's* project of building greater unity among Muslims of the world and in support of the nation-building project of the Pahlavi era, as they were premised on cultivating a new Iranian identity that was inclusive of all Muslims. However, these were extraordinary arguments for a society used to cursing the Sunni caliphs or Aisha in its annual rituals, especially since these essays were combined with others in *Homâyoun* that fundamentally questioned many Shi'i rituals, especially the excessive lamentation and self-flagellation of Muharram.

Subsequently, some of the clerics of Qom protested against this drastic diminution of the importance of rituals and texts. After all, the rituals were the chief source of income for most clerics and the interpretation of various Shi'i hadiths and texts their *raison d'être*. In response Hakamizâdeh backed off slightly. He criticized Tonekâboni and stated that his journal was not willing to go as far as the Sangelaji school had done, and he subsequently discontinued all letters to the editor on this subject.<sup>76</sup>

### **Selective Modernity: Science Explains the Supernatural**

Memories of atrocities in Europe during the First World War had not receded in the Middle East. *Homâyoun* reminded its readers that while the Western world pretended to be "civilized," it was capable of committing the greatest atrocities. Two decades earlier Europeans had torn each other apart and "for a while turned the earth, the sky, and the seas into a hell fire and who knows how much worse they might do in the future."<sup>77</sup> Hence, one could not blindly follow

<sup>75</sup>For a discussion of this issue see Hossein Modarressi, "Early debates on the integrity of the Qur'an: a brief survey," *Studia Islamica*, 77 (1993), 37-38.

<sup>76</sup>Hakamizâdeh, "Ekhtelâfât-e dini," 5.

<sup>77</sup>Ali Akbar Hakamizâdeh, "Khodâparasti," *Homâyoun*, 1, (Mehr 1313/1934), 22-23.

Western civilization. *Homâyoun* made a big distinction between a moderate modernization (adopting some technological and scientific developments of the West) and Westernization (blind imitation of the West). Technical forms of knowledge (but not theoretical ones) in the fields of medicine and science were in the first category. Proper exercise, and new practices related to diet, health, and hygiene such as eating less meat, more vegetables, and avoiding added sugar were also worth following, especially since some of these recommendations could also be found in the sayings of Muslim sages.<sup>78</sup>

Examples of the second type of inappropriate knowledge that had to be avoided were the use of English, French, of Arabic words for which Persian synonyms were not yet coined. Kasravi, in particular, called for preservation of the Persian language from the onslaught of European and Arabic words in the pages of *Homâyoun*.<sup>79</sup> Wearing form-fitting European clothes and ties (for men), and using too much cosmetics (for women) were other examples of excessive modernization. Here again, there was substantial agreement between *Homâyoun*'s notion of a moderate appropriation of Western mannerisms and state policies.

Occasionally writers disagreed on how one should reconcile modern scientific findings with the Qur'an itself. Various hadiths could be explained away as unsubstantiated, but the same could not be done with Qur'anic verses. In *Homâyoun*'s view the Qur'an contained the kernel of all scientific truths in its revelations. The Qur'an did not include statements about "Newton's laws of gravity" and "Einstein's law of relativity;" rather, divine revelations were presented in an easily understandable language for the common folk.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup>Hakamizâdeh, "Din va donyâ," 28.

<sup>79</sup>See Ahmad Kasravi, "Iran," *Homâyoun*, 1 (Mehr SH 1313/1934), 13-15. Kasravi condemned superstitious practices and other "religious deviations." Later, his *Pak Dini* (Purity of Religion) movement would gain thousands of supporters. See also 'Ali Akbar

Hakamizdeh, "Zabân-e khonsâ," *Homâyoun*, 1 (SH 1313/1934), 15-17.

<sup>80</sup>A. H., "Qur'an va do doust-e nâdân," 10-11. Sangelaji was again bolder than Hakamizâdeh on this subject. He stated unequivocally that the Qur'an was not a manual for medical and scientific knowledge, only an ethical guide.

The struggle to “purify Islam” was wedded to the campaign for the eradication of superstitions with the help of modern science. Each issue of the journal contained articles about health and hygiene that directly contradicted cherished daily practices, ones that contributed to the spread of contagious diseases. Sometimes, as in the case of belief in genies (*jen*), the paper dismissed them as pre-Islamic concepts rooted in the Zoroastrian notion of Ahriman (Evil) and not monotheistic ones.<sup>81</sup> Other times, as in the case of communicating with the dead, *Homâyoun* resorted to science fictional explanations. Direct communication with the dead was impossible. However could a technology be invented one day that captured and amplified the voices of the long dead, voices that continued to reverberate in the universe even after the speaker was long gone, as the radio did for the living? Perhaps. But in general the paper rejected such conjectures as highly dubious.<sup>82</sup> Or perhaps scientists would find some medical explanation for the “evil eye.” These were all efforts to explain away folk opinions and claim that evil or good spirits had no place in a rationalist reading of Islam. Ultimately, all could be explained with the help of science and medicine, or else refuted.

### **Fighting Unethical Capitalism and “Godless” Materialism**

*Homâyoun* encouraged social welfare, helping the poor and needy, and community service, especially in times of need like natural disasters. While it objected to secular ideological movements, especially materialism and socialism, it nevertheless appropriated some of their leftist and anti-colonialist criticisms, and emphasized the ethical and spiritual degradation caused by capitalism. Modernization and industrialization had produced vast quantities of commodities and increased human comfort. At the same time, these new forms of production were responsible for great unhappiness in society and increased unemployment and suicide. There was a direct link between unhappiness and a capitalist economy. When human beings cared only for the material world, they lost their spiritual connection to other human beings.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Ali Akbar Hakamizâdeh, “Jengiri,” *Homâyoun*, 4 (Day SH 1313/ 1934), 14-15.  
<sup>82</sup> Ali Akbar Hakamizâdeh, “Sâ’âdat chist?” *Homâyoun*, 3 (Azar SH 1313/1935), 27-29.

<sup>83</sup> Khvâb-e Meqnâtisi va ehzr-e rouh,” *Homâyoun*, 3 (Azar SH 1313/1934), 18.

Here again, the state under Reza Shah was in general agreement with *Homâyoun*'s relentless attacks on "Godless materialism." Two years earlier in 1932 the Tudeh Party had launched its new underground theoretical journal, *Donya* (the world), the official organ of the Communist Party of Iran, and large numbers of youth were gravitating towards communism.<sup>84</sup> *Homâyoun*'s socially conscious Shi'i discourse aimed at turning students and workers back towards religion. Faith was essential for humanity because human beings were by nature cruel creatures, far worse than animals. A wolf would not tear apart another wolf, but humans were merciless towards other beings and even towards themselves. Without faith, they became uncontrollable monsters, putting the whole of society in danger.<sup>85</sup> This was a powerful argument against any form of materialism though it ignored the fact that throughout history many barbarities were also committed in the name of religion.

### **No Compromises with Women's Rights and the Rights of Non-Muslims**

In contrast to the modernizing pronouncements discussed above, *Homâyoun* found it absolutely impossible to support or even compromise with modern gender reforms. Women were portrayed as dimwitted creatures, bound by emotion rather than reason. Since a rationalist Islam required human beings who were capable of exercising reason, and since women were bereft of that capacity by nature, they were excluded from this project. Women could never be active, thinking, agents, only passive objects that were acted upon. Women's intellectual backwardness made it imperative that they obey their husbands and male guardians on all matters. In response to a question about whether a woman could make an independent vow (*nazr*) of her own, for example a vow to feed the poor, *Homâyoun* repeated the old line that "since women are mostly subject to their emotions, their vow is only correct if it is backed by their husband's permission."<sup>86</sup> It thus supported the patriarchal

<sup>84</sup>In 1936 the state imprisoned the group's leading theoretician, Taqi Arâni, and his associates known as the Group of 53.

<sup>85</sup>Hakamizâdeh, "Ekhtelâfât-e dini," 9.

<sup>86</sup>Ali Akbar, Hakamizâdeh, "Ranj-e bihoudeh," *Homâyoun*, 6 (Esfand SH 1313/1935), 31.

structure by preventing women from spending their husbands' money without the man's permission.

It was as if more than three decades of passionate journalistic writings and other struggle for greater rights for Iranian women had never happened. *Homâyoun's* writers were, as a whole, disdainful towards purely theoretical knowledge without immediate practical use. But the most useless type of education was found in pursuits like teaching women math or historical and geographical facts, issues "that were of no use to them." The only appropriate profession, and that only for a few, was to become midwives and treat women's gynecological illnesses. Even female teachers were not necessary. Educating them only led to their "gathering around the Ministry of Education and demanding teaching positions," an activity they were engaged in and that highly annoyed the clerics of Qom.<sup>87</sup>

In an article entitled "Respect for Women," the whole concept of women's rights was debunked. At a time when Iranian women were struggling for their elementary rights, *Homâyoun* claimed that women's rights was a ruse designed to undermine modesty norms of Islam and push women into indecent sexual practices. Stopping these discussions was a good deed, akin to removing a dish of poisonous honey placed before an idiot:

What rights have there been denied to the women in this nation? If we remove a [tempting] poisonous pot of honey sitting before an ignorant person, can we call this an abuse of rights . . . Those who claim such, regard women as lowest of all creatures, and this means they only want them for sexual pleasure and for frivolities. You flowers of the Garden of Nature! Do not be fooled by these falsehoods. Strictly avoid mingling with men, as you would flee a wild animal. Because no matter how decent and pure a man might be, he cannot resist sexual attraction, the strongest impulse of all.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Ali Akbar Hakamizâdeh, "Ranj-e bihoudeh," *Homâyoun*, 2 (Abân SH 1313/1934), 28.

<sup>88</sup> Alavi Taleqâni, "Ehterâm-e zan," *Homâyoun*, 1 (1 Mehr SH 1313/1934), 18.

And yet a very similar joke about honey, involving a teacher and a young male pupil, appeared in that same issue, reaffirming the routine nature of homoerotic discourse—and practices-- in seminary circles:

A boy came to his teacher and said, “I had a dream that your body was covered in honey and mine in impurities (*nejasat*).” The teacher said, “these are our actions that appear to you in a dream.” The student said, “Indeed! Afterwards I was licking your body and you were licking mine.”<sup>89</sup>

By 1934-35, following state directives, young female teachers in some public schools were asked to unveil. Their use of makeup, form-fitting clothes and high-heeled shoes, revealed a new type of agency, a way to direct the male gaze towards themselves and participate more fully in the process of mate selection, rather than be subject to marriages arranged strictly by their parents. Cinema likewise provided a space for covert dating, while gramophone and music recordings encouraged heterosexual intimacy. *Homâyoun* strenuously objected to these forms of agency, and called the new aesthetics of the body and forms of entertainment a violation of morality, an “intoxication with [Western] civilization.”<sup>90</sup>

There are many other examples of hostility to modern gender and sexual norms in the pages of *Homâyoun*, including repeated criticisms of women’s makeup, modern grooming practices for both men and women, unveiling, dancing, and young men and women’s interest in cinema and the gramophone. Rather than catalogue all these arguments here, I hope the examples above have suggested the two primary reasons for the journal’s opposition to modern gender and sexual norms: (1) modernity challenged a patriarch’s religiously sanctioned authority over wives, daughters, and sons; (2) modern gender norms facilitated women’s entry into the public sphere, including schools and the workforce, and thereby interfered with male prerogatives,

<sup>89</sup>Hakamizâdeh, “Dâstânâ-ye shirin,” *Homâyoun*, 1 (1 Mehr SH 1313/1934), 31. <sup>90</sup>Ali Akbar, Hakamizâdeh, “Tabliqât,” *Homâyoun*, 7 (Farvardin SH 1314/1935), 32.

including homosocial ones that gave men the right to publish flirtatious jokes about same-sex practices in a respectable Qom publication, a journal where Qur'anic verses were routinely quoted.

A second arena where Homâyoun endured no compromise with modernity concerned the supremacy of Islam over all other religions. Islam was to be propagated worldwide. Eventually “conquest and victory will be ours.” We should not be intimidated by our losses to imperialist powers for even if it takes until the last day of earth “Islam will rule the world.”<sup>91</sup> Islam had made an exception for People of the Book, whom *Homâyoun* referred to by the derogatory term *kâfar* (infidel). Those who belonged to pre-Islamic monotheistic religions could follow their religion if they paid their religious taxes (*jaizyeh*). But a mortad, one who had been a Muslim and then abandoned Islam, was not tolerated and “had to be killed.”<sup>92</sup> The irony of this essay is that it was published under the title of Sa'di's (d. 1291) renowned poem, “*Of one essence is the human race*,” a poem that has since been inscribed at the entrance of the United Nations building in New York City:

*Of one Essence is the human race,  
Thusly has Creation put the Base;  
One Limb impacted is sufficient,  
For all Others to feel the Mace.*<sup>93</sup>

While the poem is an affirmation of the unity of all people, regardless of religion, creed, nationality, race, and gender, *Homâyoun* read it differently and concluded, “if one limb of the body does not behave as required, then it is paralyzed and should be cut.” The implication was clear. Muslims who had converted to another religion primarily Babes and Baha'is had no right to life and were condemned to death.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>91</sup>Mirza Ali Esfahâni, “Mojâhedeh va tabliq,” *Homâyoun*, 1 (Mehr SH 1313/ 1934), 10.

<sup>92</sup>Hakamizâdeh, “Maqsud-e man,” 11.

<sup>93</sup>Iran Chamber Society, Persian Language and Literature: Sa'adi Shirazi, Sheikh Mosleh-al

Din,” at <http://www.iranchamber.com/literature/saadi/saadi.php#sthash.c2KF8gCW.dpuf/>

<sup>94</sup>See Seyyed Ali Taleqâni, “Bani adam a'zâ-ye yekdigarand,” *Homâyoun*, 2 (Aban SH 1313/1934), 11.

Other pieces in the journal also attacked the Babi religion and its offshoot the Baha'i religion, founded by Baha'ullah (d. 1892). Seyyed Ali Akbar Borqei suggested that a rationalist Islam would make it impossible for "fraudulent" prophets such as the Bab or Baha'ullah to appear. Baha'ullah, for example, had used the Shi'i belief in the return of the Mahdi to claim that he was the Messiah. Hence a more rationalist Islam, one that broke with concepts such as the return of the Mahdi, placed greater obstacles in the way of deceitful pretenders.<sup>95</sup>

Thus gender reforms and equal rights for non-Muslims remained the two insurmountable barriers in the modern Shi'i discourse of *Homâyoun* and presumably that of Qom as a whole. The call for a rationalist Islam was not combined with discourse of respect and tolerance for other religions, for religious minorities in Iran, or for women. Rather, it was a way to reassert the supremacy of the male Muslim in a world where such privileges and status hierarchies were being seriously questioned by Western technological advancements. Thirty years earlier, constitutionalists had gained much new ground in both areas. The 1906-1907 constitution had pronounced the people of Iran equal before state law, and ostensibly ended *jazyeh* taxes. The constitutionalists had also supported greater inclusion of women in the public sphere. In the 1930s, Reza Shah's reforms from above, which aimed at advancing Iran's social and economic status, were leading to the greater integration of non-Muslims and urban women and a more cohesive sense of national identity.

*Homâyoun* ceased publication when funding for the journal abruptly ended in the summer of 1935. Contemporary observers suggest that the journal's patron and some senior clerics found the publication's accommodations with modernity unacceptable.<sup>96</sup> This may have been the case, especially when some of the ideas of Shariat Sangelaji appeared in the journal.

<sup>95</sup>Seyyed Ali Akbar Borqei, "Telesmhâ-ye segâneh," *Homâyoun*, 6 (Esfand SH 1313/1935), 9-13.

<sup>96</sup>In an interview with Rajaei in 1990, Hossein Bodalâ, another contributor to the journal,

states that "in general, *Hawzeh* (the religious seminary) turned its back on this journal, and as a result the journal stopped." Quoted in Rajaei, *Islamism and Modernism*, 64.

After Hâeri's death in January 1937, Hakamizâdeh grew more distant from the Qom establishment. In the early 1940s, he moved to Tehran and aligned himself with another former cleric, now a secular reformer, Ahmad Kasravi. Hakamizâdeh's *Thousand-Year Old Secrets (Asrar-e Hezarsaleh)*, published in Tehran with the support of Kasravi, was an exposé of Qom and refuted many shi'i practices. The pamphlet ended with a series of thirteen questions aimed at the howzâ.<sup>97</sup> Qom quietly commissioned responses from religious teachers and eventually settled on Ruhollah Khomeini's point-by-point refutation of Hakamizâdeh's pamphlet. Khomeini's now well-known response was published anonymously in 1944, and with the financial backing of the Qom establishment, and under the title *Unveiling of Secrets (Kashf al-Asrar)*.<sup>98</sup>

## Conclusion

Reza Shah's unilateral reforms accomplished some of the goals of the Constitutional Revolution, albeit in an undemocratic form that was alien to its overall democratic spirit. The nation became more unified, the authority of the clerics was mitigated, a more modern justice system replaced the old penal code, and legal discrimination against women and religious minorities receded. Many progressive supporters of reform and civil liberties altered their course and entered the state-sponsored organizations in order to realize some of their modernizing objectives. Many others were exiled, imprisoned, or outright murdered in the bargain. The state's political and economic tilt toward Nazi Germany mobilized the Allies against Reza Shah and also placed him at odds with modern progressive nationalism. The ease with which Reza Shah was deposed in 1941 attested to his great isolation from his early backers by the end of his rule, despite all that he had accomplished.

However, the constitutionalist goal of reforming Shi'ism also moved forward in this period. Shi'ism is a pollution-conscious religion, much as Zoroastrianism and Judaism are. As Mary Douglas who used the term pollution conscious has

<sup>97</sup>See 'Ali Akbar Hakamizâdeh, *Asrâr-e* (Germany: Forough, 2001).

*hezârsâleh* (Tehran: Parcham Press, 1943).  
See also Nâsser Pakdâman, *Qatl-e Kasravi*

<sup>98</sup>Ruhollah Khomeini, *Kashf al-asrâr*, (Tehran: n.p., 1944).

argued, in such faiths rituals are a way of life, fully integrated into the daily practices of individuals and community interactions.<sup>99</sup> In this way religious beliefs are not just a matter of individual faith but bound up with daily practice. The community of the faithful renew their commitment to each other and their religion through such rituals.

Almost nothing was immune from change during the Reza Shah years including the societal conceptions of time, space, status hierarchies, gender relations, aesthetics, health, morality, and law. And every one of these reforms clashed with hitherto cherished and sacrosanct religious and cultural practices.

The reforms enumerated above were transformative on an unprecedented scale. The new emphasis on health and hygiene (smallpox vaccinations, modern hospitals, the closing of public pools of the baths, mandatory sports, and membership in the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts), the prohibition of old religious rituals (the banning of self-flagellation and self-mutilation in Muharram processions), the new sartorial reforms (military uniforms, a uniform dress code for men, school uniforms, the unveiling of women), the new public spaces (schools, theaters, stadiums, parks), the national holidays (greater emphasis on Nowruz over Muharram, and on the shah's birthday), and the new concept of time (marking time by clocks and the new calendar instead of by calls to prayer)—were all aimed at refashioning more efficient and docile modern bodies. And in the process, they also violated centuries old sacred religious practices and status hierarchies. Those who complied, often by passing rigorous examinations, were accepted into modern schools, the military officer corps, the judiciary, the new government bureaus, and were generally included in the new hierarchy of the Pahlavi regime. Those who resisted (tribal peoples, bazaar merchants, traditional clerics, and women of the old middle class) were marginalized and excluded.

<sup>99</sup>Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Psychology Press, 1966).

Some feared that the stern predictions of conservative clerics such as Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri, who had forecast such calamities during the Constitutional Revolution, were coming true. But religion did not die out, as he had feared. Reformists in Qom and Tehran built on the earlier contributions of Najmabadi and Dehkhoda to construct a more rationalist discourse of Islam. They rejected the notion of intercession and common practices associated with it. They interpreted the concept of *towhid* to mean a strict monotheism that disapproved of veneration of saints and imams. They turned to scientific explanations to prove the existence of God and moved away from appealing to fear and magic as explanation for events. They also used modern science to rebut traditional beliefs such as fear of the evil eye or communication with the dead. Most reformers argued for the removal of unsubstantiated hadiths, i.e. those that did not conform to a common sense understanding of the world.

Reformists also continued Al-Afghani's project of building a Pan-Islamic discourse that brought Shi'ites and Sunnis closer. Towards this goal, they called Sunni recognition of the Umayyad caliphs and Shi'i expectation of the Twelfth Imam's return mere "subsidiary issues" which could be set aside safely towards the goal of building a united Muslim identity. Some such as Sangelaji went further. They took issue with the notion of *taqlid* and emulation of living *mujtaheds* and asked believers to focus on the Qur'an and early prophetic hadith. Yet in their efforts to move away from the veneration of saints and imams and to create a non-intercessory notion of Shi'ism, these reformists could not compromise with concepts such as democracy, gender equality, and recognition of religious liberty and diversity. They thereby helped propel a populist and universalist concept of rationality that adhered to gender and religious hierarchies, and in this way created the foundation for what a generation later would be called Political Islam.