

IRANIAN STUDIES

Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran

Interior revolutions of the modern era

Pamela Karimi



Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran

Examining Iran's recent history through the double lens of domesticity and consumer culture, *Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran* demonstrates that a significant component of the modernization process in Iran advanced beyond political and public spheres.

On the cusp of Iran's entry into modernity, the rules and tenets that had traditionally defined the Iranian home began to vanish and the influx of new household goods gradually led to the substantial physical expansion of the domestic milieu. Subsequently, architects, designers, and commercial advertisers shifted their attention from commercial and public architecture to the new home and its contents. Domesticity and consumer culture also became topics of interest among politicians, Shiite religious scholars, and the Left, who communicated their respective views via the popular media and numerous other means. In the interim, ordinary Iranian families, who were capable of selectively appropriating aspects of their immediate surroundings, demonstrated their resistance toward the officially sanctioned transformations. Through analyzing a series of case studies that elucidate such phenomena and appraising a wide range of objects and archival documents—from furnishings, appliances, architectural blueprints, and maps to photographs, films, TV series, novels, artworks, scrapbooks, work-logs, personal letters and reports—this book highlights the significance of private life in social, economic, and political contexts of modern Iran.

Tackling the subject of home from a variety of perspectives, *Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran* thus shows the interplay between local aspirations, foreign influences, gender roles, consumer culture and women's education as they intersect with taste, fashion, domestic architecture and interior design.

Pamela Karimi is Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth. She received her PhD in history and theory of art and architecture from MIT in 2009. Her primary field of research is art, architecture, and visual culture of the modern Middle East.

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Acknowledgments

As a young girl growing up in Iran, I experienced a unique period in that country's history. I was attending an American kindergarten as political forces were changing Iran's social climate, culminating in the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in February 1979. Thus, as Iran was isolating itself from the international community, I was exposed to a broader world outlook. This experience left a lasting impression on me, and I never lost my desire to know more about the world beyond the increasingly closed society in which I was raised. During the 1980s, everyday life in Tehran was largely dominated by the news about the Iran–Iraq war and other such serious affairs. The overemphasis on political matters barely allowed room for the expression of fantasies and desires that often appeal to young girls. I turned my attention to the interiors of life—a private realm away from the watchful eyes of the Revolutionary Guard and the school authorities. There, I could imagine a life that was different from what I saw on broadcast television, in the dull hallways and classrooms of our schools, and on city walls that were mostly covered with political propaganda murals. I was always fascinated by how friends and relatives added new exotic items to their homes and what those items implied, especially in contrast to what we encountered in our public lives. Occasionally, I tried to persuade my parents to purchase the exact same things, and to their credit, they did so. Other times, I immersed myself in the often futile attempt to “build” furniture and other decorative items that I had seen in a woman's monthly from the Shah's period or on the pages of an outdated American interior-design magazine from my parents' bookshelves. Thanks to the underground, black-market of Western videos, I was also inspired by American suburban homes and by those alluring commodities that were featured in many Hollywood movies. Because of my own life experience in revolutionary and post-revolutionary Iran, I have always been committed to the idea that things in our immediate surroundings have the power to affect our lives. They even have the potential to be liberating in both their physical reality and fictional operation. The stories that I tell in this book may not seem unusual to those who grew up in Iran; I am interested in these accounts precisely because they are commonplace. By writing the history of modern Iran through the lens of people's private lives, I would like to suggest that much of the importance in Iran's modernization lies outside political frames and away from public contexts. This assessment is coupled with my personal views towards architecture. I do not

see architecture as separate from its users; instead, I am fascinated by how ordinary people—through their decorating and furnishing choices—can transform the built environment and its related connotations. My childhood preoccupations with the home, my long-held interest in the bottom-up histories of modern Iran, and my architectural views provided the impulse for my doctoral work at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the dissertation upon which this book is based.

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I hope that these are met. The present project is very ambitious and covers many aspects of domesticity in modern Iran. But the limited span of the book did not always allow me to elaborate on all of these characteristics at length. Any issues that I have neglected in this study I hope to address in future publications.

I am also grateful to the University of Pittsburgh Press and Indiana University Press for allowing me to reproduce portions of chapters 3 and 4 of the present book that have been published in their respective edited volumes, *Governing by Design: Architecture, Economy, and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (2012) and *Rhetoric of the Image: Visual Culture in the Modern Middle East* (2013). Finally, I thank the editors of the Iranian Studies Series at Routledge and the three anonymous external reviewers for their insightful comments, suggestions, and editorial remarks.

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A note on transliteration

I have used a simplified version of the *International Journal for Middle Eastern Studies* transliteration system. I have used diacritics to indicate only the difference between the short and long vowels. This system is not used for Persian words that are widely known in the English language or for common words, names, and titles that appear without diacritics in English publications. Dates of Iranian publications appear in both CE and solar dates.

Prologue

Set amid a landscape in transition, the Coca-Cola advertisement with its familiar red and white logo and embossed green glass bottle is an icon of the modern era. The photograph (figure 0.1) was taken in 1959 in the Iranian oil city of Abadan. It captures the essence of Western development initiatives in Iran throughout the past century: the inexplicable allure and perceived threat of the new and different, the foreign element adding color to bleak surroundings but somehow out of place. As globalization brings the world's cultures closer together, the same challenges as those of the 1950s continue to reverberate—the efforts to liberate that instead restrict, the good intentions that are misconstrued, and the best-laid plans that go awry.



Figure 0.1 Charles R. Schroeder, Corner of Abadan bazaar, 1958–9, color transparency on film, 35mm. Courtesy of Paul Schroeder and the Special Collections, Fine Arts Library, Harvard University

2 *Prologue*

For more than a thousand years Abadan was a small village until the British discovered oil in the area during the late nineteenth century. By the 1920s, the first residential neighborhoods had been built by British architects, beginning the transformation of Abadan into a city with a sharp divide between prosperity and poverty. Over time, Abadan became a hallmark of Iran's rapid entry into the modern world, a place where "Westerners looked in and locals looked out without having much verbal dialogue," as described by Paul Schroeder, whose father, Charles Schroeder, an employee of the National Iranian Oil Company, took the photograph above.¹ If dialogue appeared lacking to a twelve-year-old expatriate in Abadan, in other parts of the country efforts were under way to establish a connection between East and West. A thousand miles to the north, in the country's capital, Tehran, Iranian women were busy learning domestic skills in home-economics schools established by President Truman's Point IV Program. Euro-American concepts of domestic life and home design had been part of upper-class life in Iran since the turn of the century. After World War II, however, freer access to imported goods had wide-ranging implications for Iranians. Suburban "dream" items followed as American companies such as General Electric and the York Corporation introduced cooler chests, ovens, dishwashers, and shiny utensils into Iranian kitchens.

During the late 1950s, the McGraw-Edison Company's Air Comfort division (Michigan, USA) began selling air-conditioning units in Iranian cities, which helped residents to keep cool during the country's scorchingly hot summers.² A few years later, the Iranian company Arj (Value) set up a sprawling joint Iranian–American factory devoted to electrical equipment and appliances at old Karaj Road on the outskirts of Tehran. Among the many items produced by Arj was the cooler, a clunky blue-tone-and-metal air-conditioning unit. Its affordability and perfectly acceptable quality made it a hit among certain middle-class Iranian consumers. The cooler and other later brands (e.g., Absal) differed from the typical window-mounted units used in the United States. The cooler was installed outside of the building, either propped atop a balcony or attached to a metal frame. These boxes "decorated" countless facades around cities, resembling stalled elevators or awkward miniature tree houses (figure 0.2).

In the late 1960s and 1970s, the rise of new consumer products inspired a generation of artists, many of them educated in the West where they would certainly have seen Andy Warhol's prints, paintings, and drawings of common household objects. In the 1960s, Mehdi Hussein, previously known for his reliably abstract oil paintings, began illustrating household objects such as dish racks and air conditioners. At the same time, a fellow artist named Behjat Sadr began riffing on imported Venetian blinds as objects of art; and Coca-Cola bottles came to serve as inspiration for Parvaneh Etemadi (figures 0.3a–d).³ The objects depicted in these works were either imported, "montage" (joint Iranian–Western), or products of local factories and private businesses. In the late 1970s, one of Iran's most prominent businesses was the Bihshahr Industrial Group, a maker of consumer products ranging from soap to cooking oil and textiles recognized as "Iran's biggest private enterprise—snaring many coveted government franchises."⁴ At this time, the Bihshahr group



Figure 0.2 Building façade in central Tehran, furnished with suspended air conditioners. Photograph by the author, 2007

began a campaign called Art and Advertisement that grew into a collection of more than 130 contemporary Iranian and foreign paintings whose focus was primarily on commodities. These artworks were showcased in several exhibitions and catalogues.⁵ The contributions of Michael Makroulakis, a Greek painter who then lived and worked in Tehran, are particularly outstanding. In one piece, Makroulakis celebrates the company's Barf (Snow) detergent. Its box, presented in *trompe l'oeil* style, floats above a desert scene and gives a surreal dimension to the picture. The subject matter is idealized, and consumption is dramatized (figure 0.4).⁶

By bringing appliances into the elite sphere of art galleries and exhibition catalogues, these artists imbued the new commodities and foreign imports with a mysterious quality. As the Iranian Marxist art and literary critic Khusraw Gulsurkhī lamented in his manuscript *The Politics of Art and Poetry*, illegally distributed after his execution in 1974 by the Shah's regime, only a few privileged upper-class patrons could relate to "cliché art" (*hunar-i qālibī*) of this kind.⁷ Once the Islamic Revolution had taken place, the reality of this "Westoxification"—to use a term popular at the time⁸—continued to raise the ire of the post-revolutionary elite. Artists like Husseinī were barred from displaying their "capitalistic works" in local museums. Islamic revolutionaries drew a sharp distinction between local and imported goods. Joint Iranian–Western production (the so-called "montage") was considered *harām* (unlawful/forbidden by God)—as described in early



Figure 0.3a
Mehdi Husseini, Dish Rack

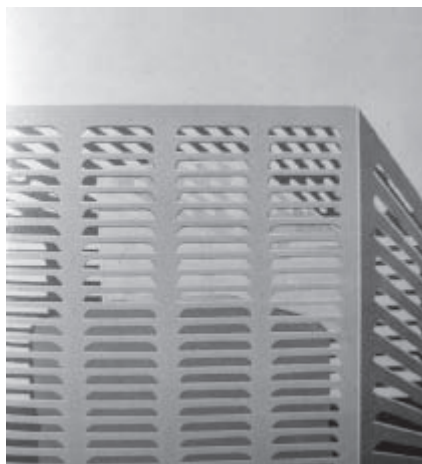


Figure 0.3b
Mehdi Husseini, Air Cooler

Both, c. 1967, oil on canvas, 50 × 70 cm. Both reproduced in *Modern Iranian Art: The International Art Fair, Basil Switzerland, 16–21 July of 1976*, Tehran: Culture and Art Branch of the Office of Empress Farah Pahlavi, 1976, pp. 56–57. Courtesy of the artist and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran

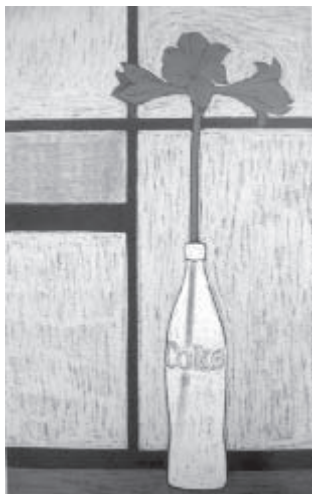


Figure 0.3c
Parvaneh Etemadi, *Composition*, 1978, pastel on paper, 80 × 60 cm. Reproduced in J. Mujābī and J. Damija, eds., *Barguzidah āsār-i Parvaneh Etemadi 1345–1377 (A Selection of Parvaneh Etemadi's Artwork, 1966–1998)*, Tehran: Nashr-i hunar-i Iran, 1999, p. 45. Courtesy of the artist and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran



Figure 0.3d
Behjat Sadr, *Drape over Oil Painting on Wood*, 1967, actual blind installed over oil painting on wood panel, 100 × 80 cm. Reproduced in J. Mujābī, Y. Emdānian, and T. Malikī, eds., *Pīshgāmān-i hunar-i naw garāy-i Iran: Behjat Sadr (Pioneers of Contemporary Art in Iran: Behjat Sadr)*, Tehran: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005, p. 87. Courtesy of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran

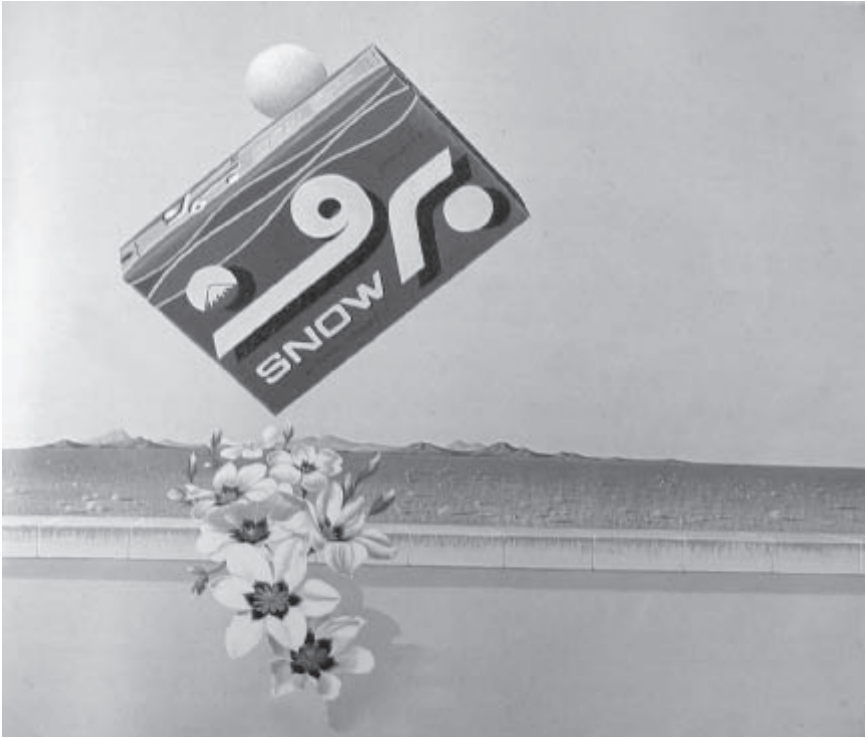


Figure 0.4 Michael Makroulakis, *Snow Detergent*, c. 1976, oil on canvas, 90 × 110 cm. Reproduced in *Hunar-i mu'āsir-i Iran: az āghāz ta imrūz* (*Contemporary Iranian Art: From the Beginning to Today*), Tehran: Iranian American Society, 1976, p. 1. Courtesy of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran

post-revolutionary books such as *Montage Factories*, *Economic Priorities of Iran: The Sinful Economy* (see Chapter 4).⁹

The rise and fall of the cooler—as an import, a montage product, a subject of avant-garde art, and the target of Islamists—is a kind of miniature version of the story of the contemporary Iranian home. Modernization pushed Iranians into a new space, in actuality as well as in abstract terms. This new space was furnished with cultural conversions, including new notions of taste, beauty, and consumption. In 1964, the American President Lyndon B. Johnson said, “What is going on in Iran, is about the best thing going on anywhere in the world,”¹⁰ and his ambassador to Tehran chimed in, “The Shah (Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi) is making Iran (a) showcase of modernization in this part of the world.”¹¹ More than forty-five years later, Iran is perceived in a radically different way.

This book illuminates a neglected aspect of these changes by examining the culture of twentieth century Iran as it manifested itself within the home and by discussing the relatively unexplored subject of the imports themselves and their reception. Acknowledging that Iran’s oil boom increased the ability of consumers to buy goods, my analysis elucidates how major conservative and

revolutionary forces contested new concepts of gender, class, consumption, and religious and national identity as these took shape in the domestic realm. In this, I go beyond the boundaries of nationalism and state politics to explore how Iranians have struggled over the spaces of their daily lives; and I consider their negotiations as to its usage and presentation. When ideas came from “above,” they were neither understood nor put into practice in the ways intended by their proponents. Likewise, reformers of domestic life who propagated their modern Western views in the form of textbooks, newspapers, and professional journals were not in a position to impose their plans by force. These reforms were, indeed, in contrast with the simplistic views offered by classic modernization theory,¹² such as stating that tradition is an obstacle for the realization of modernity and that modernization is actually desired by all.¹³

Throughout its long history, Iran has never been an isolated region. Indeed, it played an important role in what historians refer to as “archaic globalization.”¹⁴ The development of the Silk Road, starting in China and ending in Europe, reached the boundaries of Iran as early as the time of the Parthian Empire (247 BCE–224 CE). The expansion of the Pax Mongolica from the early thirteenth through the mid-fourteenth century followed the conquest of a huge amount of territory by the Mongols and energized the commercial centers of Iran, while it created a greater integration of the country into the global trade route along the Silk Road. This exchange continued into modern times; however, there has been an unusually rapid growth in Iran’s connections with the greater world since the late-nineteenth century discovery of and drilling for oil by the British. The policies of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who became ruler of Iran in 1941, marked the country’s entry into a boom era of residential construction and consumption. However, during the 1980s, following the Islamic Revolution, Iranians became increasingly detached from the rest of the world, the West in particular. The progression from huge promotion of Westernization through the period of anti-Westernization deeply affected the use of space and the desire for consumption within Iran. Amidst the Islamic Republic’s anti-East and anti-West (*na sharqī, na gharbī*) agenda, the global culture entered the Islamic Republic via movies (often illegally distributed), periodicals, video games, posters, and Internet and satellite images. This study explores the process of Iran’s modernization through the double lens of domesticity and consumer culture, thus displaying the extent to which the Iranian house has served as the place of encounter with the “other” and of reconsideration of the nation as “home.” In doing so, I rely on the work of scholars who have provided cogent explanations on the subject.

Domesticity, gender, consumer culture, and modernity

The subject of the home, as both physical entity and metaphor, is essential to the understanding of social power structures in studies focusing on gender and post-colonial themes and of theories regarding the critical links between space and identity. Such books as Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Ruth Schwartz Cowan’s *More Works for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (1983) explored a housewife’s very many

senseless hours of cleaning and housekeeping.¹⁵ Certain aspects of these writings captured the imagination of architectural historians, who have taken the authors' ideas in several directions; most remarkably, exploring the house as a consumer unit and its gendered implications. Gender is undoubtedly a key component of these studies. The modern home as a woman's sphere has been also regarded as a locus of consumption. According to Walter Benjamin in Europe in the early 1800s, "for the first time the living space became distinguished from the space of the work."¹⁶ Indeed, domesticity is not only a "modern phenomenon" but also "a product of the confluence of capitalist economies."¹⁷

Inspired by the work of Schwartz Cowan and Friedan as well as scholars who have emphasized the connections between the built environment and daily life (e.g., Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja),¹⁸ Shirley Ardener, Doreen Massey, and Daphne Spain have written on how the home as a physical space has contributed to certain assumptions about gender roles (e.g., women belong to the sphere of consumption and home, while men belong to the public sphere and the realm of production).¹⁹ Likewise, in their ground-breaking studies of modern American domestic architecture, Elizabeth Collins Cromley, Dolores Hayden and Gwendolyn Wright have traced attitudes of consumption and gender roles in relation to the architecture of the American house.²⁰ These scholars have brought forward issues of gender and consumer culture and the ways in which they overlap with the spatial characteristics of the home; and how, in turn, certain architectural features and spatial boundaries enforce specific ways of life that would not otherwise have come to be. Studies of minority and post-colonial conceptualizations of the home, on the other hand, have shed light on issues that go beyond gender.

While bell hooks rewrote home as a "site of resistance" and re-evaluated domestic spaces of identification for women, Salman Rushdie and Homi Bhabha addressed a global and labile sense of place and belonging to the homeland.²¹ The analyses developed by these authors have been articulated in explicitly spatial terms, although not always with direct reference to the house as a physical entity. They have helped to overturn traditional approaches and have mobilized insights into the study of residential architecture from other disciplines. Above all, by integrating the concept of "home" into their work, they have disrupted the polarized fixity of "public" and "private" and "self" and "other." This latter body of literature has inspired my arguments in all chapters of this book, where instead of viewing the attitudes toward the notions of public and private, men and women, and self and other as static and confining, they are represented in their more protean senses.

In the aforementioned studies, domestic space has been interpreted as the product of a relationship among individuals, groups, and architecture. Such interactions either restrict or enable specific types of access. In the present book, I focus on spatial relations at a number of different levels within and outside the home, and I recognize that at none of these junctures is there a clear-cut division between architects and users or producers and consumers. This is particularly true in the context of non-Western countries, where ideas were introduced by foreign specialists.

In non-Western contexts where Western ideas were implemented, modernity and the additional dimension of foreignness were dealt with as people had to negotiate imported practices and commodities had to be “adopted and adapted or crafted anew.”²² Historian Jordan Sand concedes in his study of domesticity and class in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Japan that the story of modernization of the home in non-Western contexts offers a means through which to understand how “the ideology of modern domesticity was recognized from the beginning as foreign—its foreignness being an important part of its significance in fact—and posed against very different native domesticities.”²³ The theme of adopting and adapting foreign ideas has also been studied by numerous scholars of the traditional Islamic home or harem as well as by those who study Middle Eastern domesticity in modern times.

For centuries, the word harem—or, *andarūn*, the women’s section of the house or inner space, which has more common usage in Persian language—was utilized by Westerners to refer to the domestic space in the Islamic world. Building on the insights provided by pioneering scholars such as Fatemeh Mernisi, Malek Alloula, and Nilüfer Göle, the contributors to *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces* (2011), a collection of essays edited by Marilyn Booth, explore the very many ways in which the harem has been historically imagined, represented, and experienced by both the locals and foreign visitors.²⁴ The authors dismantle the commonly held stereotypes surrounding the harem, substantiating that it had broader implications than those narrow visions presented in most (Western) textual sources and pictorial representations—e.g., the imperial harem which was restricted to the sultan and his concubines. The works of these scholars, joined by many more recent studies,²⁵ have ultimately informed the ways in which the *andarūn* has been portrayed in the present book. Consider, for instance, the frequently taken-for-granted binaries of men and women, inside and outside, and public and private that have prevented historians from seeing other gendered features of the *andarūn*, such as portrayal of *franagī* (European) women on the interiors’ walls. By examining such phenomena, I hope to introduce other ways of understanding the *andarūn* in regard to issues of gender (see Chapter 1).

Three studies of Egyptian and Turkish households in the twentieth century, authored respectively by the sociologist Alan Duben, economist Cem Behar (1991), religious scholar Juan Eduardo Campo (1991), and anthropologist Farha Ghannam (2002), stand out with regard to the relationships between domesticity, gender, religion, and socio-economic issues.²⁶ These scholars map the ties between Islamic sentiments—“Islamic” in these works refers mostly to Sunni Islam—, gender dynamics, and economic factors of domestic settings. Several architectural historians have likewise followed an interdisciplinary approach in their works on the house. Such books include Sibel Bozdoğan’s *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic* (2001),²⁷ as well as a more current contribution by Carel Bertram, *Imagining the Turkish House: Collective Visions of Home* (2008).²⁸ Both authors explore the theme of the home within and beyond its physical boundaries. They write on how Turkish architects hoped that the modern house would inspire better and healthier

lifestyles while also contributing to the discourse of nationalism. Discussing the notion of domesticity in more detail, Bertram shows the significant role that the old Ottoman house—as well as its textual and pictorial representations—played in the imagination of the Turks at the time Westernization of the Turkish Republic was at its height. Bertram's discussions of how the home became a central part of the discourse on national identity in Turkey resembles that of Lisa Pollard's 2005 study of the Egyptian household, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805–1923*.²⁹

Pollard asserts that the domestic realm was in fact a central ground through which the modern nation-state of Egypt forged a new relationship with its people. She shows how concepts such as nationhood and citizenship were imagined and articulated in schoolbooks and the popular press. According to these texts, domestic cleanliness was, for example, a sign of political organization and national power. Although not concerned with the architectural aspects of the home, Pollard provides a fresh view in discussing the home and its importance at larger national and political levels. Such a theme animates Relli Shechter's volume, *Transitions in Domestic Consumption and Family Life in the Modern Middle East: Houses in Motion* (2003),³⁰ which includes a chapter by Pollard along with those of six additional writers. Drawing on accounts and representations of domestic life in archival documents, journals, books, and photographs, the volume reveals common aspects of people's private lives in modern Egypt, Israel, Palestine, and Turkey. It shows how people in these formerly Ottoman-ruled regions either chose or were forced to restructure their most immediate and intimate surroundings. While the present book contributes to this body of literature, it also covers what has not been studied—the role of Shiite Muslims in shaping and contesting domestic modernization forces.

Unlike with other parts of the Middle East, the Iranian home as a physical entity and storehouse of people's belongings has not been paid the scholarly attention it deserves. This inattention has in part resulted from the inadequacy of the themes that have dominated the scholarship of modern Iranian history,³¹ which distracts from understanding transformations of everyday life and other non-political activities. For example, while the Shah's 1962–63 White Revolution and the 1973–74 world energy crisis have been overtly studied, the rise of consumer culture in 1970s Iranian homes has not been sufficiently explored. This deficiency may be also attributed to the lack of a solid and coherent body of archival information. This shortcoming is particularly evident in certain areas, including the industrial provincial towns built during Reza Shah's reign (1925–41). In such places, little evidence still exists, and the houses are not as well kept up as they were in the past; indeed, one finds no traces of the past whatsoever in certain sectors. Histories are missing from every old household. The people currently living in these homes belong to a different era and know little about what is past. Even if they do, it is a delicate undertaking to acquire such information. Years of maintenance and repair have stripped these older homes of their authentic look, and their original blueprints are lost or are kept in the most unlikely archives. Other older witnesses are reserved and wish to protect the privacy, safety, and legal rights of the current dwellers.

Due to these deficiencies, the present book cannot do justice to all forms of the modern Iranian home that have emerged during the past century; nonetheless, the selected case studies are exemplars of some of the most important trends that have been shaped by or have given shape to the Iranian house.

House and home in modern Iranian historiography

In the scholarship of modern Iranian history, the study of migration of the population of rural communities into large cities and of urban housing development has gained ample attention. This is partly because of the “housing problem” that was one of the main challenges of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi’s regime (1941–79) and partly because of the important role the urban poor and the homeless played in the 1979 revolutionary upheaval.³² Since the 1960s, many dissertations, books, and articles have directly or indirectly addressed the so-called housing problem, both during the Pahlavi period and in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution. In *Street Politics: Poor People’s Movements in Iran* (1997), sociologist Asef Bayat examines the revolutionary period of 1978–9 and how the urban poor struggled with their homelessness without governmental aid,³³ but the place of house and home in modern Iranian history does not end there. While Bayat focuses on the role that lack of housing for all played in the revolution, others, notably Afsaneh Najmabadi (1998), Camron Michael Amin (2003), and Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet (2006),³⁴ have explored the home in more abstract ways. They have shown how the domestic sphere was often comparable with the notion of motherhood and how both the idea of the “home” and the concept of “motherhood” were constantly reimagined and reconstructed in light of nationalist discourses during the late Qajar and early Pahlavi periods. These studies have inspired my approach to the notion of “home” as it was conceptualized in the thoughts of more recent political and intellectual figures, including Leftists and Islamic Republic ideologues.

Other historians of women and gender in modern Iran, such as Nima Naghibi, Michael Zirinski, Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi, and Gulnar Eleanor Francis-Dehqani, have shown how American and British missionary educators introduced Western ideas of domesticity to Iranian women.³⁵ One of the most valuable aspects of this body of literature is that it explores an aspect of foreign influence on Iran that goes beyond politics.³⁶ However, by placing so much emphasis on the educational materials delivered by foreign missionaries, the aforementioned scholars often overlook the daily interactions of missionary educators with Iranian women, including the ways in which Iranian women appropriated Western modes of everyday life from them. Missionaries in Iran kept meticulous records of their daily lives. They photographed their homes and drew maps of their neighborhoods. These sources, as well as personal letters and work logs, are all excellent historical materials that open new doors to the study of everyday life in early twentieth-century Iran. Such sources are significant because they help us reassess the history of modern Iran—one that is more often than not “reduced to a paradigm of state action/societal reaction.”³⁷

Only a few scholars, such as Amin, have looked at commodities when considering how “imported ideas” aimed to transform everyday life in Iran. In