Introduction

Born at the turn of the twentieth-century in Tehran and confined to the private world of the family, my veiled grandmother took lessons in her native Persian language from a tutor at her parents' home. More mobile, my mother welcomed the opportunity to attend school, to and from which she was always escorted. In 1936 when she was almost nine years old, she later recalled, a local gendarme stopped her, admonishing her to abandon the *chador* in favor of complete unveiling. My own experiences have been vastly different but in some ways similar. I received a superior education, but until the last two years of high school, I was always accompanied. I wore a knee-length school uniform with my hair uncovered, except in mosques or in neighborhoods with major *Shi'i* shrines, where I had to wear the *chador*. Hardly changing my appearance when I left my American university for Iran during the 1979 Revolution, I carried a shawl in my bag to ward off unpleasant encounters. Home after twelve years of exile, I was wearing a black, loose and long tunic to conduct interviews at the University of Tehran when I was approached by a contentious Islamic revolutionary guard who had determined that I was improperly veiled: "Sister, pull your scarf over your forehead to hide your hair completely," he commanded. Hearing similar remarks in 1997 and 2002 but to a lesser degree in 2005, I concluded: history repeats itself, though with twists and not always following the same scripts.

These family stories represent cataclysmic experiences in Iranian history and women's lives during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The first Iranian woman in the United States who wrote on women in Iran from a social science perspective, I am still seeking to delve into new

territory.[1] For me, these memories raise a key question. Why were urban Iranian women veiled at the turn of the century, unveiled from 1936 to 1979, and reveiled after the Revolution of 1979? Clearly the veil possessed significance greater than merely a cover to cloak the appearance of a Muslim woman, or – as Frantz Fanon argued – to protect her from the eyes of infidels or colonizers. Conversely, the importance of unveiling transcends its association with secularism, Westernism, and modernism. Reveiling, too, means far more than the resurgence of "Islamic fundamentalism" or a return of cultural authenticity and Islamic revivalism. This book will show the connection among politics, religion, and gender.[2]

Significant metaphorically and literally, veiling, unveiling, and reveiling illuminate the contest for political power in the course of Iran's development. During and immediately after the Constitutional Revolution (1905–11), concerns regarding veiling and women's subordinate social and political position fostered challenges to the established power structure and the religious establishment. Later, state-sponsored unveiling contributed to the Westernization posture of the Pahlavi dynasty (1925–79) and its apparent victory over the clergy. The state-mandated reveiling embodied the Islamic identity of the succeeding polity (1979–), accompanied by the restoration of juridical and de facto gender segregation. From the early twentieth-century to the present, therefore, various forms of veiling draw attention to the continuing quest for political power between the state and religion especially over women's sexuality and their labor. Gender remains a core concern of politics. Gender analysis illuminates politics and power struggle: who gets, what, how, when, and why.

Veiling, unveiling, and reveiling also deserve special attention because of their extraordinary significance for the history of women's agency, their responses to the state and clergy, and their attempts to carve out their own place in society and the marketplace. During the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Iranian women displayed varied political positions. Class background, philosophical persuasion, and political alliance often divided women. Yet some women transcended their differences and joined in common causes defying and subverting culture, politics, and institutions. At the turn of the last century, reacting to patriarchal dominatory tendencies and national and political crises, a handful of women from wealthy households joined open or secret societies, while others

[1] First Iranian woman, Sedghi, "Women in Iran," 219–228; Sedghi and Ashraf, "The Condition," 201–214; Sedghi, "A Critique"; and Sedghi, "An Assessment," 37–41.
[2] Fanon, *A Dying*, 67; and also see Sedghi, "Third World," 88–105.

attempted to awaken women through schools and journals (Chapters 1 and 2).

Women's agency became more evident under the Pahlavis, when women engaged in the beginnings of unprecedented challenges to state and society. A handful of different women's organizations, composed primarily of well-to-do women, attempted to articulate their interests in the 1930s. But "state feminism," or the state's active interference in women's activities preempted all women's organizations. Many awaited the collapse of the autocratic state. During the 1940s independent and organized women gained some autonomy (Chapter 2). They engendered a new group of pioneering and educated women who claimed a unique place in the 1960s and 1970s among future feminists. These decades were crucial because they witnessed a sharp split among women whose interests overlapped occasionally. Active in legislative and political reforms on behalf of women, some "Queen Bees" or "conformist" women who were relatively prosperous members of the society, represented the state's interests and contributed to its national and international legitimacy. On the opposite side were anti-establishment or "nonconformist" women who were less privileged and represented left, secular, and Islamic perspectives. They were critical of the state and its political and economic reforms (Chapter 5).

The quest for gender equality and women's rights in the newly formed Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) amplifies yet another dimension of women's political behavior, their class background, and varied responses to inequality and discriminatory practices. Both "proponent" women or supporters and "opponent" women who dare to defy the state remain divided on reveiling and the implementation of inequitable political, legal, social, and economic policies. They also present different approaches to gender relations, women's role in the household and society, and women's involvement in politics and feminism. But their interconnected interests on diverse issues including, patriarchy, political power, and women's political participation allow them to engage in temporary and shifting alliances. Women continue to maintain a dynamic presence in the Islamic state (Chapters 6 and 8). The persistent and multiple forms of expression and activity of women suggest that gender is important for political analysis, especially regarding the contest between state and clergy over women in the history of modern Iran.

This book explores Iran's transformation from a gender perspective. It analyzes relations among the state, clergy, and cultural forces and the private and public lives of women of different classes, their work, and

their political persuasions and behavior in three distinct yet connected periods of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: the last years of the Qajar dynasty, or the reign of "veiling"; the Pahlavi dynasty, which made Iran "the Japan of the Middle East" economically and promoted secularization, Westernization, and later Americanization and "unveiling," which culminated in the revolution; and finally, the Islamic state, which restored clerical power and imposed "reveiling." This comparative historical approach highlights development processes and gender politics in one country over a period of time.

Setting the basis for interconnecting gender and politics, this book considers broad and specific themes: how and to what extent unveiling and reveiling measures represented not only the power struggle between the state and clergy over women's sexuality but regime change, how and whether Iran's participation in the global economy elicited shifts in its domestic gender division of labor and women's work, and finally, how political and economic policies solicited active responses from women. These themes raise one basic question: what is the meaning of women's sexuality that its control or decontrol assumes importance for the state and its development strategies? I argue that the state intervenes in women's lives for the purpose of its internal and external policy objectives. Domestically, whether weak or strong, secular or religious, Westernizing or Islamizing, the state manipulates women's sexuality and their labor in order to legitimize its political and cultural position and to consolidate its powers. Internationally, the state uses women and their portrayal as Westernized or Islamized, unveiled or veiled, in order to depict a distinct political identity and message abroad. Women become an instrument of national and foreign policies.

Although the state's ability to modify and reshape gender relations and women's lives is real, its actions, I argue, are limited by the persistence of women's resistance. As active and reactive agents of social change, women respond to and defy state actions. Women pose challenges to the system, constraining and modifying the state's behavior – sometimes successfully, sometimes not. Women's responses vary historically, not only by their class background, ideological dispositions, and religious outlook, but by the degree of their political and feminist awareness and how they can articulate their interests and issues of their concerns. This study explores the private and public lives of women of different classes, women's work (inside and outside of the household and as self-employed laborers), and women's feminist and political conduct in different socioeconomic and political periods (Chapters 1, 2, 5, 6, and 8). It is my firm belief that

women's lives are linked with politics and in order to understand women's experiences, we must consider women and gender as an integral part of the political and economic system that they share and experience. Thus, gender can be seen through a state lens both in its domestic and international environments, and conversely, the state can be analyzed through its gender policies and women's experiences.

Urban women are my focus because of their participation in political proclivities and feminist yearnings and also due to the distinct and complex demographic differences in Iran. Where relevant, I refer to rural women, but refrain from investigating changes in the position of rural, tribal, ethnic, or religious minority women. Urban Iran is more homogeneous in culture and language (for example, in large cities the majority of people speak Persian while some smaller towns communicate in Turkish and Azari, and a few rural hinterlands converse in Arabic, Luri, or Kurdish). Urban Iran is also similar in the polarization of class structure, the impact of modernization and labor force participation, Westernization and Islamization processes, and feminist awakening and women's initiatives especially since the Revolution of 1979.

This is a case study of state, gender, and religious relations in Iran. Case studies illuminate areas and subject matters that have been hitherto inadequately examined or not explored at all. They also shed light on comparative analysis when they consider an important aspect of one country's development over a specific time span. Moreover, data-gathering operations, such as the one undertaken here, enable the researcher to test previous propositions developed in other area studies, and/or refine more general theories, or build new ones.[3] This study of Iran demonstrates its historical transformation along with changes in women's lives, their work, and women's proclivities over the past century. It identifies similarities and differences in three politically and economically distinct phases of the same society. More significantly, it offers an understanding of gender-state-religion relations in the Pahlavi era, which has not yet been examined systematically, and suggests viewing it as an explanation for the birth of the system that followed.

This interdisciplinary endeavor cuts across several academic disciplines, including political science, economics, history, religion, anthropology, and sociology, and it is linked to women's studies, developmental and Middle Eastern studies. Within the context of currently significant works in women's and gender studies, developmental studies, and Middle

[3] Propositions, Johnson, 32–38.

Eastern and Iranian studies, I explore women's experiences and activities and draw on gender as a category of analysis in the study of politics and economy and the contention over women's sexuality. Rather than offering a comprehensive review, this introduction focuses on specific areas where feminist work and gender analysis provide new insights on Iran as a developing Middle Eastern society with its unique history and gender dynamics.

Broadly speaking, I draw on and build on literature in several fields. I embark on gender studies that incorporate state studies and illuminate the importance of sexuality, family legislation, and political mobilization of women for the state and state-building. Since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Islam and Islamic movements have been the central category of analysis within which debates on women and gender have been generally placed. Religion and religious ideologies have been singled out to explain the subordination of women in "Islamic" states. Yet such constructs fail to address the historically specific and varied forms of subordination in different states, particularly those undergoing rapid transformation. I examine religion and culture, but within broader historical and political contexts in which specific cultural forms or religious interpretations are articulated and sanctioned by the state. And as mentioned earlier, I analyze the state in terms of its contest with the religious establishment.[4]

Gender studies consider four basic types of gender-state relations. Some focus on the state's interference in family legislation and reproductive policies that aim at restricting or expanding women's rights and control over their sexuality.[5] A few examine the state's interaction with women in public policy processes and women's roles in policy making.[6] Others investigate women's political mobilization, with implications for gender relations and gender construction.[7] Another body of literature probes how economic policies affect women's and men's work differently.[8] Still growing in number, other works delve into the interaction among gender, Islam, and state projects and women.[9] My analysis highlights state's interaction

[4] Religious ideologies, Minces.
[5] Sexuality, Pateman; and Hoodfar, "Devices and Desires," 11–17, and her "Bargaining With," 30–40.
[6] Public Policy, Nelson and Chowdhury, eds.; and policy, Basu.
[7] Mobilization, Molyneux, 280–302; and Jayawardena.
[8] Economic Policy, Beneria and Sen, "Accumulation," 279–98; and UNDP, *Human Development Report 1995*.
[9] Interaction, Joseph, 3–7; Islam, see Introduction in Kandiyoti, ed., *Women, Islam*; Ahmed; Papaneck; and Haddad and Esposito, eds.

with women of different classes, their work, and political and feminist activities; with men as clergy, secular leaders, and household members; and with political and economic forces.[10]

Drawing theoretical attention to the *political* dynamics of the state, I explore the state in terms of its political struggles and the state's use of gender for mobilization, consolidation, and legitimation purposes both for domestic and foreign policy reasons. Depending on the specificity of the historical period, I refer to the state as an organization that attempts to exercise political domination and hegemony.[11] Beyond reification, the state is a site of contestation, therefore, its nature, activities, institutions, and structures respond to forces of change. In Iran, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries bear the significance of gender politics to the state. Until recently, most studies of the Iranian state paid little attention, if any, to gender. Rather, scholars referred to various states as "weak," "modernizing," "reformist," "petrolic and rentier," "dependent capitalist," "statist," "bourgeois," "populist," "theocratic," "repressive," "fundamentalist," and "Islamic," among many modifiers.[12] None of these characterizations recognized the importance of gender to policy making or to the functioning of the state, nor did they acknowledge the use of gender in political conflicts and competition over power. Introducing a new approach, I view the state in terms of its relations to gender.

In each era of veiling, unveiling, and reveiling, the state comprises a distinct political economy and class structure, political ideology, and unique forms of patriarchy and gender relations that generates its own political contentions to which women respond in different ways. I present four arguments. First, the state is gendered and its policies are often discriminatory. For example, Iranian men were enfranchised in 1906, women only in 1963. Second, the state uses gender as a source of legitimacy in order to consolidate its power. Cases in point are the coercive policies that resulted in unveiling under the Pahlavis and reveiling under the Islamic Republic of Iran. A third, related observation is that the desire to control women's sexuality alludes to power struggles among men rooted in their own sense of masculinity and their related policy choices. For

[10] Activities, Farhi, "Sexuality"; Abu-Lughod; and Sedghi, "The State."

[11] The state has historically embodied its own patterns of conflict and cooperation, and in response to various sources, at times it has been flexible – see, Skocpol, *States*.

[12] Modernizing, Banani; M. Milani; Amir Arjomand; Katouzian; and Abrahamian, *Iran*. Rentier, Skocpol, *States*; bourgeois, Ashraf, "Historical Obstacles"; populist, transitional, and exceptional state, F. Sanat-Carr, "Khomeynism"; and fundamentalist, Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*.

example, Reza Shah Pahlavi used unveiling to emasculate the clergy and to promote modernization and Westernization, as did his son, the Shah. Once in power in 1979, the clergy regained what it had lost: control over women's sexuality and labor that continued to define "the Islamic" posture and identity of the regime. Fourth, gender matters to the global image of the state. The Pahlavis needed Westernized women to promote a secular and modern representation abroad, even as the Islamic Republic required authentic, devout, and "Islamic" women. Thus, state studies are important to gender studies.

In addition to gender and state studies, gender and development works provide valuable insights on women's work (inside and outside the household), the gendered division of labor and employment policies nationally, and within the context of global changes.[13] It is of paramount importance to consider the dialectical relationship between political and economic forces, and how they relate to the gender division of labor in the market and women's reproductive activities. It is also useful to consider the interaction between domestic economy and the larger global market in order to ascertain external economic influences, if any, on internal dynamics. In Iran, economic change reverberated in policy. Iran's integration into the global market under the Pahlavis led to the introduction of modernization projects and Westernization, and welcomed some unveiled women, their educational endeavors, and labor force participation.[14] Conversely, the Islamic regimes' initial antagonism to these processes along with its restricted gender policies restrained women from the public space, thereby, discouraging their work outside the home and encouraging their household tasks and reproduction activities. In contrast, its subsequent economic liberalization and slow participation in the global market created an opening for women, perhaps inadvertently, to advance their quests for women's rights. Thus, the historical and cultural context of development is crucial to identifying the specific circumstances of politics and economics, as well as their interactions with women's work.

Gender and development studies illuminate the impact of modernization on women's work. In a pioneering and influential work, Ester Boserup analyzed the impact of internal development or "modernization" on women's work in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. She introduced the thesis that modernization has an adverse effect on female as compared to male labor by marginalizing or excluding women from the more

[13] Women's work, Boris and Prugl, eds.; and Turpin and Lorentzen, eds.
[14] Modernization, Ch. 3 of this book.

modern sectors of the economy. Boserup attributed women's subordination to a modernization process in which "men are quicker than women to change over from traditional to modern types of occupations." The main consequence of economic development for the urban economy is the "polarization and hierarchization of men's and women's work roles," with men being preferred for "skilled and supervisory" jobs and women the "unskilled and subservient." In distinguishing between women and men in her analysis, Boserup challenged neoclassical economics. But she ignored feminist doubts regarding the neutrality of modernization. She also paid scant attention to the reasons for women's exclusion or marginalization in the labor force, the gendered division of labor in the market and the household, and the impact of sexuality on rewards in the labor market and the family.[15]

Lourdes Beneria meticulously investigated broader gender and development categories. In trying to account for issues surrounding women's work, for example, the impact of structural adjustment on poverty, the gender division of labor, and women's position in production and reproduction, Beneria argued that the core of "women's economic activities is provided by their special role in the reproduction of the labor force." Women's subordination and its various forms in different societies stem from their reproductive activities and are conditioned by "the nature of the productive process and the requirements of a given process of growth and accumulation." She also perceived an intimate link between production processes and women's work at home. As a result of the control exercised over women's reproductive activities, "the focal point of women's work becomes the household" and "the household becomes the very root of patriarchy" and male domination. Thus, the gender division of labor in the market reproduces gender hierarchies and women's work and reproductive activities in the household. Building upon the literature of gender and development, I relate political struggles over women's sexuality to the understanding of women's work in Iran.[16]

Salient aspects of Iran's development included changes in the gender division of labor, women's work, and the modification of traditional mores. Women's work and women's role in reproduction shifted by the transformation of a predominantly agricultural economy in the early twentieth-century to a rapidly developing market economy in the late

[15] "Occupations," "polarization," "skilled," and "unskilled," Boserup, 140.
[16] "Reproduction," "accumulation," "focal," and "patriarchy," Beneria, "Reproduction," 203, 207, 205, 209, and 222; and Beneria and Feldman, eds.

1960s and 1970s and then to the shrinking economy under the IRI that affected women's work and their role in reproduction. At the turn of the century, a "Qoranic division of labor" and a subsistence economy allowed the household to be the focal point of a patriarchal system that held women's sexuality and labor in check. Under the Pahlavis, significant alterations occurred in the economy and polity, and women emerged as important contributors to the economy and society. With the slower economy during its first decade of the IRI, labor force participation of women exhibited a downturn and many women returned to the home and household production. During and after its second decade, the Islamic regime witnessed a greater entry of women to educational institutions and the labor market.[17]

The Pahlavi era illustrates the dynamics of rapid modernization in developing countries. It witnessed an unprecedented growth of capital accumulation by the late 1960s and early 1970s and a relatively high labor force participation of women. In comparison with African and Latin American patterns, Iranian women's absorption in production and their position in the gender division of labor was unique: most employed women were concentrated in the service rather than other sectors of the economy; and the typical pattern of wage work was reversed, as labor force participation was highest among married women between the ages of 20 and 29 years. Household consumption rose with increases in the standard of living, yet domestic work remained primarily the women's domain and locus of reproductive activities, and many men continued to be little kings in their walled homes.[18]

So volatile has been women's experiences in the labor market that they had to adjust continuously to unparalleled situations. Under the Shah, these experiences were contradictory. On the one hand, women confronted the old and new forms of subordination: as wage earners by capital, as women by men, and as women by women in positions of power. On the other hand, women's departure from home and their participation in the educational system and the labor market helped many of them achieve personal and professional self-esteem, becoming active pioneers. By contrast, under the IRI, women's work increasingly intermeshed with the control of their sexuality. With the 1979 Revolution and the establishment of the new state, the integration of politics and religion adversely

[17] "Qoranic division," Sedghi, "Women and Class," Chs. 1 and 2.
[18] 1970s, Iran's women's labor force participation in the region was highest after Israel and Turkey, respectively – see Ch. 3 of this book.