Royal Harem Lives:
Power, Intimacy, and Liminal Family Formation
In the Late-19th Century Qajar Court

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
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Department of History
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Abstract

Royal Harem Lives explores the social, spatial and cultural dimensions of the women’s quarter of Nasir al-Din Shah’s court, variously referred to as his harem or andarun, during his reign (1848-1896). While this period is generally understood to coincide with the emergence of modernity in Iran, the maintenance of a large-scale royal harem is generally associated with a traditional and outdated Islamic convention. As such, the expansion of the Gulistan harem in the second half of the 19th century, concurrently with greater contact between the Qajar empire and Western modernity, presents us with an interesting paradox. This dissertation will focus on the demographic, physical, topographic, and representational dimensions of Nasser al-Din Shah’s harem, and the various social and familial relations within it, to argue that this institution was in fact one of the central loci of negotiations with modernity in late 19th century Iran. Throughout the following chapters, I examine the complex structure of this institution and the everyday life of its residents—at various points estimated to be between 700 and 2000 wives and female relatives, as well as different classes of employees—from physicians and translators, to servants, maids, slaves, and eunuchs.
For its time, the cultural and ethnic heterogeneity within the Gulistan harem was quite unique, as it housed residents from various interregional networks, and hosted elite local and international visitors. Located within the ever-expanding Gulistan Palace, and in the heart of the Qajar capital, the Gulistan harem was physically and socially structured around a set of extremely rigid hierarchies, which were often undermined by various affective bonds, developed through relations of proximity and cunning negotiations. I explore a number of these complex relationships and the ways in which they informed familial association, court life, and the distribution of political power within the late Qajar Empire.
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In the translation of Persian words, I have adopted a simplified version of the Library of Congress Persian Romanization Table. To make names easier for the reader, the diacritics indicated in the Library of Congress Romanization Table for vowels and Persian letters such as ﺮ, ﺭ, ﺟ, ﺟ, and ﻅ, ﺪ, ﺪ, ﻀ, ﻀ, ﻁ, ﺖ, and ﻅ have been dropped. Almost all Persian names (and nouns), including the names of authors, historical figures, and books, have been transliterated according to the simplified version present in the Library of Congress Persian Romanization Table. Names of individuals that appear in English translations of texts, such as Taj al-Saltanah’s Crowning Anguish, have also been transliterated within the text following the same format, but I use the translators spelling in all bibliographic references.

When the title of the image in a caption appears in quotation marks, the handwritten caption on the image itself has been translated into English. For all other images, the captions include the title of the image as it appears in the source or archive the image is taken from. When possible, dates have been provided. Full citation for the images appears at the end.

In all general matters of citation and footnotes, the 16th edition of The Chicago Manual of Style (for footnotes) has been followed. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

For all dates of events and/or publications, I have provided the Gregorian calendar date. Wherever the Persian Solar calendar date was indicated in the sources, I have provided both the Gregorian and Solar calendar dates in the citation. In the case of sources that only supplied a Lunar calendar date, I have supplied both the Lunar and Gregorian dates.
Introduction

Are not women of the harem more happy than women voters?¹
Simone de Beauvoir

Revisiting the Qajar Harem

An assembly of approximately twenty Qajar women are casually posing for a group photograph on a wide marble staircase. Some are sitting on different levels of the steps, while others are cross-legged on the ground, and a few are standing to each side. Their arms are casually draped over one another, and a few are leaning on the women next to them, exhibiting a sense of informal intimacy. All are staring directly at the camera, which is presumably in the hands of Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar, the third longest reigning monarch in Iranian history, and ruler of the Qajar dynasty for most of the second half of the 19th century, from 1848 until his assassination in 1896. The caption, written in his handwriting, simply states “group of women, marble stairs” (Figure 1).

Fig.1. “Group of women, marble stairs,” Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center

The photograph is from the first of four albums that feature images of harem women during Nasir al-Din’s reign, and are preserved at the Gulistan Palace Library image archive.²

While the photograph is not dated, based on the quality of the image and the age of key figures who are present within it, including the Shah’s favored wife Anis al-Dawlah (seated in the second row at the very center of the pack), and his adult daughters ‘Ismat al-Dawlah (seated on her right), and Furugh al-Dawlah (lounging in the middle of the bottom row), as well as the shape and width of the staircase, we can roughly estimate that

²Gulistan Archive Library has four albums which exclusively focus on images of harem women and servants from later Qajar period: album numbers 210, 289, 362, 682.
it was taken sometime in the last decade of Nasir al-Din Shah’s reign, inside the Gulistan andarun, after its last major phase of renovation and expansion which took place between 1882-1885. It is one of many group photographs composed as family portraits of Qajar harem women and taken during Nasir al-Din’s reign. While it is not possible to identify all of the women in this image, many of them are important figures who re-appear in several of the photographs within the four albums. What is certain is that these women make up a cross-section of harem constituents, from favoured wives and children to younger concubines, servants, and African slaves, together posing in familial formation.

The image is striking on several registers. Most notably, unlike the dominant orientalist representations of harem women from the period, seen in images by European painters such as Eugène Delacroix, Jean Leon Gerome, and Jean Auguste Ingre, as well as the early 20th century North African harem photographs and postcards of Rudolf Franz Lehnert and Ernest Heinrich Landrock (Figure 2), there is no sensual intimacy or erotic gaze in this photograph.

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3As I will show in Chapter II, during the last second half of the 19th century, the Gulistan Palace went through a series of major expansion and renovation projects, which were undertaken in tandem with the growth and development of Tehran.

4Ali Behdad has pointed out that early photographs of the Middle East borrowed from orientalist painting tradition in their representations of harems. He argues that such photographs “reproduced, and consequently reinforced, certain orientalist stereotypes about the Middle East—its "backward" people, and "exotic" cultures—stereotypes that provided the ideological rationale for colonizing the Middle East in this period.” See: Ali Behdad, “The Powerful Art of Qajar Photography: Orientalism and (Self)-Orientalizing in Nineteenth-Century Iran,” Journal of Iranian Studies 34, no. 1-4 (Fall, 2001), 143.
While orientalists chose to depict the harem as either a despotic prison house or the ideal site to forge a phantasm of a sensual domain where erotic and exotic fantasies could be indulged, in this image, and the many others like it, the royal Qajar harem reveals itself as an elite homosocial world of collective female bonding, wherein women from different classes and racial backgrounds cohabitate. The sense of intimacy here, both shared amongst the women depicted, and between the photographer and his subjects, is familial rather than sensual. In fact, throughout these albums, groups of women consistently appear within the intimacy of family bonds, posing in various spaces of an elite domestic order in which they are comfortably situated in. This is in part due to Islamic prohibitions in regards to the visibility of women, which made it so that the majority of the photographs of Nasir al-Din’s harem were in fact taken by the Shah himself, and

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5For an insightful study of orientalist images of the harem, see: Malek Alloula, Colonial Harem, translated by Myma and Wald Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
preserved in family albums which were not intended for public circulation.⁶ As Nameghi and Gonzalez have pointed out in their survey of early Qajar photography, Nasir al-Din Shah’s photographs of his harem defied the premise of oriental and colonial photography. Rather than depicting the harem as a world of hidden and forbidden eroticism, his camera tended to record the everyday life of his wives, children, and servants, while travelling or at home in the harem.⁷ As we will see in the many Qajar harem photographs I rely on throughout this dissertation, women are often depicted on staircases, doorsteps, balconies, and gardens inside Gulistan’s inner quarter (*andarun*), posing in group formation with children and servants, or participating in various social and ritual activities both inside and outside the palace. In the tradition of amateur family photography, in group portraits such as this one the subjects are positioned in a casual arrangement, meeting the camera’s gaze with relaxed and familiar expressions.⁸ The hand-written text, which often accompanies such photos, situates the subjects, often by name (though not in this particular instance), and sometimes with a descriptive account of the days’ activities that the subjects were engaged in. This visual archive of everyday life in the Qajar harem is a rich, albeit understudied, source of information about domestic culture, gender relations, and familial bonds in the late 19th century royal Qajar court.

Another feature of this photograph, most noticeable to our 21st century Western sensibilities, is the masculine nature of some of the women who proudly display their

⁷Ibid., 64.
⁸Nicole Hudgins argues that unlike formal family portraits taken by studio photographers, which show family members’ stiff and deliberate composure, within amateur family photographs, subjects are usually more relaxed and at ease. See: Nicole Hudgins, “A Historical Approach to Family Photography: Class and Individuality in Manchester and Lille, 1850-1914,” *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 3, (Spring 2010): 577-578.
thick eyebrows and exaggerated moustaches. In fact, were it not for their clothing, which includes the veil, to an untrained eye many of the women in this image lack clearly marked feminine attributes, and a few would more easily be read as male.\textsuperscript{9} As Afsaneh Najmabadi has pointed out in her seminal work \textit{Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards}, which examines the negotiation of gender and sexuality in Iranian modernity, it is hard to differentiate between genders in visual representations of the Qajar period, and one must often rely on the style of headgear to do so.\textsuperscript{10} Furthermore, in other images, these women are also often accompanied by children, both male and female, as well as court eunuchs, marking the gendered boundaries of the homosocial harem world as porous (Figure 3).

\textsuperscript{9}For example, Sikinah Sultan, who in the image is sitting on the ground, bottom row, second from the right, is amongst the more masculine-looking wives of Nasir al-Din.

To a contemporary viewer then, less familiar with Qajar sensibilities, these images, and the many others like them, displays a queer grouping of gender fluid bodies in close familial proximity. My initial selection, reading, and translation of such images, and the space of the 19th century Gulistan harem more generally, was informed by my interest in this queer sensibility and what I read as an alternative social model—a domestic space of homosocial collectivity, which was, for the most part, women-dominated, and inaccessible to the pervasive male gaze. After all, gender-segregated domestic and social spaces are not limited to Islamic social practices. As Leila Ahmed has pointed out in her memoirs, upon moving from Cairo to England to pursue a university education her initial
impression of Girton, a women’s college at the University of Cambridge which she
attended, was that it in many ways resembled a familiar female community, not unlike
the one she remembered in her mother’s childhood home in Cairo. Her positive
associations with this form of female community led her to wonder if her college was not
in fact “the harem perfected.”11 As Daphne Spain has pointed out in Gendered Spaces,
gender segregation in the domestic sphere as well as in public, educational, and social
spaces, is a frequent feature of many societies.12 While some feminist scholars have
argued that such segregation leads to women occupying a lower social status, and
produces and reproduces men’s power and privilege,13 others, including separatist
feminists, have celebrated women-only spaces as offering a liberatory model for
women’s emancipation.14

My own initial encounter with, and interest in the Qajar harem, was in part motivated by
the many ways in which this space seemed to me to mimic some features of the utopian
vision of North American separatist feminists, which I had encountered in my study of
the disparate history of feminist movements. Specifically, second-wave separatists
imagined and attempted to reconstruct a social order that rejected the heterosexual and
patriarchal norms of feminine beauty and the nuclear family through the assertion of new
forms of gender ambiguous aesthetics and intimate same-sex bonds, and proposed radical
shifts in everyday life that centered collective living and cultural practices, and the desire

11Leila Ahmed, A Border Passage: From Cairo to America - A Women’s Journey (New York: Farrar,
Straus and Giroux, 1999), 181.
13Ibid., 3.
14Separatists were a subgroup of feminists within the Western women’s movement of the 1970s, who, as a
response to the sexism of the New Left, called for women-only political groups, and later social formations.
See: Dana Shugar, Separatism and Women’s Community (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 3-17, 20–34.
to create a women-centric counter-culture to heteropatriarchal capitalist norms. At the height of what is now characterized as the second-wave feminist movement in North America, many, primarily white-middle class women, flocked to both urban and rural locations across the continent to become part of women’s-only living, social, and public spheres. From communes, to music festivals, book stores, and campus groups, the premise of this emerging separatist movement was that ‘women’ as a category constituted a unique and universal identity that had specific, and perhaps superior moral attributes, than the predominantly capitalist patriarchal societies that they had inhabited. Out of this philosophy, exclusive women’s spaces emerged as the most effective way to express a liberatory and radical feminist politics.

The motto “the personal is political” is a product of this ideological shift within the feminist movement—the emphasis on the personal was a call to consider everyday life as the site of radical political possibility. By now, much of this politics has been effectively criticized from multiple perspectives—from its inherent white, middle-class bias, to its biological determinism and the often violent exclusion of transgender identities. In more contemporary radical feminist discourses, this separatist model has

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15 For a discussion of second-wave engagements with women-only spaces, see: Kathy Rudy “Radical Feminism, Lesbian Separatism, and Queer Theory,” Feminist Studies 27, no. 1 (Spring, 2001), 190-222; Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973); Alice Echols, Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Sarah M. Evans, Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century’s End (New York: Free Press, 2003).

16 This articulation of womanhood also relied on foregoing, or at times showing active hostility, to considerations of conflicting differences between women based on race and transgender forms of being.

17 Kathy Rudy, “Radical Feminism, Lesbian Separatism, and Queer Theory,” 191.

18 Daly, Beyond God the father, 14, 17.
been rightfully replaced by the notions of gender fluidity and cross-cultural solidarity.¹⁹

However, even within this newer body of feminist literature lies the assumption that progressive women-only spaces were a product of white middle-class Western feminism. My dissertation then emerges as a critique of multiple waves of Western feminisms’ inability to see, seek, or engage with alternative social models of gender relationship outside of the Western canon. Through looking at one such site, a late 19th century royal Qajar harem, my dissertation attempts a revision of multiple sites of knowledge production, including both the Western feminist canon and the historiography of modern Iran, through looking at non-Western alternative domestic and social structures outside of the patriarchal nuclear family.

Of course, the Gulistan harem was in no way a utopic space outside of patriarchal purview or other repressive and hierarchical forces. Instead, the royal harem was comfortably situated at the very epicenter of elite institutionalized political and economic power in late-Qajar Iran, with the ultimate patriarchal figure, the Shah, as its head. Even within these images, Nasir al-Din’s presence both behind, and in front of the camera asserts this fact (Figure 4).²⁰


²⁰The vast majority of harem photographs from this period are taken by Nasir al-Din. They depict harem women and children in a passive role, and feature his handwriting describing the content of the image. Thus, these images, in a very literal sense, represent the patriarchal male gaze and gender power asymmetry so often critiqued by feminist writers. See Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Visual and Other Pleasures, 2nd ed. (New York: PalgraveMacmillan, 2009), 14-30.
Yet, I begin this project by asserting that the royal Qajar harem is an ideal site for studying both the possibilities and limits of an alternative social formation, which stood in a liminal temporal and physical space—at the crux of Iran’s engagements with modernization, and in the heart of a developing urban metropolis. My dissertation argues that while this institution was at once highly elite and hierarchically organized, the kinds of social, affective, and political power that circulated within its boundaries mark it as a historically specific and unique liminal social space that deserves attention and investigation. More specifically, I see my work on the Qajar harem as presenting a formidable challenge to Western feminist discourses about alternative social models, as well as a powerful scholarly intervention in the historiography of modern Iran, through centering gendered narratives that borrow from queer and feminist theoretical canons.
Harem Historiography

In European visual and textual accounts of 19th century Iran, the women’s quarter of the Shah’s palace, wherein his many classes of women relatives and their servants resided and referred to as his harem or andarun, was a central motif used to describe Iranian gender relations, and more broadly, the backward character of Iranains. Much like the broader body of European knowledge about Middle Eastern harems and the women that occupy them, these accounts were steeped in orientalist ideology, and often full of scorn and moral outrage, and sometimes, patriarchal envy, over gender segregation, polygamy, child marriage, and the treatment of widows and concubines. Harems were at once idealized as spaces of unmediated access to the fulfillment of lascivious desire,21 denounced as barbaric domestic spaces, and viewed as part of a timeless institution of Islamic culture.22 As Reina Lewis notes, for many of these orientalists, the harem was “a cruel and polygamous sexual prison” for Eastern women and “a pitiful emblem of the aberrant sexuality and despotic power that characterized all that was wrong with the non-Christian Orient.”23 For other European orientalists, the phantasm of the East as sexually lax, and the exotic harem as the space of unlimited erotic encounters, offered opportunities to access the various forms of sexual pleasure that were denied to them in a repressed Victorian society.24 Of course, both forms of orientalist discourses almost always ignored the non-Islamic origin of the actual harem system. In fact, as Billie

21 As Derek Hopwood has pointed out, earlier European writers such as Montesquieu, Gustave Flaubert, and Victor Hugo favoured the exotic images of the orient, since it allowed them to speak about ideas and impulses that were impermissible in Europe. See Derek Hopwood, Sexual Encounters in the Middle East: The British, the French and the Arabs (Ithaca: Ithaca Press, 1999), 20.

22 The works of most 19th century European travelers to Iran, such as James Bailey Fraser, Jakob Eduard Polak, George Curzon, and Mary Sheil provide ample evidence of this tendency. In the final chapter of my dissertation, I offer an in-depth analysis of this body of work.


24 Hopwood, Sexual Encounters in the Middle East, 48, 106,
Melman has pointed out, polygamy, concubinage, and various forms of gender segregation were practiced in Mediterranean societies prior to the Arab conquests of the Middle East. She argues that the identification of polygamy and seclusion with Muslim cultures emerged from the 18th century, and had clear political implications: “the harem came to be not merely a psychosexual symbol, but a metaphor for injustice in civil society and the state and arbitrary government.”

European representations of the harem as a barbaric institution of the Oriental Other then really came to life with the Enlightenment. As Marilyn Booth has argued, during this period, “the harem became a resonant image of political authoritarianism- the opposite of the reign of individual rights that Enlightenment thinkers argued ought to undergird legitimate political sovereignty.” The harem offered European orientalists a principal site for a critique of irrational Eastern practices, and counterpoint to the Enlightenment notion of an ideal conjugal family, as well as a separate public sphere. The prevalence and popularity of harems within this body of work not only revealed the voyeuristic impulse of European writers and their public, it also pointed to the imperial attitudes of European officials towards the region. Images of the backward harem were generally set against equally exaggerated images of a free-thinking and progressive Europe where

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26 Ibid.
women had made modernist gains through access to education, public political life, family law, and work opportunities.29

By now, such orientalist accounts of Eastern and Islamic gender roles and family structures have been sufficiently challenged by a host of feminist postcolonial scholars, including, most notably, Interpal Grewal and Meyda Yegengolu.30 However, such critiques have rarely offered much insight into the historical context and material reality of domestic spaces in Islamic societies. Instead, these accounts have been more invested in critiques of European representation. As, Indrani Chatterjee has pointed out, despite the critical understandings of colonial representations of women and domesticity within postcolonial and new imperial histories, there have been very few serious works about the nature of indigenous families in this historiography. She argues that in the South Asian scholarship, the study of family has been relegated to an old and outdated mode of social history.31

Similarly, within Iranian historiography, the royal harem has not only been a popular trope in orientalist writings, but also in the nationalist discourses which began to emerge

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29Not surprisingly, as Guity Nashat has pointed out, “few Europeans who championed the cause of Muslim women showed concern for, or an awareness of the difficulties experienced by many women in Europe.” Instead, a comparative analysis of gender roles between European and Middle Eastern women, in their respective societies, was part and parcel of orientalist and imperialist civilization discourses. See introduction to: Guity Nashat and Louise Beck (eds.), Women in Iran: from 1800 to the Islamic Revolution (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 7.
31Chatterjee’s edited collection of essays, Unfamiliar Relations, aim to address this historiographical gap in the South Asian scholarship by looking at different forms of kinship ties that existed across various temporal and geographical spaces in South Asia between the 17th and 19th century. See Indrani Chatterjee, ed., Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).
in the later part of the 19th century. Scholars such as Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi and Afsaneh Najmabadi have pointed out that the demands for women’s entrance into the Iranian public sphere and out of seclusion, were a key element of the matriarchal nationalist discourses which emerged in the second half of the 19th century, the period leading up to the constitutional revolution.\footnote{Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, \textit{Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography} (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 113; Najmabadi, \textit{Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards}, 133.} For example, the Iranian nationalist reformer, Mirza Agha Khan Kirmani, in his influential \textit{Three Essays} (\textit{Sih Maktub}), often read as a poignant rapprochement of Nasir al-Din Shah and his court, offers a deep critique of the role of women in Qajar society, and takes particular aim at the Islamic tradition of polygamy, women’s isolation from public space through gender segregation, and child marriage.\footnote{Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani, \textit{Sih maktub}, ed. Bahram Chubineh (Essen: Nima Verlag, 2000), 6.} All of these practices were of course inherent elements of the social structure of the Qajar harem.

In both 19th century orientalist and nationalist discourses, then, the harem/\textit{andarun} was a signifier for the containment of women within the private realm, and the royal harem in particular was used to make claims about a pre-modern social order where despotic kings ruled over their kingdoms and their homes with absolute authority. While both orientalists and nationalists looked at the harem as a principal site for their claims about women’s place in Iranian society, their rhetoric had little interest or investment in Iranian women in general, harem women in particular, or their everyday lives. Instead, within their writings, the practices associated with harems emerge as tropes to justify imperial or nationalist pursuits.
Despite its rampant use as a motif within these bodies of writing, there have been very few scholarly studies, particularly in the English language, that engage deeply with the royal Qajar haram as an institution, and with the everyday life of its constituents. This is despite the fact that the harem has been a central site of popular and fictitious accounts of the role of women in Qajar society. Representations of the Qajar harem continue to saturate popular culture sites that range from TV series, theatre, and film, to fiction and popular historical texts in Iran.

This project builds on Chatterjee’s call for a serious scholarly engagement with different forms of kinship arrangements in the “East” by examining the late Qajar harem, housed in the Gulistan Palace, during Nasir al-Din Shah’s reign. I aim to engage with the Gulistan harem during this period as the site of a unique familial formation that at once reflects certain Islamic traditions, and yet takes shape and even expands during the height of Iran’s engagement with the processes of modernization. During Nasir al-Din’s forty-eight year reign, the Gulistan harem, similar to Tehran, the city that housed it, grew both spatially and in terms of the number of residents as compared to the harem of his predecessor Muhammad Shah Qajar, who reigned from 1834-1848. This expansion presents an interesting contradiction since this period is generally understood as one that heralds the emergence of modernity in Iran, and since in both European and Iranian reformist and modernist accounts, the harem as an institution is thought to be an

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36 Muhamad Shah Qajar only had 12 wives.
outdated and traditional form of kinship that represents Islamic backwardness. As such, its simultaneous expansion in the face of greater contact with Europe and Western modernity presents us with an interesting paradox that I hope to explore throughout my dissertation.

Gendering Modernity

The period of Nasir al-Din Shah’s reign is generally associated with the emergence and spread of modernity in Iran, caused by a significant increase in contact between Iran and the West, the metropolitination of Tehran, and most notably, Nasir al-Din’s own travels to Europe. It is during this period that many modern technologies were brought and put to use in the Qajar capital, including new photography and film cameras, electricity, the telegraph, and railroads. Additionally, there was a major transformation in most Iranian cities, a proliferation of national newspapers and scientific journals, and the opening of hospitals, pharmacies, post offices, and Dar al-Fanun, the first Iranian university.

These dominant accounts of the modernization of Iran, mainly narrated through the field of political history, have also presented Iran as an independent peripheral state that was in

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37 Joseph Upton’s *The History of Modern Iran*, for example, argues that the process of modernization in Iran is largely determined through external forces. He argues that British and Russian interests in the region led to a series of internal changes in the country with modernization as their ultimate outcome (in other words, modernization was induced through external forces). Mehran Kamrava also agrees with this assessment that the rapid colonial expansion of Europe post-industrial revolution meant that European powers found Iran to be an increasingly important factor in the international equation, and this lead to increased economic and diplomatic ties between the countries, which eventually allowed Iran to modernize. See: Joseph Upton, *The History of Modern Iran: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960); Mehran Kamrava, *The Political History of Modern Iran: From Tribalism to Theocracy* (Westport: Praeger Publisher, 1992.

decline during the last decades of Qajar rule, and specifically Nasir al-Din’s reign.\textsuperscript{39} Such accounts tend to see modernity as an evolutionary model of universal progress, with post-Enlightenment Europe as its birth place, and other societies are thought to have been in a state of stagnation until they encountered and adopted European ways. The secular, scientific, and free nature of Western societies is offered as the hallmark of modernity, which was then universally applied and emulated by non-Western societies at different rates.\textsuperscript{40} Mehrzad Boroujerdi takes this argument further, stating that since Iran was never officially colonized, its modernization lagged behind that of other Eastern nations such as India, Algeria, and Morocco.\textsuperscript{41} Simply put, within the established historiographical canon, the predominant understanding is that modernity emerged in Iran in the second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, as a result of increased contact with Europe, and revealed itself through a clear break from traditional Islamic and Iranian social practices. As such, like much of the traditional literature on modernity, the focus is on change and discontinuity from past conventions and traditions, which is motivated by progress and emancipation through an embrace of European liberal Enlightenment values.

Modernity has also often been gendered as a male aspiration, which has been responsible for the universal distribution of freedom and liberty. As Hilde Heynen has noted, “the gendering of modernity as male . . . resides in the heroes that figure in its narratives and

\textsuperscript{39} Abbas Amanat offers a counter narrative to this historicization, arguing that Nasir al-Din’s reign and his consolidation of power was in fact perpetuated by modernity rather than hampered by it: Abbas Amanat, \textit{Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah and the Iranian Monarchy} (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008), xiii.

\textsuperscript{40} Cyrus Schayegh, for example, argues that Iranian modernity required the adoption and application of Western scientific knowledge to form the cultural and economic capital of a modern urban middle class: Cyrus Schayegh, \textit{Who is Knowledgeable is Strong: Science, Class, and the Formation of Modern Iranian Society, 1900-1950}, (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009).

in the specific sites they occupy.”  

These spaces include parliaments, universities, hospitals, and an emerging public sphere that is inhabited by “new forms of male subjectivity that manifest themselves in the public arena of city streets and political discourses, seemingly freer from any familial and communal ties.” While women sometimes make an appearance in the historiography of Iranian modernity, gender is generally regarded as a side note in a discourse that is dominated by a dichotomous rhetoric about East and West. Furthermore, any advances made in regards to Iranian women’s status, thought to be abysmal in comparison to their Western counterparts, is a by-product of contact with the West and is attributed to progressive male reformers, who are generally understood to be influenced by European ideas and responsible for the distribution of women’s rights. Modernist men, through their contact with Europe and European-inspired discourses, are recognized as the primary agents for the liberation of the modern Iranian woman, which takes place only after the downfall of the Qajar dynasty in 1925. They are credited with opening up discussions of previously taboo subjects such as sexuality, and encouraging a public reassessment of women’s education, public visibility, and family life.

43 Ibid.
44 Mehrzad Boroujerdi’s work in particular is limited in this manner. Of the over one dozen Iranian modernist intellectuals featured in his book, not a single one is a woman.
45 Modernist Iranian men including Mirza Malkam Khan, Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani and Hassan Taqizadeh, for example, are often the object of such praise. See: Camron Michael Amin, The making of the modern Iranian woman: gender, state policy, and popular culture, 1865-1946 (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 31-33; Afsaneh Najmabadi, Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards, 134-135 and 184-187; Afshin Marashi, Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State, 82-84.
46 Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi argues that the entrance of women into Iranian public sphere in the early part of the 20th century was in part a result of matriarchal national discourses put forth by leading Iranian male reformers in constitutionalist papers such as Musavat. Tavakoli-Targhi, Refashioning Iran, 132.
Over the last few decades, Iranian feminist scholars have attempted to remedy the gender-blind bias within Iranian historiography through writing women back into the history of Iranian modernity. Most, however, have been invested in a similar developmentalist understanding of modernity, wherein women’s social status is defined through their claim to a liberal and universal notion of rights, which they generally come to know in the first half of the 20th century, through contact with Europe, and a distancing from indigenous and Islamic values.\(^{48}\) Even nuanced writers such as Valentine Moghadam, who in her pivotal work, *Modernizing Women*, argues against the centrality of Islamic stereotypes in writing about Middle Eastern women, ultimately relies on liberal feminist strategies for narrating Iranian gender history.\(^{49}\) For example, while Moghadam argues that “the position of women in the Middle East cannot be attributed to the presumed intrinsic properties of Islam,” she maintains that the condition of Iranian women lagged behind Western women as a result of developmental issues.\(^{50}\) For her, the limits of “urbanization, industrialization, and proletarianization, as well as the political ploys of state managers” are the result of a failed modernity which began to take form in the 19th century, expanded during the Constitutional Revolution, and peaked under the Pahlavis.\(^{51}\)


\(^{50}\)Ibid., 5.

\(^{51}\)Ibid., 6.
This body of work by Iranian feminist writers is influenced by Western modernism and secular feminism, with an underlying assumption that traditional Islamic teachings reinforce a patriarchal system, and secularism holds the key to women’s liberation. Such an understanding takes as a given that feminism in Iran, like modernity, was a result of women being exposed to the outside world, both literally through exposure to socialist ideas from Russia and European-style education, and figuratively, through women’s entrance into the public domain. They fail to take account of modernity not just as a liberatory political and nationalist undertaking, but as Lila Abu-Lughod has pointed out, also as “a cultural or discursive project in which ideals of womanhood and notions of the modern were key elements.”\(^{52}\) She warns that, in looking at the net effects of this project, we must recognize that “the forms of feminism in the Middle East tied to modernity ushered in new forms of gendered subjection (in the double sense of subject position for women and forms of domination), as well as new experiences and possibilities.”\(^{53}\)

Taking to heart Abu-Lughod’s warning, a critical assessment of the aforementioned Iranian feminist canon would note the ways in which they align with orientalist assumptions that, previous to the adoption of Western liberal ideologies, Iranian women were victims of backward and repressive local customs such as polygamy, seclusion, and veiling. Such a framing not only functions to idealize understandings of secular Enlightenment and the nuclear family as the site of women’s liberation, it also ignores the multiple contributions Iranian women made to political, public, and social life prior to the 20th century. In doing so, there is a clear connection being made between encounters with


\(^{53}\)Ibid., 13.
European ideology and the rise of women’s rights movements in the Middle East. Muslim women’s liberation can then be narrated as one of the “positive” consequences of European imperial pursuits.

Afsaneh Najmabadi, in her seminal work *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, offers a decidedly different look at the process of modernization in Iran – one which takes gender as a central category in the making of Iranian modernity. Najmabadi argues that 19th century Iranian reformers, aware of contemporary European condemnations of homosexuality, and by extension homosociality, came to understand the modernizing project in terms of a repudiation of homoeroticism, and by extension, homosociality.54 As a result, the Enlightenment-induced shift in European definitions of marriage, from political alliance to the bourgeois Western ideal of “love” and nuclear family,55 were imported by Iranian reformist discourses beginning in the 19th century. However, it was not until directly after Nasir al-Din’s reign, and in particular, during the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911), that these shifts became entrenched, most notably in a move from polygamy to monogamy as the preferred expression of modern marriage. As Najmabadi points out, the European-inspired “modernist project of heteronormalization of sexual mores and heterosocialization of public life called for a

55 Key European enlightenment figures, such as Adam Smith, were strong advocates of this shift to the nuclear family as the central social unit of production that would best benefit the commercial interests of the state. In his 1759 work, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith argues that it is the responsibility of the individual to take care of himself, while the state was responsible for providing security. Family, for Smith, complements the security afforded by the state, so that the individual could be the ideal productive unit. However, too much reliance on kin was an outdated and backward mode of tribalism that he held in contempt. Instead, he prioritizes the autonomy of nuclear married couples, and their children, over all other social units. See Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1982), 220-223. Interestingly, in Smith’s work, this preference for conjugal nuclear family is set against Native American kinship formations, which according to him, display a “weakness of love” and the “most unpardonable effeminacy” amongst the “savages of North America.” Ibid., 205-206.
reenvisioning of marriage,” and had a tremendous impact on the familial and cultural life of early 20th century Iranians.56

Much as in liberal European discourse, in Iran, matrimony and the family became an appealing metaphor for describing the evolving relationship between citizens and the state.57 As a consequence, reform during the Constitutional Revolution and continuing into the early Pahlavi regime hinged on a total restructuring of Iranian gender relations into the exclusively binary terms of male and female, as well as a shift in the social significance of marriage, kinship formations, and what came to constitute a proper modern Iranian family.58 Accordingly, while under Nasir al-Din Shah, the royal harem had grown into a considerable social institution, among the most important social changes during the constitutional years was the termination of the royal harem as an institution. In fact, Muzaffar al-Din Shah began the process of shutting down his father’s harem soon after Nasir al-Din Shah’s assassination in 1896, marking a major shift in the meaning of marriage for the most privileged classes of Iranian society. As such, the Gulistan harem under Nasir al-Din was amongst the last of an important female-dominated institution of 19th century Iran that deserves more attention, and is thus the focus of this dissertation project. Throughout this work, I engage with the Gulistan harem in various registers, as a complex institution that was at once the site of Qajar monarchical and Islamic conjugal and social traditions, and as a transnational space at the heart of Iran’s engagements with modernity.

56Najmabadi, Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards, 156.
57Kashani-Sabet, Conceiving Citizens, 52.
58For a more complete analysis of shifts in such relations, refer to Afsaneh Najmabadi’s chapter “The Tragedy of Romantic Marriage” in Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards, 156-180.
Methodology

My dissertation is primarily situated in the field of new imperial history with a strong commitment to feminist, queer, postcolonial, and transnational methodologies. Most significant historians of the Qajar period, writing in the English language, have narrated the period primarily through political and economic history frameworks, with a more minor focus on social and cultural history. \(^{59}\) Such works, and the methodologies they’ve employed, have often ignored the themes of gender, domesticity, conjugality, and family, and their contribution to social, cultural, and political life during the 19th century.

More recently, a few scholars have begun the arduous task of revising Qajar history with a focus on women and gender relations in the period. \(^{60}\) At the same time, the broader field of new imperial history, lead by scholars such as Anne McClintock, Durba Ghosh, and Ann Stoler, has opened up space for the exploration of the centrality of gender as a key mode of power within imperialist ideologies and practices, as well as the constitution of both metropolitan and colonial modernities. \(^{61}\) A reexamination of family and domestic space has been an important site of study for this scholarship, and it made a major impact

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\(^{60}\) While both the scholarly and archival works of Afsaneh Najmabadi has been seminal to this project, other scholars including Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet and Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi have also made significant contributions.

upon the feminist and imperial historiographies of South and South East Asia. Yet the field has had less impact within Iranian studies.

My dissertation is inspired by and makes use of the new imperial history as a methodology, in order to move away from the late Qajar historiographical canon that over-emphasizes political and economic factors, while ignoring the significance of gender, conjugality, and family as key determining forces. This canon has functioned to produce not only a Eurocentric narrative, but also a masculinist lens, which ignores the significance of gender, sexuality, and intimacy in both nationalist and imperial projects. My work breaks away from this tradition through drawing on the works of a number of historians including Ann Stoler, Durba Ghosh, Indrani Chatterjee, and Afsaneh Najmabadi, working on various histories of women, gender, families, and affective bonds across a variety of historical and global contexts, and the shifting nature of these categories as a result of colonial and imperial projects. This approach will allow me to examine Nasir al-Din Shah’s harem not as an imagined space of orientalist fantasy or reformer nationalist scorn, but as a domestic space which was deeply implicated in late 19th century Iranian modernist discourses as well as urban metropolitan development and public life.

Through looking at the specific historical context of the second half of the 19th century in
Iran, and the everyday lives of the residents of the female quarters of Gulistan Palace, while also embracing a transnational, feminist, and queer critical understanding of race, class, imperialism, nationality, gender, and sexuality, this project challenges the understandings of progress in relation to gender roles which dominated imperialist and nationalist narratives about the late Qajar period. I will also borrow from the field of social geography, led by Michel Foucault’s later work on heterotopias, in order to make a case for the significance of the spatial organization of the harem - a space which I will argue was not passive or neutral, but informed by the ways its inhabitants organized themselves both physically, and structurally through formal and informal networks.

In his later work, Michel Foucault argued for the importance of the spatiality of social life, what he termed heterotopia—the place in which the actually-lived and socially-produced sites and the relations between them are negotiated. Foucault argued that, in contrast to utopias, “sites with no real place [which] present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down,” heterotopias are counter-sites, “a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which. . . all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.” In other words, heterotopias are heterogeneous and contradictory spaces—marginal centers that hold a complex arrangement of power and resistance, as well as norms, differences, and alterity. For Foucault, while utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces, heterotopias are real places that exist, but they exist “outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate

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63Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," Diacritics 16 (Spring 1986), 22-27.
64Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 24.
As I stated earlier, my initial interest in Nasir al-Din Shah’s harem was in fact motivated by its close structural proximity to the utopic spaces imagined by Western second-wave feminists. However, upon further research and reflection, I have come to understand this late Qajar harem as a heterotopic counter-site, where many of the cultural expectations and anxieties about Iranian modernity and gender norms are at once represented and contested. As Foucault states: “heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible.”

Using an interdisciplinary and multi-pronged approach, this project gathers and presents the multiple complex sites, contradictory representations, social and familial relations, and power structures that together made up the Gulistan harem. I offer various forms of insight into the social, political, spatial, and cultural life of late 19th century Iran through looking at its epicenter—the Gulistan Palace and its harem, which were at once walled-off from and at the very heart of a developing Tehran, as well as a modernizing Qajar empire.

I explore both the real and imagined representations of this iconic institution in a developing Middle Eastern metropole, with an emphasis on how this space was represented and negotiated by its residents, and the centrality of such representation and

65 Ibid., 24.
66 Ibid., 25.
negotiations to the development of Iranian modernity. To that end, my dissertation primarily relies on Persian language narratives recounted by individuals who were a part of this institution, as well as other documents from the period, such as memoirs, letters, photographs and maps, that re-trace the daily lives of Gulistan harem’s residents and their relations to the outside world. While I also engage with accounts written by foreign visitors to Iran during this period, the use of primarily Iranian sources privileges the narration, preservation, and recounting of everyday life within the Gulistan Palace by those individuals who were a part of this institution. Whether in photographs, confessional diaries or reflective memoirs, these sources, in various registers, were all distinctively sensitive to the discourses of and about modernity, and as my last chapter shows, in one way or another, their representation of daily life in Gulistan was in relation to such discourses.

Daily life, as recorded by those who lived it, represents a conceptual framework that allows me to examine how the experiences of Gulistan’s residents might serve as a historical optic to widen our understanding of the process of modernity, and how it may have taken shape in late 19th century Iran. As Harry Harootunian has pointed out, the category of the everyday is a loaded site for exploring the contradictions of modernity, particularly as experienced by those states in the periphery of the industrial world, since it takes as its main object of study how “contemporaries organized their lived experience at a certain historical moment and named it, and how that moment was historically stored
for later interpreters. In other words, the study of everyday life, through narratives and documents from the past of peripheral locations, allows the various elaborate and dull routines from that time and place, what he calls the *actuality of everyday life*, to be studied through the reflections of the present.

This project then attempts to think through how the everydayness of the Qajar harem was conceptualized by those who lived it, and how their story can offer us an understanding of the process of modernity as it unfolded in Iran during the 19th century, with a particular focus on some of the gendered implications of this process. Throughout the dissertation, I rely on contemporary theoretical and conceptual frameworks offered by feminist and queer theory, as well as new imperial history, to make the everydayness of the Qajar harem legible to a contemporary audience.

Harootunian argues that traditionally historians’ attempts to reproduce a continuity between the past and present was motivated by what they deemed to be the fixed reality of the past. He instead calls for a reversal of this convention, wherein history is in fact a reflection of the actuality of the present, using the facts of the past. As such, it is the present, where the world outside of Western hegemony, in all its complexity, can no longer be ignored, that serves as the starting point for any critical consideration of the history of modernity.

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This dissertation takes to heart the assertion that the present requires an account of different social spaces in diverse societies across a spectrum of the histories and experiences of the modernization project. Taking the shifting everyday experiences and spaces of the late Gulistan harem as its object of study, this dissertation attempts to engage with more broad questions in relation to discursive formations of Muslim women and their everyday social life and cultural practices. It asks us to think about how the spatial and social organization of the Gulistan harem, and the ways in which its constituents negotiated their positions within it, produced and reveal more general tendencies within a gendered history of Iranian modernity. The significance of this project is not only in the ways in which it allows us to study the intricacy, multiplicity, and contradictions of this institution from the past, but also reflect on the possibilities for alternative social formations of the future.

The complexity of lived experience as witnessed in everyday life is also precisely the site that Henri Lefebvre points to as an optimal space for critiques of capitalist modernity in his pioneering work, *The Critique of Everyday Life.*

Taking 20th century Europe as the site of his investigation, Lefebvre argued that although capitalism was primarily concerned with the organization and distribution of space, and as such, space, and in particular, urban space under capitalism, was organized to replicate hegemonic structures, the ways in which people lived and got along within modern spatial organization was often counter to capitalists’ intentions and interests, and the primary site of interventions

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into its hegemonic structures. As such, Lefebvre argued that it was only through the conditioning of everyday life that the space for a utopian future can open up.\footnote{Ibid., xxvii, 252.}

Throughout this dissertation, I engage with some of the effects of the 19th century social and spatial organization of the Gulistan harem, the global flows of people and commodities through it, and the various ways its constituents negotiated their social position and everyday lives. This is in order to think through the conditions of possibility held within this understudied institution, which I insist is, in many ways, the very locus of 19th century Iranian engagements with modernity. The larger argument that motivates this project is that the process of modernization in Iran, as experienced by the constituents of the Gulistan harem under Nasir al-Din Shah, did not conform to a Eurocentric model that demanded a homogenized experience of gender, conjugality, or kinship. Instead, the Gulistan harem presents us with a unique historical model of homosociality, collective living, and alternative familial intimacy, outside the bourgeois ideals of the nuclear family. Interestingly, such forms of communal living, in certain ways, both parallel and predate second wave ideals of women-only spaces, which didn’t emerge in the West until the 1970s.\footnote{Marilyn Frye, "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power" in Feminist Social Thought: A Reader, ed. Diana Tietjens Meyers (New York: Routledge, 1997).}

**Sources and Archival Materials**

My dissertation makes use of three categories of primary sources: published memoirs, chronicles and travelogues from 19th century actors who were directly implicated in the
Qajar court and Harem; official records and personal correspondence between members of the court and harem; and a vast body of photographs, maps and drawings that offer a robust visual history of the harem and its surrounding environment.

Throughout my dissertation, I have relied on both published and unpublished documents, primarily in the Persian language, including print and digital sources gathered from a number of libraries and archives from inside and outside of Iran. These include the Gulistan Palace Library and Archive in Tehran, The National Library and Archives of Iran, the Museum and Document Center of Iran’s Parliamentary library, The Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies, The Smithsonian Institution Archives, and Harvard University’s online resource Women’s World in Qajar Iran. All of my primary sources were intentionally drawn from public collections with significant Persian holdings.

Early in my research, I encountered a common trend within the historiography of Qajar Iran. Within this body of work, many, if not most historians tend to rely heavily on the use of private, personal and family collections in their work, with little to no distinction between the politics and practices of working with private rather than public records. This is even more prevalent in the works of scholars who focus on the history of women, and other marginalized figures. The reliance on private collections is in part the result of a lack of institutional collections pertaining to the history of Qajar Iran that are well organized and publicly accessible. As I learnt in my own research process, while Iranian

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72 The works of Haleh Ashfar, Hafez Farmayan, Mansoureh Ettehadieh Nezam Mafi, Afsaneh Najmabadi, and Abbas Amanat all rely extensively on both public and private records.
institutions such as the Gulistan Palace Library and Archives hold a robust collection of materials, they lack in both organizational structure and transparency, which imposes significant limits on public access. For example, the Gulistan archives does not have a searchable database that is open to the public. Thus, access is limited to what employees allow you to see, and the materials that are accessible can often be unreliable, since they don’t always come with properly catalogued designations. Thus, I am sympathetic to how such limitations foster a desire and need to pursue private collections.

However, I find three major problems with this reliance on sources from private collections. The first is that for some scholars, a tendency towards privileging private collections over public, has led to placing more emphasis on the discovery and publishing of such sources, rather than on their analysis and historical contextualization. The second major issue is that many documents in private collections are owned by heirs or entitled parties, and are either shared reluctantly and selectively with general scholars, shared with strings attached, or reserved for sale to other wealthy collectors and institutions. This can lead to a privatization of knowledge, as well as to different forms of problematic colluding between dealers and scholars. The third problem is a tendency of elite families, often individuals and scholars with direct ties to royal family descendants, to use their privileged access to private collections to monopolize the historiography of the period, and the way it is narrativized. This is a particularly acute problem within Qajar historiography as two of the main international bodies that hold such a monopoly, The International Qajar Studies Association, and The Qajar Family Association, are proudly

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run by royal family decedents.\textsuperscript{74} Within these institutions, members make use of private family collections, in order to generate and circulate their own favorable family history. I chose not to pursue private collections as an intentional rejection of the elite privatization of knowledge production within Qajar historiography.\textsuperscript{75} I instead limit my work to what was present in public institutions, and found sufficient materials within these institutions, that when properly analyzed and contextualized, could tell a different story about Qajar gender relations, than the predominant narratives within Iranian historiography. Furthermore, I made a choice not to privilege unpublished photographs and documents over published ones in my dissertation. Both are used in accordance to their value to the arguments I am making.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter I focuses on the social structure of Nasir al-Din Shah’s harem and the different forms of familial and conjugal relations within it, which were a defining feature of the day-to-day life of its residents. The chapter explores the unique forms of kinship that took shape within this institution, and how they were experienced, mediated, and negotiated by its differing levels of constituents. I will argue that the complex social relations of harem

\textsuperscript{74}In fact, the International Qajar Studies Association is primarily composed of members of the Qajar Family Association. The latter association boasts of being formed in the 1940’s by “over one hundred representatives of the major princely families,” and later in 90’s by members of the Qajar family, “under the honorary presidency of Prince Soltan Ali Mirza Kadjar, grand-son of Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar and Head of the Imperial Qajar House.” See “Qajar Family Association’s History,” Qajar Family Association, accessed April 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2018. \url{http://qajarfamilyassociation.org/qfa-s-history-.html}.

\textsuperscript{75}My work is deeply indebted to scholars such as professor Afsaneh Najmabadi and Massoureh Etehadieh, who have leveraged their personal and privileged access points to collect large bodies of documents, and make them accessible to the public through various institutions such as Harvard’s Women’s World in Qajar Iran and Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies. Such scholars have made major contributions to democratizing Qajar history, by offering public resources to all interested scholars and the larger public.
constituents, between and amongst themselves, as well as with the outside world, oftentimes functioned to undermine the hierarchies and dichotomies which are generally associated with pre-modern Islamic societies, and thought to be an inherent part of this elite institution. In particular, I will argue that the affective attachments across social class, and as we will see in Chapter II, racial boundaries, were a common occurrence in the Qajar harem, and mark this space as a unique and heterotopic site of female community, homosocial bonding, and extended kinship networks that formed contemporaneously with processes of modernization, which were also an inherent feature of daily life in this Qajar haram.

The concept of a harem denotes a certain specific arrangement of domestic space that has been common to a wide variety of Islamicate societies across many centuries and with great variations. As such, it is not limited to any single architectural or even class-defined elaboration of that concept. Chapter II will emphasize and analyze the specificity of Gulistan Palace’s physical space. Located in what was at the time the historical core of Tehran, and steps away from the Grand Bazar, both the Gulistan Palace and its andarun went through a series of major renovation and expansion projects during Nasir al-Din’s reign. This chapter will examine the spatial dimensions of Nasir al-Din Shah’s harem and its proximity to the core of this expanding urban locale. During this period, the palace, along with its women’s quarter, grew both physically and in terms of the number of residents as compared to the harem of his predecessor. This period is also generally understood as the emergence of modernity in Iran, in part defined through rapid urbanization, and yet, in both European and Iranian nationalist accounts, the harem as an
institution is thought to be outdated and traditional. As such, its simultaneous expansion in the face of greater contact with Europe and Western modernity, and metropolitanism, presents us with an interesting paradox. This chapter will focus on the physical and topographic dimensions of Nasir al-Din Shah’s harem and its proximity to the core of an expanding urban locale. I offer new insights into the material organization of this social institution, the ways in which different bodies, ideologies, and commodities were distributed within and outside of it, and the ways in which it was controlled, lived in, and subverted.

Chapter III focuses specifically on the differing classes of maids, servants, and slaves that resided and worked within the royal palace, and traces their history in parallel to the history of both migration and slavery in Iran. The cultural and ethnic diversity within this harem was, for its time, quite unique. Many of the servants and eunuchs which were a part of this institution were brought to Iran either after being captured in war, or were exported through the gulf slave trade (this is predominantly the case for the black slaves and eunuchs who originated from East Africa). These specific classes of residents reveal a great deal about interregional networks and the various forms of migration within them during the period. As well, many of these individuals were significant figures in the royal court and wielded various forms of power within the complex court system. For example, servants functioned as a key connection between the women of the court and the outside public world. As such, they often occupied an ambiguous space between the public and private realms, the boundaries of which were so heavily guarded for many of the other residents of the harem. While there are many visual and textual traces of this class of
constituents, it is only recently that they have emerged as a subject within Qajar historiography. This chapter aims to offer an account that connects the themes of migration, labor, and domesticity in late Qajar Iran.

Finally, Chapter IV will focus on the various representations of Nasir al-Din Shah’s harem in both Western and native accounts of the institution. My emphasis will be on the conceptual and descriptive accounts of Nasir al-Din’s harem, as shaped and represented by various narratives and archives, and what they tell us about the different kinds of investments that various parties had in this space. Comparing and contrasting orientalist, native, autobiographical, and visual accounts of Gulistan Palace’s andarun, this chapter examines the various ways it has been imagined and memorialized as a defining space of negotiating modernity in late 19th century Iran.

The dissertation will conclude with an attempt to trace what happened to the women of Nasir al-Din Shah’s harem after his assassination in 1896 and once the institution was disbanded. There is little information available about the majority of the lower-ranked women who were left abandoned once Muzaffar al-Din Shah took the throne. The little we do know paints a grim picture of loneliness and poverty for many of these women. Retracing some of their narratives in the post-constitutional era, this project offers an apt critique of traditional narratives of Iranian women’s history that located their liberation in the early part of the 20th century. Instead, through an examination of the late 19th century Gulistan harem, the project offers one way to write gender back into Qajar history, and the urban fabric of a developing Tehran. It argues that the late Qajar harem was a decisive
force in shaping the Iranian modernization project. In doing so, the project is more broadly an attempt to preserve a past that can provide a legacy for future imaginings of alternative social and domestic formations. It is also a counter-narrative to histories that have pathologized, stereotyped, exoticized, and otherwise misrepresented the lives of Muslim women of the past in the name of their liberation.
Chapter I
Intimacy and Power: Familial Relations in Nasir al-Din’s Harem

... despite the fact that Nasir al-Din has a large number of wives, he is still accumulating new ones. It is not only princesses and royal decedents that fill his andarun, his spouses are often selected from among young peasant women from neighboring villages who could end up as mother to the next sovereign.  

Carla Serena

Introduction

Nasir al-Din Shah’s harem, housed primarily in Gulistan Palace’s andarun, was the last large-scale harem of an Iranian monarch. By the end of the 19th century, this form of conjugality was increasingly scrutinized as a backward Islamic tradition that had no place in the 20th century. After Nasir al-Din’s assassination in 1896, and certainly by the time of the Constitutional Revolution, polygamous unions, which allowed for large-scale royal harems, were frowned upon by modern citizen-subjects, and were relegated to the uneducated peasant class. As an institution, polygamy was a counterpoint to post-Enlightenment European understandings of marriage, conjugality, and family. Yet, throughout the 19th century, the royal Qajar harem, the largest polygamous institution in late 19th century Iran, was a crucial site wherein tradition and modernity met, intermingled, and sometimes clashed. Despite being relegated to the realm of the domestic, familial, and private spheres, the royal Qajar harem under Nasir al-Din Shah was an important and influential social sphere where relations of proximity, affective bonds, intimacy, and kinship ties were the primary engine for the acquisition and exercise of political power in the Qajar court. However, since structurally the royal harem stood as the antithesis of modern ideas of domesticity and the bourgeois family, the complex and

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76 Carla Serena, Hommes et choses en Perse (Paris: Charpentier et Cie, 1883), 217.
nuanced social formation has often been uncritically relegated to the realm of an outmoded Islamic tradition which was successfully replaced with more modernist forms of conjugality that replicated European practices, which themselves had only emerged in the previous century.

In his seminal work *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin argued that in the early 19th century a new figure appears onto the scene of European discourses—the private individual whose home and work become separate and distinct spaces. Benjamin claims that, previous to this era, the home did not serve as a private shelter for members of a small family, and instead, was a large structure that housed different forms of work and social spaces, as well as various constituents including protégés, extended family, and servants. However, beginning in the 19th century, for this newly emerging private individual, “the place of dwelling is for the first time opposed to the place of work. The former constitutes itself as the interior. Its complement is the office.” This leads the private individual, who is most certainly male-gendered, and “who in the office has to deal with reality,” to seek out a domestic interior space of leisure separate from work “to sustain him in his illusions.” As such, he increasingly keeps all work, commercial, and public considerations outside of the private realm, which he reserves only for the “irreal” acts of inhabitation. Benjamin offers a formative and influential argument for an oppositional distinction between private and public space, family and social space, and the separation between spaces of work and leisure, which according to him was a key

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78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., 9.
feature of modernity and capitalism, informed by the enduring legacy of Enlightenment principles that dominated 19th century European ideology. Hilde Heynen, in “Modernity and Domesticity,” extends Benjamin’s assertion to argue that the whole notion of domesticity is a construction of the 19th century. She states:

The term refers to a whole set of ideas that developed in reaction to the division between male and female spheres, which was justified by assumptions regarding the differences in “nature” between the genders . . . As a consequence of their different natures, men were considered fit to take their place in the public sphere of work and power, whereas women were relegated to the private realm of the home, which they were assumed to turn into a place of rest and relaxation for their husbands, fathers, or brothers.81

Such a gendered division between public and private spheres emerged hand-in-hand with understandings of the nuclear family as the ideal kinship unit within the European social order. Many feminist critiques have noted that these European principles of domesticity, and the gendered division of labor that accompanied them, were deeply ingrained in repressive nuclear family norms and capitalist commodity culture, and were a product of the patriarchal and individualist tendencies of the liberal social order.82 Furthermore, as Ann McClintock has argued, the emergence of a domestic ideal was not only intimately connected to the rise of liberal capitalism, but was also a primary focal point of imperialism. She states:

. . . the cult of domesticity was not simply a trivial and fleeting irrelevance belonging properly in the private, “natural” real of the family . . . the cult of domesticity was a crucial, if not concealed dimension of male as well as female identities - and are indispensible elements both of the industrial market and the imperial enterprise.83

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83 McClintock, Imperial Leather, 5.
Many authors, following McClintock’s lead, have pointed out the colonial and imperial reach of such ideologies. Broader feminist investment in domestic politics have led to a robust field of gender and domestic history, which has rejected understandings of modernity that see it as a process of democratization of the family, and have instead insisted on the centrality of the links between gender roles, the private/public spheres, and both domestic and imperial state politics. This scholarship has been effective in connecting political and economic processes of modernization and imperialism to the changing ideas and structures of households and kinship across various global contexts. For example, in the case of Iran, Afsaneh Najmabadi has shown how in the 19th century, the emergence of European modernist discourses and the increased contact with Europe that resulted from its imperialist interest in the region produced rigid and codified conjugal and heteronormative practices which broke away from the homosocial order and the homosexual habits that accompanied it in earlier Qajar society. The Victorian ideals of repressed sexuality and the capitalist model of a nuclear family were foreign imports that shifted the way that intimacy, family, and domesticity were experienced in Iran during its modernization process.

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86 Najmabadi, Women with Moustaches and Men without Beards, 7.
While such studies often critique the colonial imposition of Enlightenment values on indigenous peoples and practices, few have shown a deep engagement with the variety of complex, connected, layered, and fluid household arrangements that have existed across historical and regional contexts. As Indrani Chatterjee has pointed out, while much has been written about the ideological production of the nuclear family, and the gender roles associated with it, particularly as they relate to global modernizing projects, there has been little attention paid to the history of family formations in non-Western regions.\(^87\) This is in part due to the fact that such familial formations are not easily recognizable or comparable, either structurally or affectively, to the bourgeois nuclear family that defines modern domesticity.\(^88\) As such, Chatterjee argues that the history of non-Western family formations has been relegated to an outdated mode of social history where the household is taken as an economic unit, wherein people are related through relations of production and consumption, and co-residency is the locus for the practice of these relations.\(^89\)

Many Western feminist scholars, particularly from the 1960’s and 1970’s, have explored and often celebrated alternative familial and social arrangements to conventional patterns of bourgeois family life, yet few have located such alternatives outside of Europe and North America. Instead, the study of complex local kinship patterns outside of Western contexts has been relegated to an outmoded form of cultural anthropology, legitimately

\(^{87}\) Chaterjee, *Unfamiliar Relations*, 6.


\(^{89}\) Chaterjee, *Unfamiliar Relations*, 8.
critiqued for its ethnocentric bias.\textsuperscript{90}

Chatterjee urges us to think through and recover “how intimacy was created in the past” through both small and large-scale practices of kinship.\textsuperscript{91} Her call has been heeded by a new body of South Asian scholarship, but has had less traction within the discipline of Middle Eastern Studies in general, and Iranian studies in particular. To address this gap, this chapter, motivated by Chatterjee’s call, attempts to engage with the specificity of the royal Qajar haram as a site within which multiple forms of power, intimacy, sociality, and kinship bonds were forged and navigated in the context of a complex and unique familial formation.

I explore the Gulistan harem as a model of familial life within the realm of the domestic, and the site of a very different kind of social spirit than the bourgeois family model—one which was flexible, mobile, and collective. In this space, affective bonds often cut through class and bloodlines and were also used to negotiate and affirm status and wield social and political power within a complex kinship group. While acknowledging that the Gulistan harem represented an extremely elite institution that was inaccessible, and in many ways, out of touch with the lives of ordinary Iranians in the second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, I look at this institution as an interesting site for the study of multiple social, domestic, and familial conventions outside the scope of, and in many ways in antithesis to, the European modernist ideals. In the context of the Qajar harem, which I argue was a


\textsuperscript{91} Chaterjee, \textit{Unfamiliar Relations}, 10.
large scale and pluralistic familial unit, there was a complex, but strong, kinship system within a domestic space that housed an ever-expanding and extended familial community, which included individuals from various social classes and racial categories, who were often able to bypass blood, gender, race, social, and economic status to foster complex forms of belonging, as well as social and institutional power. And while the harem, in many ways, confirms conventional gender patterns associated with Muslim culture, throughout this dissertation I argue that a look at the everyday life of its constituents shows us a very different picture—one in which rather than staying obedient to cultural conventions, the various subjects that lived and worked within Gulistan harem and court used their intricate social positions to forge unique domestic relations and through them, unconventional life paths. This chapter attempts to retrieve some of the complexities and nuances of this over-determined, yet understudied institution.

The Islamic Harem

Harem, as a concept, denotes both a certain arrangement of domestic space as well as the grouping of people who occupy it, and has been a common feature of a variety of Islamic societies across many different centuries. As such, it is not limited to any particular architectural or social arrangement and varies across different cultural and class lines. While the specificity of the differing historical and cultural context of various harems is important, the model of this complex institution found in the late Qajar court parallels

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92 In Persian, the word harem can be used in reference to either definition, but the word andarun is also used interchangeably to refer to the first definition - the interior space of a home generally occupied by women and their relatives.

93 Marilyn Booth’s edited collection, Harem Histories, offers an account of the various incarnations of this institutions across a variety of times and places. Unfortunately, a history of Persian harems is noticeably absent from this collection.
large-scale imperial Ottoman harems of the time in significant ways, and can also in
some ways be linked back to the harems of the Prophet and the Caliphate. In fact,
structural parallels that link this institution to traditional Islamic practice, including
polygamous marriage,\textsuperscript{94} the physical separation between interior and exterior domestic
spaces,\textsuperscript{95} and the categorization of men as mahram (lawful and thus allowed access) or
na-mahram (unlawful, and thus forbidden),\textsuperscript{96} function as the source of its legitimation as
an extremely elite institution, one which was far removed from most ordinary peoples’
lived experience.

Like much of the Muslim world, gender segregation as an assertion of Islamic moral and
social order served as a source of legitimation for Qajar political authority. As Asma
Asfaruddin has pointed out, beginning in the second century of Islam, and reaching its
peak by the late medieval period, much of the understanding of female seclusion within
elite Islamic society was based on interpretations of the behavior of the Prophet’s own
wives as they appeared in many biographies from the period. This was despite the fact
that the concept of harem had not yet come into existence, and according to her, was not
in fact reflective of gender relations in early Islamic history. She argues that it was only
during the medieval period that:

\[\text{[a] literary cult of domesticity apparently grounded in religious texts and}
\text{hallowed praxis came to be propagated in these circles, and seclusion in the home}
\text{was promoted as the defining feature of feminine moral excellence . . . As the}\]

\textsuperscript{94}Polygamy, in Islam, involves the marriage of one man to several women. For a more thorough discussion
of the Islamic doctrine dictating polygamous relations see: Barbara F Stowasser, \textit{Women in Qur’ān,
\textsuperscript{95}Refer to Chapter II for a more detailed discussion of spatial organization of harem.
\textsuperscript{96}For a legal definition of mahram and na-mahram gender relationships, see: Shahla Haeri, \textit{Law of Desire:}
\textit{Temporary Marriage in Shi’i Iran} (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1989), 76.
prophet’s closest female associates and relatives, their conduct and actions as recorded for us in official biographies were deemed to have met with Muhammad’s approval, and thus they were held up as morally exemplary and prescriptive for later generations of Muslim women.97

While Afsaruddin argues that during the time of the Prophet, women in fact had a robust role within the public sphere, later Islamic scholars of the medieval period interpreted early texts in accordance with their own moral adherence to strict gender segregation, and assigned it as a normative practice of the salaf, the men and women of the first generations of Muslims. As she states:

The virtuous Muslim woman from the Abbasid period on, closeted in a circumscribed world of female relatives and companions and close male relatives, could thus imagine herself to be replicating the world of her pious female predecessors of the first century of Islam. . . 98

At the same time, throughout the course of Islamic history, the notion of the king as the shadow of God on earth held great sway across regional contexts, and functioned as a way to reconcile the temporal power of a king with the premises of Islam.99 Such parallels functioned to serve as a reminder of both the benevolence of the king, as well as the virtues of the important women who played a prominent role in their societies.100 Robert Gleave, in the introduction of his edited volume Religion and Society in Qajar Iran, has argued that throughout the Qajar period of rule, Islam was a primary pillar of the social and cultural life of Iran, and as such, the Prophet and his behaviors served as

98Ibid., 44.
99Abbas Amanat has argued that the Qajar state was one of the last, if not the last, to be faithful to this model of government. See Amanat, Pivot of the Universe, xv.
100Afsaruddin, Harem Histories, 25.
the moral compass for his followers. Elements of the Prophet’s personal life, including the structure of his home in Medina, which only begins to appear in Islamic texts of the medieval period, was believed to be the original harem. It was replicated within the Qajar court. The Gulistan harem, much like other royal harems in the Islamic world, aimed to reflect certain structural parallels with understandings of the Prophet’s own system of conjugality and domestic social order, most notably through the practice of polygamy and gender segregation. Such practices were thought to be markers of Islamic virtues in social life, and adherence to this moral code served as a source of legitimation for political authority and social morality.

It is important to keep in mind that while gender segregation was a normative practice within Islamic social order and domestic life, particularly in urban and urbanizing contexts, the harems of caliphs and kings were significantly different from those of most members of various Muslim societies. Whereas the former were large and lavish polygamous institutions belonging to elite and affluent classes, what constituted the harems of most other Muslims across various contexts were much smaller, and often occupied by monogamous family units. As Nikki Keddie has pointed out, the royal harem, which often stands as the typical domestic and female space in Western accounts of the Orient, was an extremely rare and elite institution that would have appeared just as foreign and exotic to the majority of Muslim women.

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102 Ibid.
103 Booth, Harem Histories, 12.
Despite its uniqueness within the context of late Qajar Iran, or the Middle East more broadly, the Gulistan harem did in significant ways mimic certain common features of elite Shi‘i Muslim society. This included not only gender-based spatial segregation within the domestic sphere, which I will discuss further in Chapter II, but also, in the case of the royal family, a large-scale and complex kinship system which included a maximum of four primary wives, multiple temporary wives, as well as an emphasis on extended family, and the presence of individuals from various social and economic classes who were tied through kinship, domestic labor, and affective bonds.105

While on the surface the royal Qajar harem under Nasir al-Din was structured around a series of predetermined and rigid social hierarchies taken from Islamic doctrine, the everyday life of the constituents of Gulistan often undermined traditional conventions on several registers. A key example was the supposed hierarchical status of the four primary or “permanent wives” (aqdi), in relation to the many concubines or “temporary wives” (sighah) as sanctioned within Shi‘i law. This law stipulates that while a man can have up to four primary wives through a permanent marriage (nikah), there is no limit to the number of sighahs he can take, or the length of a temporary marriage (mut‘ah).106 As such, an unlimited number of sighahs can enter a man’s harem for a period which can range from 1 hour to 99 years, although such women have fewer rights and less status.107

106Shi‘i jurisprudence claims that such practices were sanctioned both by the Prophet himself, and within the Qur’an in verse 4:24. For a thorough discussion of Shi‘i marriage laws, refer to Shahla Haeri’s Law of Desire, 33-72.
107Ibid., 1-2.
Traditionally, within the Qajar dynasty, the permanent wives were descendants of more elite families, often from within the Qajar clan and bloodline itself, and thus were thought to have more power and prestige within the harem, while sighahs held a lower status and were deemed minor figures within the familial hierarchy. However, many of Nasir al-Din’s sighahs were far from temporary or minor figures in his life and harem, and as we will see in the next section, exercised great power over his throne. While the Qajar bloodline, which continued through matrilineal descent, was indeed a significant factor in determining status, and a primary factor for how heirs were selected, as we will see, many other factors contributed to the status of women, children, and servants within the royal harem. Furthermore, since royal descendants were usually raised by a combination of eunuchs, various harem women (both blood related and not) and servants, there were many instances of intimate social and familial bonds which developed across class, gender, race, and bloodlines, contributing to the complexity and fluidity of the social structure of Nasir al-Din’s harem.

Nasir al-Din’s Harem: Demographics and Structure

Throughout the first century of Qajar rule, royal harams were notoriously large-scale institutions, wherein the sizeable number of wives, both permanent (aqdi) and temporary (sighah), signaled the elite status of the royal family. At the time of his death, Nasir al-Din is said to have had a total of 85 wives and sighahs, who, along with several hundred relatives and servants, resided in the Gulistan andarun, marking his harem as the last

108Maryam Ameli-Rezaei, Safar-i Donah Bah Gul (Tehran: Nashr-i Tarikh-i Iran, 1389/2010), 34.
large-scale institution of its kind in Iran.\textsuperscript{109} While it is not clear how many wives Nasir al-Din had throughout his reign,\textsuperscript{110} the court chronicler, I’timad al-Saltanah, on April 25\textsuperscript{th}, 1888, offered the following account of the number of harem residents:

When I went to the home of his highness, he said that there are 700 women both virgins and non-virgins, as well as bondswomen and housemaids [\textit{kaniz va kulfat}] who reside in the \textit{andarun}, as well as 750 servants [\textit{nukar}]. This figure does not include the relatives of the women, and the 38 eunuchs [\textit{khvajih}].\textsuperscript{111}

I’timad al-Saltanah’s daily journal, which spanned 22 years of Nasir al-Din’s reign, and offered perhaps the most comprehensive account of the late Qajar court, only accounted for 34 of Nasir al-Din’s wives by name.

Nasir al-Din’s personal physician, the French doctor Jean-Baptiste Feuvrier, who resided in the Qajar court from 1889 to 1892, offered the more exaggerated figure of approximately one thousand women, of various statuses, residing in the harem, with forty eunuchs watching over them.\textsuperscript{112} What is clear from the different accounts is that the wives and \textit{sighahs} of the Shah made up less than ten percent of the total harem population, and came from a diverse range of backgrounds. While some were daughters of high-ranking officials, and part of the extended Qajar family, others were married into the Qajar court for political reasons so the Shah would have a link to various sectors of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{110} For a summary of various accounts, which offer different estimates of the number of wives and residents in Nasir al-Din’s harem, see: Hassan Azad, \textit{Pusht-i pardah-ha-yi haramsara} (Anzali: Oromiyeh, 1364/1985), 365.
\textsuperscript{112} Jean Babtiste Feuvrier, \textit{Trois ans à cour de Perse} (Paris: F. Juven, 1900), 157.
\end{footnotesize}
society through conjugal bonds. In many instances, marriage was motivated by social and political factors, although romantic love and intimate bonding also played a large role in whom the Shah married and what her status was in the court. Some wives first entered the harem as Kurdish and Turkish prisoners of war, and others were young women and girls he had brought back from his trips to different parts of the region. As such, in a sense, the Gulistan harem acted as a convergence site—a center that brought together constituents from across the empire and beyond, and along the various local and inter-regional routes through which Nasir al-Din and his court traveled and in which they had vested interests.

Nasir al-Din also had a total of twenty-seven surviving children, all of whom spent a significant portion of their lives in the harem, many producing offspring who made up another large sector of the harem population. This, along with the various levels of educators (both religious and secular), servants and slaves, primarily imported from Central Asia and East Africa, made this harem amongst the most heterogeneous spaces of late 19th century Iran, displaying, through its constituents, the country’s interregional and transnational networks, as well as various social classes (Figure 5).

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114I’timad al-Saltanah, for example describes an instance of fighting which breaks out in July of 1883, during a royal trip to Khorasan, between Nasir al-Din’s guards and local tribes. According to him, during the conflict, many were killed, while others were taken as prisoners of war, including a young girl who was then raised in the harem and eventually became one of the Shah’s sighah’s. See: I’timad al-Saltanah, Ruznamah-yi khatirat, 243.

Fig. 5. “Group of my wives, and Anis al-Dawlah’s guests for Eid celebrations, with servants and children. Madame Paula (?) with her child is in the middle,” Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center

Nassir al-Din Shah’s harem was also noteworthy for hosting many outside relatives, as well as both local and foreign visitors, who at any given time would be spending days and weeks at Gulistan (Figure 6).
As the above excerpt from an 1891 report on daily visitors received by various harem residents shows, it was not unusual for the number of guests to range from tens to hundreds on a daily basis. While the estimates of the general occupancy of the harem differ within various sources and during various seasons, throughout the high seasons of occupancy, from fall to summer, they usually range between 700 to 2000 people, making it a sizable institution.116

116Amongst the more conservative numbers are from Taj al-Saltanah, who estimates the number of harem residents at 500-600, with an additional 300 relatives and guests at any given time. Most estimates are, however, higher. Russian Colonel V. A. Kosogovskii, who was stationed in Persia towards the end of the century, estimated the number of women in the Shah’s harem at 1200, including 4 primary wives, and 106 sighahs, and on special occasions, hundreds of guests. I’timad al-Saltanah’s estimates add up to approximately 1500 residents, while ‘Ayn al-Saltanah, in his diaries, offers the highest estimate of 2000 residents. See: Taj al-Saltana, *Crowning Anguish*, 88; V. A. Kosogovskii, *Khatirat-i kulunil Kosogovskii*, trans. Abbas-Quli Jilli (Tehran: Simruq, 1355/1976), 161; Qahrman Mirza Salur ‘Ayn al-Saltanah,
Day-to-day life within the Gulistan harem involved a number of both mundane domestic affairs and elaborate royal rituals that, along with the spatial organization of the court, functioned to assert the internal hierarchy. Everything from sitting arrangements during meals, to size of housing, bathing rituals, number of servants, and income was technically established by reference to this structure. As an example, the pay scale for harem women was determined by their status within a tiered system. By the late 19\(^{th}\) century, according to the writings of Dust-Ali Khan Mu'ayyir al-Mamlık, the Shah’s grandson from his first wife, it was as follows: the first tier, the Shah’s four primary wives, received 750 tomans monthly, the second tier, between 200 to 500 tomans, and the third tier sighahs received between 100 to 150 tomans, while the Shah’s adult daughters received an annual stipend of 4,000 tomans.\(^{117}\)

Although primary wives within this structure were women from elite families and royal blood lines, and technically held more power, Nasir al-Dın’s harem was notorious for housing women from lower and middle classes who outranked many of the first tier wives in his affections. For example, the woman who held the greatest economic power under Nasir al-Dın Shah’s reign, perhaps only paralleled by his mother, was his sighah, Anis al-Dawlah, who entered the harem as a lower class maid but became one of the most powerful figures during the Shah’s reign. Carla Serena, the Belgium traveler, and one of the few European women to write about her travels to Iran between 1877-1878, met Anis

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al-Dawlah on several occasions and described her as the Shah’s favored wife and the most queen-like figure of Nasir al-Din’s harem. In fact, on several occasions, the Shah offered to demote one of his primary wives in order to yield her status to Anis al-Dawlah, but she refused this offer and remained a sighah until her death. In his memoirs, Mu‘ayyir al-Mamlik asserted that unlike other harem women, Anis al-Dawlah did not have a limit on her salary. According to her maid and confidant Munis al-Dawlah’s memoirs, Anis al-Dawlah also had her brother appointed as the tax collector of the city of Kashan and its neighboring villages, and she received all the tax surplus from the region.

Arguably, the majority of the influential figures in Nasir al-Din’s harem were peasants and women from lower classes, many of whom, once they entered the harem, would form close and often strategic bonds with other women and eunuchs and leverage their positions to bring in their siblings, cousins, and other kin from near and far away villages, and secure pensions and posts for them. As Abbas Amanat has pointed out, “the Shah’s favoritism for his wives of lowly background and their relatives, much criticized by the old nobility, changed the very structure of the court and eventually the social composition of the government.” Family members of the Shah’s favorite wives were often granted patronage to government positions, and formed a sizeable courtier class throughout his reign. This was often a source of criticism by European visitors, who

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118 Serena, Hommes et choses en Perse, 74-76.
122 Ibid., 26.
disapproved of the Shah’s continual pursuit of new wives, which was not just limited to royal women, but also peasant women and slaves. As the introductory quote to this chapter notes, for example, Carla Serena frowned upon the fact that any of these lower class women could potentially be the bearer of the future King of Iran.

While this fear did not come to fruition and Nasir al-Din’s successor, Muzaffar al-Din Shah, was in fact of royal Qajar decent, the diverse classes of wives and servants who occupied the royal harem wielded a great deal of power throughout his reign. Despite the fact that the Gulistan harem as a gendered space was clearly delineated as the private domestic realm of the Shah, and in some important and formal ways, was segregated from the public life of the court, harem constituents played a decisive role in Qajar social and political life in multiple ways throughout Nasir al-Din’s reign. A look at some of the key figures inside Nasir al-Din’s harem not only illuminates the kinds of power wielded by harem constituents, it also shows the direct connections between intimacy, affective bonds, and political life in the Qajar court.

Important Figures in Nasir al-Din’s Harem

Perhaps the clearest example of the correlation between intimacy and status emerged early on in Nasir al-Din’s reign with the entrance of Furugh al-Saltanah into the Shah’s harem and her quick ascent to the status of the Shah’s favored wife (suguli). Born in 1831, Furugh al-Saltanah, often referred to as Jayran, was a peasant girl from Tajrish, an area to the north of Tehran, who the Shah met and took an interest in during one of his
early hunting trips in 1851. She first entered the harem as a young performer, but the Shah quickly developed deep feelings for her, and made her a *sighah* for 99 years. Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik, in describing his grandfather’s relationship with the young Jayran, stated: “Shah had fallen madly in love with her at first sight. He could not stay away from her even for a day, and could see nothing in his horizon but her. He was so attached to her, he paid no mind to any of his other wives.” In fact, within a few years, in 1857, Nasir al-Din formally divorced his second wife, Sitarah Khanum, with whom he had three children, in order to promote Jayran to the status of permanent wife (*aqdi*). Sitarah Khanum was demoted to the status of *sighah*, and Jayran remained the only permanent wife of Nasir al-Din Shah during his entire reign who was not born of the royal bloodline. She was known for being outspoken and a confident horse woman and hunter who often accompanied the Shah on his hunting excursions.

Though Jayran bore a few children during her short life, most did not survive childbirth, with the exception of a son born in 1852, who was named Amin Qasim. Since Qajar heredity rules were premised on matrilineal bloodlines, Amin Qasim was not considered a Qajar descendant, and was therefore technically barred from being heir to the throne. However, after pressure from Jayran, and upon her taking of the title of permanent wife, Nasir al-Din named him heir to the throne on November 2nd, 1857, and gave him the title Malak Qasim Mirza, much to the dismay of his prime minister at the time, Mirza Aqa.

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126 According to *I’timad al-Saltanah*, soon after the demotion, Sitarah Khanum left Nasir al-Din’s harem altogether and remarried. Ibid.
Khan Nuri. Some sources, including the notable Qajar historian Abbas Amanat, have argued that the rivalry between Jayran and the Shah’s prime minister, and in particular, his initial resistance to her son being named heir, was in large part what resulted in Nuri’s political downfall and dismissal. Nuri initially believed firmly that the future king must be born from one of the wives with royal the Qajar bloodline, and found the naming of Malak Qasim Mirza as heir to be unacceptable. However, recognizing Jayran’s influence over the Shah, he soon conceded, and showed support for the decision in order to protect his own position and avoid being the subject of Jayran’s wrath. He went so far as to petition several European ministers, and was successful in persuading them that Amin Qasim was the proper choice for heir. While this goal was eventually achieved largely through his efforts, Jayran was aware that his show of support was only the result of Nuri’s desire to secure his own position in the court. She thus lacked trust in Nuri’s intentions and maintained resentment towards him. Her suspicions about Nuri’s motives became even more acute once Amin Qasim died suddenly at the age of six, only weeks after he was officially named heir to the throne. Jayran blamed Nuri for her son’s untimely death. According to Amanat this, along with a general harem consensus against Nuri, played a central role in the prime minister’s downfall. Other significant Qajar figures, including Amin al-Dawlah Mirza-Ali Khan, a high ranking official in Nasir al-

129 Ibid., 333.
131 Amanat, Pivot of the Universe, 322-323.
132 At one point, she presses the Shah to “choose between her and his minister [Nouri] as both cannot remain in the palace together.” See: Amanat, Pivot of the Universe, 329.
133 Amanat, Pivot of the Universe, 338.
Din’s court, also left a record of their disapproval of Jayran’s influence over the Shah. In his political diaries, Amin al-Dawlah complained that she often “intervened in important state affairs, and her meddling would never fail.”\textsuperscript{134} He also complained of the fact that her relatives received appointments to high ranking positions in Nasir al-Din’s court.\textsuperscript{135}

Jayran herself also died young, in early 1860, after having suffered from tuberculosis.\textsuperscript{136} This was a tragic death for the Shah. Many historical records attest to the Shah’s devotion to her in her last sick days, and even after her passing.\textsuperscript{137} He kept her home intact and would visit it as his sanctuary, named a garden after her in his residence, continued to write poems for her for many years to come, and transferred his loyalties and affection from her to one of her trusted servants, Anis al-Dawlah, who became his next favored wife.\textsuperscript{138} Upon his own assassination, more than three decades after Jayran’s death, he was buried beside her.\textsuperscript{139} These are only a few of the testaments to his enduring affection for this woman. Many sources also attest that one of his last favored wives was a woman named Baghban Bashi, also referred to as Khanum Bashi, the daughter of a court gardener, for whom he had great affection for because her eyes reminded him of Jayran (Figure 7).\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 68.
\textsuperscript{137} Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik, \textit{Yaddasht-ha-yi az zindigani-i khususi-i Nasir al-Din Shah}, 49.
\textsuperscript{139} Munis al-Dawlah, \textit{Khaterat-i Munis al-Dawlah}, 232.
\textsuperscript{140} Both Munis al-Dawlah and Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik give this as the reason for the Shah’s interest in Khanum Bashi. See: Munis al-Dawlah, \textit{Khaterat-i Munis al-Dawlah}, 234; Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik, \textit{Yaddasht-ha-yi az zindigani-i khususi-i Nasir al-Din Shah}, 50.
Interestingly, while Nasir al-Din Shah began photographing his harem as early as 1858, there are no available photographs of Jayran within the Qajar archives. This is due to the fact that initially Nasir al-Din did not take pictures of his wives and other harem women,
although there were some exceptions made for his mother and sister.\textsuperscript{141} In fact, the earliest photographs of the Shah’s wives seem to be from the mid-1870s, well over a decade after Jayran’s passing.\textsuperscript{142}

Jayran’s story is one amongst many examples of close intimacy and affective bonding between the Shah and his harem constituents that cut across the kinds of rigid class and bloodline structures we set out initially. It is also one of the many instances within late-Qajar history where the women who occupied the deeply “private” realm of the haram had a decisive role in public affairs. Despite being an “interior” (as the word \textit{andarun} suggests), “private” space, the Gulistan harem under Nasir al-Din’s reign in fact played a critical role in state politics and policy.

Jayran, along with the Shah’s mother Malak Jahan (1805-1875), were just two of the women residing in the Gulistan \textit{andarun} who were very much involved in public and political affairs that were conducted in the inner quarters, as well as outer courts, and can be used as historical examples that dismantle the traditional division between the domestic life of the \textit{andarun} and the public affairs of the court. The Shah’s mother, Malak Jahan (later known as Mahd-i ‘Ulya), was the influential, and rumored to be unfaithful, wife of Muhamad Shah,\textsuperscript{143} and granddaughter of Fath’Ali Shah (Figure 8).

\textsuperscript{141}Staci Gem Scheiwiller has argued that though there is a robust history, dating back several centuries, of depicting royal men in paintings and later photographs, women rarely appeared in Persian visual culture as a result of Islamic principles. She argues that a shift occurs in this practice during the second half of Nasir al-Din’s reign, wherein women become a popular subject of image production. She attributes this shift as a sign of modernity. See: Staci Gem Scheiwiller, \textit{Liminalities of Gender and Sexuality in Nineteenth-century Iranian Photography: desirous bodies} (New York, Routledge, 2017), 46.
\textsuperscript{142}Ibid., 43.
\textsuperscript{143}Azad, \textit{Pusht-i pardah-ha-yi haramsara}, 323.
At the time of his predecessor Muhamad Shah’s death in September of 1848, the young Nasir al-Din was stationed in Azarbaijan as the province’s governor. During the six weeks it took Nasir al-Din to travel from Tabriz back to Tehran, it was the then forty-four year old Malak Jahan who assumed charge of her husband’s empire.144 Abbas Mirza Mulk Ara, one of Nasir al-Din’s brothers, in his autobiography, described the period following their father’s passing: “I came to Tehran depressed and in mourning, to bury

the Shah [Muhamad Shah] in Lalihzar garden, and because the heir to the throne was in Tabriz, for two months, it was Mahd-i ‘Ulya who was in charge.” During this period, she was the de facto leader of the empire, and with the help of her rumored lover, Mirza Agha Khan Nuri, whom she later helped appoint to the position of prime minister, she negotiated her son’s succession with European powers and local ministers. As such, Nasir al-Din’s ascent to the thrown was itself mediated by his mother, a harem woman. This is particularly impressive given the dubious reputation of Malak Jahan in Muhamad Shah’s court, where accusations of infidelity influenced the former Shah to demote her from the status of a primary wife to that of a sighah.

Throughout Nasir al-Din’s reign, Malak Jahan exercised a tremendous amount of power both inside and outside of his harem. Most significantly, she is often credited with the downfall and eventual death of the first prime minister of Nasir al-Din’s court, and her main rival in terms of political influence over the Shah, Mirza Taghi Khan Amir Kabir. During his short reign as prime minister, Amir Kabir made many attempts to strengthen

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146 Hassan Azad argues that it was very likely that Malak Jahan began an affair with Mirza Agha Khan Nuri, the future prime minister, while her husband Muhamad Shah was ill. See: Azad, *Pusht-i pardah-ha-yi haramsara*, 323.
148 Amanat has pointed out that this bad reputation was fueled by rumors of her infidelity, which went so far as to claim that Nasir al-Din was in fact not the legitimate son of Muhamad Shah.: Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, 42.
his status in the court, including trying to convince Nasir al-Din to kill his own mother, and marrying the Shah’s beloved sister (and Malak Jahan’s daughter) ‘Izzat al-Dawlah, in order to secure his position (Figure 9).  

![Fig. 9. Mahd-i ‘Ulya accompanied by Nasir al-Din and ‘Izzat al-Dawlah, mid/late 19th Century, Women’s World in Qajar Iran](image)

The story of Amir Kabir’s decline in Nasir al-Din’s court is a well-studied and complicated one, wherein Nasir al-Din’s devotion to him was ultimately trumped by broader geopolitical realities. Yet many sources give the Shah’s mother much of the credit for his demise. His replacement with Mirza Aqa Kahn Nuri, a close ally of Malak Jahan, and her rumored lover, also points to the king’s mother’s successful

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151 For letters between Malak Jahan, Nasir al-Din, and Amir Kabir detailing the request and granting of permission of the latter to marry ‘Izzat al-Dawlah, see: S.A. Al-e Davood, Amir Kabir’s Letters and Records (Tehran: National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2011), 199-200.


153 See: Amanat, Pivot of the Universe, 142-149; Ameli-Rezaei, Safar-i Dan-i Bah Gul, 66.
meddling in political affairs of the court.\textsuperscript{154} Her great-grandson, Mu’ayyir al-Mamalik, remembers her as an educated woman who had a firm command of both Persian and Arabic, and was a dominating figure within Nasir al-Din’s harem during her life.\textsuperscript{155} Both Malak Jahan and Jayran stand as compelling examples of how women presented a real threat to elite male power within the court from the very start of Nasir al-Din Shah’s reign.

Anis al-Dawlah, the daughter of a poor Georgian miller from the small village of Amameh, and a young servant to Jayran, who after her death became Nasir al-Din’s \textit{sighah} and quickly emerged as the favored wife (his second \textit{suguli}), was in fact the most important and politically powerful woman in the history of his harem (Figure 10).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.7\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Anis al-Dawlah, Nasir al-Din’s Wife, mid/late 19th Century, Women’s World In Qajar Iran}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{155}Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik, \textit{Yaddasht-ha-yi az zindigani-i khususi-i Nasir al-Din Shah}, 118.
Anis al-Dawlah was first brought to Gulistan by Nabat Khanum, the daughter of one of the Shah’s nannies, as a potential wife for her young servant son.\textsuperscript{156} This union never came to fruition because Jayran took an immediate liking to her, recruited her as a personal attendant, and took charge of her upbringing.\textsuperscript{157} Anis al-Dawlah grew up as a close servant and confident of Jayran, giving her great access and close proximity to the Shah as well as to important court affairs. In 1860, after Jayran’s death, Nasir al-Din took Anis al-Dawlah, by then nineteen years old, as a new \textit{sighah}.\textsuperscript{158} Upon several occasions, the Shah offered to make her a primary wife, but she refused this gesture, believing she lived a charmed life as a favored \textit{sighah}.\textsuperscript{159}

While she was not born of royal blood, never became a primary wife, nor bore him any children, within the historiography of Qajar Iran Anis al-Dawlah has been considered the de facto queen of the late-Qajar empire. She was by far the biggest influence on Nasir al-Din both politically and personally until his death. As I’timad al-Saltanah noted in his diaries, “the Shah’s harem is her exclusive domain.”\textsuperscript{160} Taj al-Saltanah, the Shah’s daughter, in her diary, offered the following account of her:

So intelligent and upstanding was she that, despite being homely, she held the first rank in character and respectability. . . Of medium stature, she was very simple, gentle, and dignified. Her tan face was ordinary, even ugly, but quite commanding. All the wives of foreign ambassadors were received at her house

\textsuperscript{156}I’timad al-Saltanah offers a detailed biography of Anis al-Dawlah including information about her family background and how she first entered the harem. See: I’timad al-Saltanah, \textit{Ruznamah-yi khatirat}, 115.
\textsuperscript{157}Azad, \textit{Pusht-i pardah-ha-yi haramsara}, 378.
\textsuperscript{158}I’timad al-Saltanah, \textit{Ruznamah-yi khatirat}, 116.
\textsuperscript{160}I’timad al-Saltanah, \textit{Ruznamah-yi khatirat}, 736.
where they were admitted into His Majesty’s presence on festive and formal occasions . . . All the influential and noble families and all the wives of ministers and other functionaries were also received at her house. Most petitions were submitted through her because when she presented them to the sovereign they were accepted.161

Anis al-Dawlah was a central actor in both Nasir al-Din’s harem and the court. She was well-educated, something which was rare for 19th century Iranian women of any class, literate and well-read, owned an extensive personal library, was a composer of many sonnets, and served as the treasurer of the court for a period of time.162 She is also often credited for the Shah’s eventual support of the tobacco boycott against the British.163

Anis al-Dawlah joined Nasir al-Din on his first trip to Europe in 1873, making her the first royal Qajar woman to make the journey. She was sent back early from Moscow due to fears that her presence as a veiled woman would embarrass the throne in front of European royalty.164 The rejection of Anis al-Dawlah during the first European trip made by a modern Iranian monarch was a loaded signifier. As mentioned, for several centuries leading up to this period, and throughout both the Qajar and Safavid dynasties, gender segregation as an assertion of Islamic moral and social order served as a source of legitimation for Qajar political authority. But this first royal trip to Europe, and Anis al-Dawlah’s forced return after having made it only as far as Russia, marked a shift away from the public display of Islamic values being a source of legitimation for the monarchy. It showed an official acknowledgement, though not yet a full embrace, of European

161Taj al-Saltana, Crowning Anguish, 102.
164I’timad al-Saltanah. Ruznamah-yi khatirat, 596.
secular values by the Qajar elite. Nasir al-Din himself, however, never fully embraced such European values. As we will see, another one of his noteworthy wives, Amin Aqdas, who also later visited Europe for eye surgery and Nasir al-Din himself on his subsequent trips, was accompanied by perhaps a far more controversial member of his harem, the young page boy named Malijak.

Amin Aqdas was another lower-ranking member of Nasir al-Din’s harem, who later became a significant *sighah* and played a defining role in his rule. Like Anis al-Dawlah, she first entered the harem as a servant, soon after Jayran’s death (Figure 11).

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*Fig. 11. Zubaydah Khanum Amin Aqdas, mid/late 19th Century, Women’s World In Qajar Iran*
Amin Aqdas, whose birth name was Zubaydah Khanum, was a young slave girl, purchased for only six toman, from a village near Garrus in Kurdistan province during one of the Shah’s trips to Qom in 1859.\textsuperscript{165} According to Amin al-Dawlah, Jayran had accompanied the Shah on this trip, but became ill and had to return to Tehran, where she died soon after. He argues that as a result, Nasir al-Din associated this servant girl with Jayran and thus she was later able to “partially fill the gap left by Furugh al-Saltanah [Jayran] in the Shah’s heart.”\textsuperscript{166}

Amin Aqdas was described as a dark-skinned orphaned Kurdish girl, belonging to a peasant tribe, who was first entrusted to Za’faran Baji, a high-ranking female servant in charge of the andarun’s treasury.\textsuperscript{167} Within a short time, Amin Aqdas began to serve one of the Shah’s favored daughters, and entered her house in the andarun. There, she worked alongside another high-ranking servant, an older nanny referred to as Haji Nanah Jun, who took a liking to Amin Aqdas and played a large role in her upbringing, offering her access to various forms of social mobility in the andarun.\textsuperscript{168} The practice of young servant girls being placed in the care of older women who were tasked with their rearing was a normative custom within the Qajar harem, one that fostered affective and familial bonding unattached to bloodlines.\textsuperscript{169} Such older women acted as tutors, responsible for teaching the norms and manners of the andarun, as well as maternal figures, who guided and nurtured the younger women placed in their homes and under their care. These forms

\textsuperscript{165}I’timad al-Saltanah. \textit{Ruznamah-yi khatirat}, 970.
\textsuperscript{166}Amin al-Dawlah, \textit{Khatirat-i siyasi}, 13.
\textsuperscript{168}Ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{169}I will explore this practice further in Chapter III.
of intimate and nurturing relationships and kinship bonds outside blood relations were not only common amongst the servant class but, as we will see, throughout the harem and amongst all levels of its constituents.

A year after Amin Aqdas’s entrance into the Shah’s harem he made her a sighah, and charged her with the important task of caring for Babri Khan, the Shah’s beloved cat.\textsuperscript{170} Many sources attest to the Shah’s obsession with this feline.\textsuperscript{171} Her well-being was also the subject of several letters written by Amin Aqdas, as well as other harem women and servants, to the Shah during his travels.\textsuperscript{172} For example, in a letter written by a court servant, who was watching over the cat while she was ill for a period of time, the writer stated “I prefer to serve this cat over my own children and parents . . . may I be sacrificed for this cat, whose health and well-being brings such joy to the King.”\textsuperscript{173}

Amin Aqdas herself also often wrote to Nasir al-Din during his travels, updating him on harem affairs, and always noting how well she was taking care of his cat. In one instance, she boasted of feeding him freshly made kabab.\textsuperscript{174} In another instance, when the cat gave birth to a litter while the king was away, Amin Aqdas informed him of the event and described her kittens. She stated: “My full attention is on Babri Khan . . . rest easy . . . I am doing everything in my power to take care of this cat. Whatever you have affection

\textsuperscript{170}Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{172}“Guzarish-i zanan-i haram va mustakhdimin az bihbudi-yi hal-i gurbah-i Shah,” 1867, document 295-3450, National Archives of Iran, 1-8.
\textsuperscript{173}Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{174}“Namah-‘i Tuman Agha bah Nasir al-Din Shah,” March 6th, 1875, document 295-3590, National Archives of Iran.
for, I will do all I can to serve.”175 Being entrusted with taking care of the Shah’s prized possession offered Amin Aqdas a privileged position in relation to the king, who, while residing in Gulistan, visited her home in the andarun daily in order to play with Babri Khan.176 Thus harem affections, and the power associated with them, were not limited to cross-class intimacies, but in the case of Nasir al-Din, they also included cross-species bonds. Taj al-Saltanah, in speaking about her father’s relationship with Babri Khan, wrote:

Since every human needs a confident who will be uppermost in his affections, this powerful yet overpowered sovereign . . . had directed all his love to this animal, even preferring it to the rest of his family . . . This cat was decked with all manner of fine, expensive trimmings and fed with sumptuous foods. Waited on like a human, it had servants and paid attendants, the aforementioned Amin Aqdas being its nanny.177

It was precisely because Amin Aqdas was tasked with being the primary caregiver of the Shah’s beloved cat that she gained her initial high level of access to Nasir al-Din himself, and high-ranking status as a sighah. Within a few years, she had license to bring her younger brother, Aqa Mirza Muhamad, to Gulistan, and he entered Nassre al-Din’s court as a young boy servant (ghulam bachih).178

Within the harem, it was common practice for trusted temporary wives and servants to gain court access for other members of their family. Amin Aqdas was notorious for using

175 “Guzarish bah Shah dar khusus-i hal-i Mahd ‘Ulya,” 1869, document 295-4507, National Archives of Iran.
176 In several correspondence letters between the Shah and Amin Aqdas, while he is away on a trip, she makes reference to how well she is taking care of his cat, and how they miss his daily visits: “Guzarish-i zanan-i haram va mustakhdimin az bihbudi-yi hal-i gurbah-i Shah,” 1867, document 295-3450, National Archives of Iran, 7-9.
177 Taj al-Saltana, Crowning Anguish, 88-89.
178 Malijak Sani, Ruznamah-ye khatirat, 28.
this privilege throughout her life to bolster her own position within both the harem and court.\(^{179}\) This dismayed many court officials. I’timad al-Saltanah, for example, expressed his disapproval of the privileges afforded to a peasant woman who had been brought in to the harem as a slave, and feared the influence she and her family could assert over the Shah.\(^{180}\) He even questioned whether Aqa Mirza Muhamad was in fact Amin Aqdas’s brother, or a more distant relative who had entered the court through deceit.\(^{181}\)

Aqa Mirza Muhamad also quickly rose in the ranks in his own right. He became a footman (\textit{farrash khalvat}) who accompanied the Shah on several of his trips, including to Europe.\(^{182}\) The Shah began to refer to him as Malijak, later known as the first Malijak (\textit{Malijak-i avval}), and he advanced to the position of a high-ranking court servant. Soon after, Amin Aqdas arranged for him to marry her mentor Haji Nanah Jun’s granddaughter, Bihjat al-Muluk.\(^{183}\) In 1879, the two had a son together, who they named Ghulam Ali. Within the first year of the child’s life, he became the object of Nasir al-Din’s affection and later, according to many of his contemporaries, an unusual obsession, particularly after the death of his beloved cat,\(^{184}\) who was also a playmate of the young boy.\(^{185}\)

\(^{179}\)In a letter addressed to Amin Aqdas written most likely by her brother Aqa Mirza Muhamad, he notes the presence of two of her other sisters Fatimah Sultan Khanum and Khavar Sultan, who have been brought to Tehran, and are residing in the royal complex north of the city, in Niavaran. See: “\textit{Guzarish-i zanan-i haram va mustakhdimin az bihbudi-yi hal-i gurbah-i Shah},” 1867, document 295-3450, National Archives of Iran, 2.

\(^{180}\)I’timad al-Saltanah. \textit{Ruznamah-yi khatirat}, 970.

\(^{181}\)Ibid., 227.

\(^{182}\)See: Malijak Sani, \textit{Ruznamah-yi khatirat}, 47.


\(^{184}\)According to Taj al-Saltanah, the Shah’s obsession with the cat led to his eventual death as he was poisoned by the Shah’s wives who were rivals of Amin Aqdas, and jealous of the affection the cat received from the Shah. See: Taj al-Saltana, \textit{Crowning Anguish}, 90.

\(^{185}\)Ibid., 88, 92; Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik, \textit{Yaddasht-ha-yi az zindigani-i khususi-i Nasir al-Din Shah}, 121-122.
Nasir al-Din referred to this child as ‘Aziz al-Sultan Malijak, and at a very young age he was brought into the haram to live with his aunt, Amin Aqdas, where he remained throughout his childhood. He was allocated several servants and playmates, many of whom, as we will see in Chapter III, became significant figures within the harem in their own right, and he spent much of his time in the company of the king (Figure 12).  

Despite the Shah having hundreds of royal descendants, including his own children and grandchildren, littered throughout the court, the ruler’s preference for and obsession with Malijak is well documented in multiple sources and photographs. Malijak makes an almost daily appearance in the diaries and travelogues of Nasir al-Din Shah during the

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186 Mu‘ayyir al-Mamlık writes that both his nurses for example, Jujugh and Gulchihrah, were well-respected and subject to much flattery in the harem. Ibid.
second half of his reign, where the Shah showed an almost compulsive interest in the child’s whereabouts and activities.\textsuperscript{187} He was also a constant companion of the Shah in his travels, even when other harem residents did not join him.\textsuperscript{188}

By all accounts, Malijak was a peculiar choice as an object of affection. He was a short and frail dark-skinned boy who suffered from chronic trachoma, and was often ill, had a stutter, and was filthy.\textsuperscript{189} In his own biography, Malijak acknowledged that while he was a very dirty child with health problems, he was the Shah’s prized possession and during the Shah’s daily visits to the andarun, his first stop was always a visit to Amin Aqdas’s home in order to see the boy.\textsuperscript{190} Malijak also emerged as one of the favored subjects of both court and harem photography, often appearing with the king himself. Amongst the most iconic images of Nasir al-Din and Malijak is one wherein the pair are sitting on the steps of the king’s bed chambers. Nasir al-din is holding the child in a tight embrace while he nuzzles between the Shah’s legs (Figure 13).

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{187}In his diaries, descriptions of Malijak’s whereabouts and mundane activities, including what and with whom he is playing, what he eats, as well as his health and many ailments are an almost daily occurrence. A look at the index reveals the number of times the boy is mentioned. See: Parviz Badii, ed., \textit{Nasir al-Din Shah’s Diaries (1883-1885)}, (Tehran: Iran National Archives Organization, Record Research Centre, 2000), 591; Fatimeh Ghaziha, ed., \textit{Nasir al-Din Shah’s Journeys to Qom (1850-1892)}, (Tehran: Iran National Archives Organization, Record Research Centre, 2003), 334; Abdol Hossain Navaie and Elham Malekzadeh, eds., \textit{Diary of Naser al-Din Shah (September 1888-April 1889)}, (Tehran: National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1389/2010), 262.
\item \textsuperscript{188}Badii, \textit{Nasir al-Din Shah’s Diaries (1883-1885)}, 135.
\item \textsuperscript{190}Malijak Sani, \textit{Ruznamah-yi khatirat}, 77.
\end{itemize}
In another image, which appears in the published diaries of Malijak himself and was taken by the court photographer Hassan Ali ‘Akkas, a slightly older Malijak is sitting on the Shah’s lap, again, in a tight embrace. The caption, written in Nasir al-Din’s handwriting reads: “Malijak in Amin Aqdas’s andarun, where again, he slept in my arms due to malaria” (Figure 14).  

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191Malijak Sani, Ruznamah-yi khatirat, 85.
There are dozens of other similar images, from over the years, taken at home, or while traveling, which both display affection and intimacy between the Shah and the young boy, and show his increasing role as a central figure of the court. Throughout his diary, Malijak described the comforts and luxury he experienced in the daily company of the king, as well as the intimate bond they shared. He gloated that he was often embraced lovingly by Nasir al-Din, and was allowed to sit in his lap and play with him and his jewels.  

According the court chronicler I’timad al-Saltanah, who had little love for the boy, the Shah grew increasingly infatuated with Malijak, and within a few years had become subservient to his every whim, treating him as his most prized possession and primary

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192 Malijak Sani, Ruznamah-yi khatirat, 79.
object of love and affection, and even had political aspirations for him as a future prime minister. I’timad al-Saltanah’s distain for the child grew particularly acute over the last few years of Nasir al-Din’s reign. As the child entered his teen years, the court chronicler believed him to be a major source of embarrassment for the Qajar royal family. He is outraged by the level of power that the youth was able to exercise in the court, at one point writing: “although this poor child is only the beloved darling (ma’shugh va mahbub) of the Shah, in the presence of the king his power and might is equal to him.” However, despite several warnings from I’timad al-Saltanah, as well as other court and harem residents, the Shah’s infatuation and loyalty to the young Malijak remained unwavering until his assassination.

Some scholars have suggested that Nasir al-Din’s relationship with Malijak was sexual in nature, and as I’timad al-Saltanah reports, a “disgrace to the dignity of Islam.” While there is no definitive evidence of sexual relations between the two, there was much reference, within various textual and photographic sources, to the ambiguous nature of the relationship, and the Shah’s clear and strange obsession with the boy. Malijak himself alluded to this ambiguous nature on several occasions: “the kindness and favor of the

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193 I’timad al-Saltanah, Ruznamah-yi khatirat, 227.
194 He increasingly complains of Malijak’s behavior and argues that the Shah’s excessive love for the boy is a result of his deteriorating mental health, and is progressively more outraged by Malijak’s spoiled attitude and troublesome activities, and the lack of consequences he suffers. See: Ibid., 803, 862, 874, 877, 950.
195 Ibid., 863.
196 Ibid., 720.
197 See: Janet Afary, Sexual Politics in Modern Iran (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 105-106; Najmabadi, Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards, 250.
198 I’timad al-Saltanah, Ruznamah-yi khatirat, 796. Abbas Amanat has suggested that the real reason for the Shah’s infatuation with Malijak was that it allowed him to reenact and repair feelings associated with his own unhappy childhood, spent as a sickly boy who was unloved by his father: Amanat, Crowning Anguish, 32.
Shah reached such greatness that my own pen cannot describe it,”199 and later “he embraced and kissed me in the same manner as his favored lovers.”200 According to the Shah’s grandson, who in his own diaries also showed jealousy for the young Malijak, the Shah was once asked by one of his associates why it was that he is so infatuated with this young boy. Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik writes that the Shah answered him as follows:

I know very well that this child is not desirable, but the truth is, no one is without some flaws, and god made him my flaw, and has made me helpless in his presence. Often, I have wanted to get over wanting him, but not only have I failed, but instead, I desire him all the more.201

It was also clear that the Shah’s affection for the boy had political implications for the empire.202 Aside from the unrestrained power he had in the court, the boy was also a source of distraction, and often prevented Nasir al-Din from performing his political duties. For example, in his autobiography, Malijak described a time when he was sick with scarlet fever. According to him, the Shah ignored all state affairs and did not leave his side for forty-three days.203 In another instance, I’timad al-Saltanah writes, “The work and decision-making tasks of the king were thwarted by the illness of a vulgar child.”204 Malijak himself stated plainly, “when I was sick, the court affairs would be handicapped.”205

Along with Anis al-Dawlah, Malijak was also amongst the most photographed subjects of the later part of Nasir al-Din’s reign, often posing with his servants and playmates, and in

199Malijak Sani, Ruznamah-yi khatirat, 53.
200Ibid., 101.
201Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik, Yaddasht-ha-yi az zindigani-i khususi-i Nasir al-Din Shah, 122.
202Abbas Amanat argues that the Shah’s obsession with the boy was in part responsible for the decaying of the Qajar monarchy: Amanat, Pivot of the Universe, 439.
203Malijak Sani, Ruznamah-yi khatirat, 98.
204I’timad al-Saltanah, Ruznamah-yi khatirat, 168.
205Malijak Sani, Ruznamah-yi khatirat, 92.
later years, ministers and other important harem women and court officials, including Anis al-Dawlah herself. In one particularly revealing formal portrait taken by Nasir al-Din, Malijak and Anis al-Dawlah pose in European style clothing, signaling their status as the queen and prince of modern Qajar Iran (Figure 15).

The portrait is noteworthy for the ways in which it reveals that within the Qajar court, intimacy, power, and status were linked, and often took form outside of royal bloodlines, or traditional hereditary rule. Malijak himself noted that he held a more privileged position within Nasir al-Din’s court than any of the wives or children of the Shah.206

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206Ibid.
Aside from bringing many members of the young boy’s family into the royal court, and providing him with several playmates, servants and eunuchs, the boy was also given an unlimited allowance. He accompanied the Shah on his third visit to Europe in 1889, at the age of ten, where he met Queen Victoria and other heads of state, another privilege that was not afforded to any of the Shah’s wives. Later in 1889, when Malijak reached the age of puberty, the Shah dictated that the boy marry one of his daughters, Akhtar al-Dawlah, in an elaborate ceremony unmatched by most royal Qajar weddings. The royal family and the whole city of Tehran were said to have celebrated the wedding for seven days and nights. Regards and blessings rained in from important officials, both local and foreign, including the Queen of England, the Russian emperor and the French president.

Malijak’s privileged status and Nasir al-Din’s notorious bond with him is a primary example of the complex nature of affective bonding and kinship networks within the Qajar court. More specifically, it testified to the various forms of cross-class as well as homosocial intimacies, which were particularly unique features of the Qajar court and harem culture. Let us recall that the young Malijak’s father had entered the harem as a low-ranking servant, whose sister was a slave-woman turned sighah. He emerged as a close confidant of the Shah and later married the granddaughter of one of the Qajar princess’s servants, who was the mentor of his sister, Amin Aqdas. The child born of this marriage was raised in the harem by this aunt and a large assembly of nannies and

207 Ibid., 80.
208 For a description of the wedding, see: Ibid., 6; Feuvrier, Trois ans à cour de Perse, 182.
servants, and enjoyed a highly privileged life, becoming Nasir al-Din’s most cherished harem constituent, and they remained virtually inseparable for the rest of the Shah’s life.

Furthermore, the Shah’s love for Malijak also continued to offer a great deal of security to Amin Aqdas, and her position in the royal court and harem. By 1882, she was put in charge of the royal jewels, and was a key-holding treasurer.\textsuperscript{209} When the Gulistan andarun was renovated, Amin Aqdas’s home was placed in the highly coveted space directly in front of the Shah’s sleeping quarters, so that the Shah had easy access to Malijak, whom he visited regularly throughout the day and sometimes at night.\textsuperscript{210}

Throughout her life, Amin Aqdas used Nasir al-Din’s affections for others as a way to secure her own position. Aside from the cat, and later Malijak, Amin Aqdas housed some of the Shah’s young sighahs in the later part of her life, including his last favored sighah Baghban Bashi, the court gardener’s daughter mentioned earlier (See Figure 7).\textsuperscript{211} She also maintained close relations with important court servants, who I will return to later, including two of the highest-ranking court eunuchs Agha Sarvar Khan ‘Itimad al-Haram, who in 1888 was promoted to the position of chief harem eunuch, and Agha Muhamad Khan, one of the Shah’s most trusted personal servants.\textsuperscript{212} While earlier images of Amin Aqdas often feature the young Malijak, in many of her later photographs she is

\textsuperscript{209}I’timad al-Saltanah, \textit{Ruznamah-yi khatirat}, 375.
\textsuperscript{210}Malijak gloats that the Shah would continue to visit him in the middle of the night, even in the dead of winter. See: Malijak Sani, \textit{Ruznamah-yi khatirat}, 86.
\textsuperscript{211}Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik, \textit{Yaddasht-ha-yi az zindigani-i khususi-i Nasir al-Din Shah}, 50.
accompanied by a gathering of important harem personalities, as well as young women who could be potential future *sighas* of the Shah (Figure 16).

Fig. 16. Amin Aqdas (standing in front holding between Agha Sarvar Khan ‘Itimad al-Haram and Agha Muhamad Khan, who’s hand she is holding) and her entourage including Baghban Bashi (directly behind her), Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center

I’timad al-Saltanah, who showed his resentment for both her and her nephew’s status in the court throughout his diaries, complained about her manipulative nature and the amount of wealth she was able to accumulate in the final years of Nasir al-Din’s reign, and accused her of theft.\(^{213}\) Despite much criticism and hostility, Amin Aqdas remained one of the most important women of the court until her death. She was the Shah’s only other wife, aside from Anis al-Dawlah, to visit Europe, a privilege Nasir al-Din afforded only to the most high-ranking officials, servants, and harem residents.\(^{214}\)


\(^{214}\) Amin Aqdas suffered from a degenerative eye disease and was sent to Vienna for an eye surgery. See Munis al-Dawlah, *Khaterat-i Munis al-Dawlah*, 120.
Each of these relationships, in its own unique manner, illuminates the complex manner in which categories of gender, class, age, and bloodline were blurred, and at times crossed, through intimate bonds that functioned to inform the larger kinship network within the royal harem and the circulation of power in both the andarun and court. More importantly, figures such as Jayran, Anis al-Dawlah, Amin Aqdas, and Malijak offer a counter-point to the institutionalized hierarchy of the harem, which was supposed to follow royal matrilineal bloodlines, represented by a woman such as Malak Jahan.

As we have seen, many of the Shah’s wives were brought in from both near and far places in the empire in order to offer a tangible link between the king and various tribal and regional stakeholders. These women brought with them both cultural attachments and kinship groups who had a tremendous impact on the makeup of the court and its harem. Once they became part of the institution, they also formed various attachments across class and bloodlines. In Chapter III, for example, I consider how the Shah’s daughter, Taj al-Saltanah, who like many royal children was raised by an African nanny, formed close and long-lasting bonds not only with her nanny, but also with her nanny’s entire extended family. She also refered to Anis al-Dawlah as her “spiritual mother,” stating that since Anis al-Dawlah did not have her own children, she was fond of Taj and treated her as her own.215 Taj al-Saltanah’s experience was not a unique one. Both her and Malijak’s memoirs attest to the fact that harem children were not raised exclusively by blood

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relatives, but instead, relied on a motley crew of harem women, servants, and nannies for their rearing.\textsuperscript{216}

Two of Nasir al-Din’s other daughters, Furugh al-Dawlah and her sister Fakhr al-Dawlah, born of an insignificant \textit{sighah}, offer yet another noteworthy example. Their mother, Khazin al-Dawlah, was not a permanent resident of the harem, and the two girls were primarily raised by Taj al-Dawlah, the Shah’s first wife who was a Qajar descendant.\textsuperscript{217} They grew up in her house, received a formal education, and were amongst the Shah’s most favored children. The two daughters grew to be high-ranking royal members of the harem despite their birth mother’s lack of status.\textsuperscript{218} Fakhr al-Dawlah, in particular, often accompanied the Shah on his regional tours and was credited with transcribing many of his travelogues and memoirs. These are but a few examples who provide us with evidence of the kinds of fluidity and mobility available to different classes of harem constituents within the royal domestic sphere and reflect the complex characteristics of this institution.

\textbf{The Gulistan Harem as a Contact Zone with European Modernity}

An iconic image of Anis al-Dawlah, most likely taken in the late 1870s - early 1880s by Nasir al-Din Shah, offers a revealing narrative about the kinds of cultural contact that took shape within the royal \textit{andarun}. The photograph depicts a younger Anis al-Dawlah,\textsuperscript{216}

\textsuperscript{216}In her memoirs, Muhin Banu, one of Nasir al-Din’s granddaughters, writes that children of the royal family rarely saw their father. She recounts that growing up, she was taught that of all of her father, Muzaffar al-Din Shah’s wives, were maternal figures, and all of their children were her siblings, who “were mostly raised by nannies and servants.” See: Farrokh Ghaffari, ed., \textit{Muhin Banu} (Tehran: Nashr-i Farzanruz, 1391/2012), 33.


\textsuperscript{218}Ibid., 10.
looking directly at the camera while seated on a stool in front of a piano. The favored \textit{sighah} is wearing a floral headscarf, a wide short skirt, and white stockings. A Persian rug covers the floor beneath her. Within the image, the piano and her short skirt and stocking combination showcase the increasing European influence on the Qajar court and harem, while their intermingling with local cultural elements appears through the fabric patterns, headscarf, and rug (Figure 17).

Fig. 17. Anis al-Dawlah and piano, 1864-1881, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center
During Nasir al-Din’s first trip to Europe in 1873, the Shah was said to have been enamored with European music, and as a result, purchased four pianos to be shipped back to Iran, at least one of which was housed in the Gulitan andarun.\footnote{While the first piano that entered Iran was gifted by Napoleon to Fath’Ali Shah in 1805, there is no record of any Iranians playing this instrument. It was not until Nasir al-Din’s reign that the instrument truly enters Persian historiography. See: Sasan Sepanta, 
*Chishmanaz-i musiqi-’i Iran* (Tehran: Mahoor Institute of Culture and Art, 2004), 114; Hassan Mashhun, *Tarikh-i musiqi-’i Iran* (Tehran: Farhang-i Nashr-i Naw, 2009), 525; Samieh Ghazizadeh, “Darbarah-‘i vurud-‘i pianu bah Iran,” Eco Cultural Institute. \url{http://ir.ecieco.org/news-6240.aspx} (accessed November 3, 2017).} As Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik noted: “There was a piano in Anis al-Dawlah’s attic . . . At that time, there were no more than five or six pianos in Tehran.”\footnote{Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik, *Yaddasht-ha-yi az zindigani-khususi-i Nasir al-Din Shah*, 23.}

Anis al-Dawlah’s attire also reflects a dramatic shift in harem women’s indoor fashion, said to have been the result of Nasir al-Din’s same visit to Europe, where ballerinas’ tutus appealed to him.\footnote{See: Shireen Mahdavi, “Women, Customs and Ideas in Qajar Iran,” *Persian Studies in North America: Studies in Honor of Mohammad Ali Jazayery*, ed. Mehdi Marashi (Bethesda: Iranbooks, 1994), 373-95, Kashani-Sabet, *Conceiving Citizens*, 149.} Previous to this, the traditional fashion for elite Qajar women featured long bell-shaped skirts, or flaring trousers adorned in flower motifs. European influence led to a dramatic layering and shortening of the skirt length, which now ranged from mid-thigh to knee, while still adorned by Persian floral motifs, accompanied by white stockings or tight trousers.\footnote{Jonathan M. Bloom and Sheila S. Blair eds., *The Grove encyclopedia of Islamic art and architecture*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 36.} During the last decades of the 19th century, this new fashion trend, which reflected an amalgamation of Iranian and European influences, spread from harem residents to other urban elite households.\footnote{Ameli-Rezaei, *Safar-i Dan-i Bah Gul*, 67.}

The Japanese foreign minister Yoshida Masaharo, who was stationed in Iran between 1880-1881, described the opening of a European-style retail outlet in Tehran. He stated:
Just outside the palace, there was a store which sold European clothing and make-up. This store also housed a European-style coffee shop. Nasir al-Din Shah, upon returning from his European tour, forced a rich merchant to open the shop.  

The opening of this store, which was favored by elite Qajar court women, signaled the increase of European influence on both fashion and culture. Masaharo noted that aside from the clothing and make-up, unlike traditional Iranian coffee shops, where patrons were seated on carpet covered floors, the coffee shop in this store had European style tables and chairs and hosted regular story-telling sessions that garnered a large public audience.

As these examples demonstrate, particularly in the last two decades of the 19th century, both the specter and the material presence of Europe served as a consistent presence in and around the Qajar harem and court, in several registers. Other examples include the reading of, or listening to, translations of European prose and novels, which became a common leisure activity for harem women. The royal library, which harem women accessed regularly, contained a rich assortment of European travelogues, geographical and historical works, and books on current affairs and novels, in addition to a large selection of classical Iranian literature. In fact, most European imports, from literature and music, to fashion and food, first found their Iranian home in the Gulistan Palace, and harem constituents were usually the earliest point of contact and the first consumers of these European goods.

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225 Ibid.
226 As we will see in Chapter IV, there are many references in the historical records of royal family members’ familiarity with a host of European writers.
227 Taj al-Saltana, Crowning Anguish, 30.
This was also the case for Iran’s initial encounters with European technology. Much like the earliest usage of cameras and pianos, the first telephone brought to Iran from Europe was installed inside Gulistan’s residential building, Shams al-‘Imarah. In his diaries, Nasir al Din described the new technology:

The telephone is a form of telegraph, wherein you speak with your mouth and listen with your ear. When Mu’in al-Malik returned from his recent trip, he brought one back with him. We have installed a line from Shams al-‘Imarah to here in Sipahsalar garden. The object has a flat surface with holes, which one is supposed to speak into, and a second component which you hold to the ear. I have never seen such a tool. It is a very strange object. . . . I asked for the young Malijak, and spoke with him using this instrument.

As the excerpt notes, not only was the telephone installed in the residential core of Gulistan, but the Shah’s favored harem resident, the young Malijak was amongst the first to access and use the technology.

Gulistan also acted as the contact zone between members of the royal family and various foreign visitors, from musical troupes and performers, to diplomats, scholars, physicians and travelers, who, depending on their gender and role, often visited the court and its harem during their stay in the Qajar capital. The royal harem, in particular, formed a key site for interaction between Iranian and European women in the second half of the 19th century, when members of the latter group increasingly travelled to Iran. Mu‘ayyir al-Mamluk estimates that on any given day, there were approximately two hundred foreign women in the andarun, many of them wives and daughters of European ministers and

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228 Refer to Chapter III for a descriptive account and image of the building, as well as detailed map noting its location within Gulistan and Tehran.

229 Badii, *Nasir al-Din Shah’s Diaries (1883-1885)*, 146.
important foreign officials. He states: “They were often there visiting one of the wives and would spend a few nights in the harem during their visits.”

Perhaps the European woman with the most enduring legacy within the Qajar court and harem was a French woman, referred to as Madam Haji Abbas Gulsaz, who resided in Iran for over sixty years. Madam Gulsaz came to Iran in the mid-1830’s, in the early years of Muhammad Shah’s reign, after converting to Islam and marrying the Iranian artist Haji Abbas. Haji Abbas, a renowned court painter, was sent to France by Muhammad Shah to study the art of flower-making, a craft that had become increasingly popular amongst harem women. While he himself was not able to master this craft during his time abroad, he did meet the then thirty year old Madam Gulsaz, an expert artificial flower-maker, who with permission from the Shah, he married and brought back to Iran. She was hired by the royal court and quickly became a popular figure in the Qajar harem, teaching women Western style make-up and cooking skills, as well as becoming a close friend and confidant to Malak Jahan, Muhammad Shah’s first wife and Nasir al-Din’s mother. In fact, Madam Abbas was Nasir al-Din’s personal tutor as a child, and a close ally of Malak Jahan. After Muhammad Shah’s death, when the Shah’s mother controlled the country’s affairs while Nasir al-Din made his way back to Tehran, Madam Gulsaz

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231 Amanat, Pivot of the Universe, 60.
233 Ibid.
played a decisive role in state matters. After his accession to the throne, Nasir al-Din appointed her to the position of interpreter for the royal harem.

Though Madam Abbas’s position in the Gulistan court was unique, she was far from the only European woman to have a significant level of contact with harem women. For elite Western women who visited Iran during this period, the harem of Gulistan Palace held great interest, and was a place that many of them frequented. Most often, these women were wives of ministers and other elite foreign travelers. Some noteworthy figures within this class included Mary Sheil, the wife Lieutenant-Colonel Justin Sheil, a British officer who served at the British legation in Iran, Jane Dieulafoy, the wife of a French orientalist and archeologist, and Carla Serena, who traveled in Iran and throughout the region towards the end of the 19th century. These women recorded memoirs of their time in the country. As Chapter IV shows, their impressions of the royal andarun are a key source to examine the European female gaze onto royal Qajar women.

It is important to note here that the forms of cultural contact that occurred in the Qajar harem between Europeans and Iranians cannot simply be dismissed through an orientalist critique. For example, while Madam Abbas was in many ways the bearer of European knowledge and culture, which she spread amongst the royal harem constituents, her close and familial relationship with Nasir al-Din and his sister, both of whom she loved and regarded as her own children, and their mother Malak Jahan, who was her closest friend,

234 Munis al-Dawlah, Khaterat-i Munis al-Dawlah, 288.
236 Geoffrey Nash, Travellers to the Middle East from Burckhardt to Thesiger (London: Anthem Press, 2009), 114.
confident, as well as political ally, was far more nuanced and complex than what a simple critique of Orientalism would allow for.\textsuperscript{237} Her commitment to stay in Iran for decades after her husband’s death, until her own passing in 1873, should be regarded as a testament to the personal transformation that a life in the harem had fostered within her.\textsuperscript{238} As such, it is perhaps more apt to read the presence of this European woman in Gulestan as indicative of the transnational and cosmopolitan character of the harem, rather than as a colonial or imperial presence within it.

In this light, the harem can be read as a “contact zone.” Mary Louise Pratt defines contact zones as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.”\textsuperscript{239} The complex and asymmetrical nature of such relations, across racial, class, and gender lines, was one of the most unique features of the royal Qajar harem. The presence of various identities within this large-scale institution, including foreign and European women, and the various forms of contact and relationships fostered amongst them, was the most unique aspect of this social space.

Despite the formal distinctions between the differing classes of harem women, and their sometime competing claims to power, their day-to-day life both inside and outside the Gulistan andarun was spent in close proximity with each other in ways that often undermined these stratifications. Both in images and textual accounts from the period,

\textsuperscript{237}She was in large part responsible for selecting the crown-prince’s first wife Galin Khanom, prior to Nasir al-Din taking the thrown, and also played a significant role in Amir Kabir’s downfall. See: “Dastanha’i tarikhi: Madam Hajji ‘Abbas Gulsaz,” 108.
\textsuperscript{238}Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{239}Mary Louise Pratt, \textit{Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation} (London: Routledge, 1992), 4.
Harem women are depicted in communal settings, listening to religious sermons, attending concerts and plays, touring the Gulistan garden, dining, gossiping, and enjoying various leisure activities together. During special occasions such as birthdays, pregnancies, and wedding celebrations, women from all classes, including servants and slaves, participated in elaborate social gatherings and rituals. Afsaneh Najmabadi has pointed out the significance of these forms of affective bonds amongst women in predominantly homosocial settings in her seminal work *Women With Moustaches, Men Without Beards*. Yet they still remain a severely understudied topic in the history of 19th century Iran. An even more glaring omission within the limited historiography, which has explored the harem almost entirely as a female space, was the presence of non-female bodies within this space. While the harem was a female dominated space, there was a host of male relatives, children, eunuchs, as well as non-relative men who had various forms of access to the *andarun* on a regular basis. As such, it is wrong to assume that the royal harem was uniformly a “women’s space.” As we will see in the following chapters, the seclusion of women in Gulistan palace was often partial, multivalent, and interrupted, first and foremost by the number of eunuchs who acted as powerful intermediaries and as barriers between harem women and the rest of the royal court.

**Conclusion**

At every turn, the rigid social order of the royal court was undermined by the affective bonds which cut across social, racial, and class lines, and were rarely predicated on the established social order. Such familial bonds are not easily recognizable both structurally and affectively under modern fixed and neat degrees of conjugality and nuclear family,
and often challenged the assumed separation of private and public domains. The women of the harem were very much involved in public and political affairs that were conducted in the inner quarters as well as outer courts. In fact, while the Qajar harem as an institution may appear in some ways as a hierarchical and patriarchal institution, with the Shah often described as its pivot, this supposed hierarchy often had a vacuum at its top, particularly under Nasir al-Din’s reign. The Shah was often away for long stretches of time—whether on official duty, diplomatic excursions, or his preferred leisure activity, hunting trips. Day-to-day life in the harem often took place in his absence, with various women exercising a large degree of power and influence over both internal and external affairs.

Despite this, with the onset of the Constitutional Revolution and the emergence of the Pahlavi dynasty, the harem was affirmed within Iranian modernist narratives as a backward institution—a space of female incarceration. Afsaneh Najmabadi and Firouzeh Kashani-Sabet have both pointed out that Iranian women’s entrance into and participation in the public realm under the Pahlavis through education, unveiling, and an embrace of nuclear family and political participation went hand in hand with their new standardized roles within the domestic sphere. Both show the ways in which new understandings of domesticity, family, and reproduction in the first half of the 20th century functioned to limit women’s agency. Kashani-Sabet argues that maternalist policies in particular were geared to advance the state’s political ideology, and often had severely negative effects on Iranian women’s day-to-day lives.240 She notes that a series of new marriage laws emerged as part of a more sophisticated state regulatory mechanism, which could control

240Kashani-Sabet, Conceiving Citizens, 8.
citizens and force them to meet state directives. As such, polygamy was relegated to rural areas and religious elites, both categories of Iranians who were perceived as enemies of modernization. She states:

In Iran, the economic demands of urban life and the expansion of state bureaucracy necessitated a different set of skills and preparedness from both women and men in the domestic sphere and the professional world. The modern family served as the conduit for the propagation of nationalist moves and a vehicle for the enforcement of gender roles conductive to new materialist ideas.\footnote{Najmabadi, \textit{Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards}, 175.}

Najmabadi also effectively argued that this form of modernity functioned to produce new coercive gender norms and new forms of discipline and control. She points out that the entrance of women into the public realm meant that they lost their homosocial bonds within larger women’s networks, and the powers they had as a result of such bonds and networks.\footnote{Ibid., 60.}

While most historians who examine Iranian women’s social conditions tend to locate their access to rights and emancipation in the early 20th century, this chapter challenges the assumption that the pre-Pahlavi era was marked by an absence of women holding political power or living oppressed lives while they were imprisoned in interior quarters of the domestic sphere. Harem women’s participation in social, political, and cultural life can be taken as a site of agency and resistance to both patriarchal and liberal notions of domesticity and women’s place in home and society. It can also help to revise the religious/secular, Western/Eastern, modern/traditional, male/female dichotomies and paradigms that have perceived harem culture in the Middle East as the ultimate site of Muslim women’s oppression. Instead, it offers an account of lived experiences, as told by
the multiple local constituents of this institution, as a necessary supplement, and perhaps corrective, to the established historiographies of Iranian gender relations, modernity, and domestic culture.
Chapter II
Interiority and the City Center:
Locating the Gulistan Harem During Nasir al-Din Shah’s Reign

A whole history remains to be written of spaces – which would at the same time be the history of powers . . . from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat.\textsuperscript{243}

Michel Foucault

Introduction

In “Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias,” one of Michel Foucault’s later works, he argued for the importance of the spatiality of social life: the place in which actually lived and socially produced sites and the relations between them are negotiated.\textsuperscript{244} Foucault offered great insight into how we can interpret and produce knowledge based on human geographies, or, as Edward Soja has noted, “how to see the ‘other spaces’ hidden in the more obvious and diverting multiplicity of real-world sights and situations.”\textsuperscript{245} This chapter takes the Gulistan andarun and its surrounding areas as a complex set of spaces, whose architectural and material configuration structured the gendered, domestic, and social lives of its inhabitants in a myriad of complementary and contradictory ways. Focusing on the spatial dimensions, as well as human geography of Nasir al-Din Shah’s harem, and its location at the heart of late-19\textsuperscript{th} century Tehran, this chapter will examine the historical development and expanding physical structure of Gulistan, and the intricate relationship between urban space, architecture, and gendered practices of inhabitation that informed it.

\textsuperscript{244}Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 22-27.
I hope to disrupt the monolithic and narrow interpretations of Middle Eastern harems as deeply private spheres of forced and uncontested gender segregation, and, instead, examine the ways in which the Gulistan harem, along with the multiplicity of its residents, resisted the dichotomy between private/public domains—a modernist European dichotomy which has often been imposed onto this institution in its historiography—and instead forged a unique communal space that was occupied by practices of co-habitation (Figure 18).

Fig. 18. Group of harem women in Gulistan courtyard, 1864-1881, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center.

As Chapter I demonstrated, the Gulistan harem was not only a space of domesticity and distinctive familial formation, but also a place where various kinds of social contact and
collective cultural practices were realized alongside equally significant geopolitical and diplomatic affairs, as well as various registers of engagement with Iranian modernity. One of the most striking features of this space were the ways in which it centered homosocial practices and collective formations as the primary social order. While such practices have been frowned upon as the product of backward Islamic institutions, throughout this dissertation I examine the powerful, subversive, and productive possibilities that were enabled through the production of this homosocial space.

This chapter examines the historical evolution and expanding physical structure of the Gulistan Palace and situate it within the concurrent history of the emergence of Tehran as an urban metropolis. I then move on to explore the physical and material organization of the Gulistan harem and the ways in which it was controlled, lived in, and subverted. The final section interrogates the question of what constituted private, interior, and domestic spaces, respectively, when speaking of the royal Qajar harem—a space composed of multiple homes within a larger palace, which was the administrative center of Qajar rule.

The Simultaneous Development of Tehran and Gulistan Palace

The Gulistan Palace, like Tehran, the city which houses it, was built over the course of three centuries, beginning in the 16th century and continuing into the early 20th century. During this period, the palace went through a number of renovations, expanding to cover a huge area of land within the urban core of Tehran by the second half of the 19th century,
and later, in the 20th century under the Pahlavis, contracting to a smaller complex. The historical formation and evolution of the palace was from the beginning intricately connected to the development of the urban metropolis in which it was located. Most notably, under Nasir al-Din’s reign the Gulistan harem, placed within the larger boundaries of the royal citadel (arg), grew both physically and in terms of the number of its residents to its largest scale as compared to the harem of his predecessors. When Nasir al-Din Shah began his reign in 1848, Gulistan was a much smaller, though still remarkable court, mostly built by his grandfather Fath‘Ali Shah (1772-1834), who reigned between 1797-1834 developed Tehran into the true capital of Qajar rule.

While the establishment of both Tehran and Gulistan date back to the Safavid dynasty, the expansion of the arg and the growth of the city into one of the largest urban metropolises in the region took proper form during the Qajar dynasty. Under the Safavids, Tehran emerged as a modest fortified town with four gates. Tehran’s importance to the Safavids was mainly due to its location on the route from Isfahan, the Safavid capital, to Mashhad, the site of the shrine of the eighth Imam, which was a significant destination for Shi‘i people. Later, during the brief Zand period, Karim Khan Zand (1705-1779) further developed the town through building a palace and the government headquarters within the gates of the city, and promoted it to the status of a military base. It was not until 1786 that Tehran was established as a capital city by Agha

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246While the Pahlavis still maintained Gulistan as a royal palace, which they used for formal receptions during their reign, they moved their place of residence into the newly built Niavara House to the north of the city.

Muhammad Khan (1742-1779), the first Qajar ruler who went on to depose the last Zand ruler, Lutf‘Ali Khan (1769-1794), and claimed the throne in 1796. Agha Muhammad Khan, the founder of the Qajar dynasty, began the establishment of a full-scale royal court in Tehran upon claiming the throne, and in order to legitimate and expand the newly-found capital city. He was responsible for setting up much of the initial infrastructure for what later became the elaborate Gulistan royal court in the northern section of the new capital city of Tehran, established as a fortified territory in the central north desert region of the empire (Figure 19).²⁴⁸

![Fig. 19. Naskov, Russian military officer, First Tehran Map, 1826, Wikimedia Commons](image-url)

The larger rectangle marks the fortified borders of the city built on desert land, while the square on the top left-hand corner depicts the boundaries of the developing Gulistan Palace.²⁴⁹


²⁴⁹The first map of Tehran was drawn by Russian military cartographers during the Russian occupation of Iran, and after the signing of the Gulistan Treaty. For a detailed account of this map, and its historical context, see: Muhammad Mehyar, Shamil Fatullayev, Farhad Fakhari and Mehram Qadiri, eds., Asnad-i
The full realization of Gulistan into a grand palace, however, was accomplished only after Agha Muhammad’s death and during the thirty-five year reign of his nephew Fath‘Ali Shah (1797-1834). Fath‘Ali Shah was notorious for having one of the largest harems in Iranian history, with the number of wives estimated as over one thousand.\footnote{250}{Amanat, Pivot of the Universe, 19.} Unlike his uncle, Fath‘Ali Shah embraced a taste for luxury, reflected not only in the large number of wives and concubines in his harem, but also in his love of extravagant ceremonies, which were a primary engine for the development of Gulistan Palace, beginning in 1806, less than a decade into his reign. The palace was expanded to cover an area of roughly 30 hectares, and was surrounded by fortress walls with round towers at its entrance and a dry moat.\footnote{251}{Mehyar, Fatullayev, Fakhari and Qadiri, Asnad-i tasviri-i Shahr-ha-yi Iran: Dawrah-i Qajar, 49.} This expansion phase included both the completion of structures that had been started by his uncle and the initiation of new building projects, including the addition of large gardens, new barracks, and an extensive andarun area to the north of the palace, which served as the residential quarter of the Shah and his many wives. The most significant buildings constructed under his rule, most of which remain to this day, include the crystal building (‘Imarat-i bulur) on the north side of the court as well as the diamond hall (Talar-i almas) and the wind tower (‘Imarat-i badgir) on the south.\footnote{252}{Of the buildings mentioned, the crystal building (‘Imarat-i Bulur) is the only one which no longer remains in the Gulistan Palace.} He also completed the construction of the iconic audience chamber (Divan Khanah) by commissioning and installing a marble throne (Takht-i marmar) in 1800, on the iconic porch (Ayvan-i Shahi) (Figure 20).
The architecture of Gulistan during this period incorporated many traditional Persian design elements as a means of legitimizing Qajar rule over Iranian territory. For example, the marble stone columns, mirrors, doors, and painted curtains which adorned the Divan Khanah were brought to Tehran from Shiraz, while the Takht-i Marmar, made of yellow marble from Yazd, was hand-crafted in Isfahan by the master stonemason Muhammad Ibrahim Isfahani. Isfahni’s engravings on the throne incorporated imagery which connected Fath‘Ali Shah with Sulayman, ruler of the Israelite Kingdom according to the Quran, as well as the mythical Zoroastrian figure of Jamshid, and their respective legacies (Figure 21).
Such imagery functioned to suggest a historical continuity between the newer Qajar ruler, the emerging capital he ruled from, and the older centers of power in Iranian history. As Jennifer Scarce, in her study of the architectural details of the Divan Khanah, states:

The plan and decoration of the *divankhaneh* and the marble throne is a direct visual reference to Fath‘Ali Shah’s royal status. The plan of a spacious open reception hall supported on columns stresses both the antiquity and continuity of the Iranian monarchy as it is found in pre-Islamic Achaemenid and Sasanid architecture as well as in palaces of Safavid Isfahan and Zand Shiraz.\(^{255}\)

As noted in Chapter I, the Qajar monarchy often relied on elements and traditions from Iranian and Shi‘i history, and the notion of continuity with past glories, in order to validate its authority. The design elements incorporated into the various parts of Gulistan

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Palace are another site of this tendency. It served as an architectural metaphor for Qajar rule.

In Iranian historiography Fath‘Ali Shah is considered the ruler who not only built the great arg which housed Gulistan Palace, but also developed Tehran as an urban center and made it the center of Qajar rule. The rectangular-shaped capital was surrounded by 20-foot tall brick walls, which ran approximately 2500 meters from west to east, and 1600 meters from north to south, with six gates decorated with tile works (refer back to Figure 19). Notably, during his reign the Tehran Bazar, located to the south of the arg, was greatly expanded and the central square adjacent to the arg, which connected the court to the Tehran Bazar, also witnessed considerable development (Figure 22).

Fig. 22. Tehran Bazar, The Illustrated London News, volume LXII, June 21, 1873.

256Amanat, Pivot of the Universe, 12.
257Mehyar, Fatullayev, Fakhari and Qadiri, Asnad-i tasviri-i Shahr-ha-yi Iran: Dawrah-i Qajar, 48.
258For a complete discussion of the development of the Tehran Bazar, which expanded to include many more structures, and its architectural details, see Farmanfarmaian’s “Politics and Patronage.”
Aside from the development of Gulistan Palace, perhaps the most significant addition to the city during this period was the construction of the Masjid-i Sultani—the first large-scale and substantial architectural structure, as well as public building—outside of the arg. Built between 1808 and 1813, it was the largest and most important mosque built under Fath‘Ali Shah’s reign and was located near the northern entrance of the bazar (Figure 23).

![Illustration](image)

Fig. 23. Eugène Flandin, Illustration of Masjid-i Sultani, 1839-1841, Voyage en Perse, avec Flandin, éd. Gide et Baudry.

The showcasing of the royal family’s close relationship to both the merchant class and the ulama, through physical and structural proximity to the bazar and mosque, were simultaneous endeavors undertaken and accomplished during Fath‘Ali Shah’s thirty-seven year reign.²⁵⁹ As Ali Madanipour explains in his historiography of the development

²⁵⁹In her study of the bazar, Fatema Soudavar Farmanfarmanian argues that the grand scale of the mosque served as a source of legitimacy for the new dynasty. Abdul-Hadi Hairi also argues that Fath‘Ali Shah’s desire for political legitimacy during his reign required fostering a close relationship with the ulama,
of Tehran, the structure of the city from the beginning had “a clear functional organization: a political authority (royal compound), an economic center (bazar), a religious focus (Friday Mosque), and the living places of the townspeople.”

Gulistan Palace was developed not only to serve as the administrative center of the state and an assertion of its political authority, but was also simultaneously the place of residence of the royal family and their large entourage (which, as we saw in Chapter I, included a large network of extended family members, guests, and servants, as well as resident artists, craftsmen, tile workers, health practitioners, performers, and so on). As such, while the walls and gates built around the citadel protected the court from outside intruders, the extensive structures on the inside of the court were designed to host large audiences and serve as the site of multiple forms of ceremonial events, state functions, and royal patronage. In this sense, as I will discuss later, from the beginning the boundaries between deeply private and hidden and proudly public and social, were constantly negotiated both inside and outside of the arg, as well as its andarun. This multi-functional dimension of Gulistan Palace, and the various political, social, cultural, and familial affairs which took place within its boundaries, continued to define the development of the physical geography of the space in its various manifestations throughout the Qajar period.


Despite the large-scale development projects and new infrastructure that were set up inside the city borders, as well as the arg, during the nearly four decades of Fath‘Ali Shah’s rule Tehran’s shape and size, number of gates, and border-defining walls remained essentially the same as when they had been built three centuries earlier.\textsuperscript{261}

During his short reign from 1834 to 1848, Fath‘Ali Shah’s successor Muhhamad Shah (1802-1848) made a modest contribution to urban development mostly focused on improving the Royal Square (Miydan-i Shah), which connected the bazar and the arg. He also added large gardens to the interior of both the Eastern and Western quarters inside the arg.\textsuperscript{262} It was, however, not until Nasir al-Din Shah’s reign that Tehran truly transformed into a 19th century cosmopolitan metropole, incorporating local, regional, and Western ideas and aesthetics into a cityscape that was increasingly a destination point for both regional and international stakeholders.

Nasir al-Din Shah officially took the throne in October 1848, appearing on the Takht-i marmar built by his grandfather atop the porch of the iconic Divan Khanah inside Gulistan Palace.\textsuperscript{263} He continued the tradition, set by earlier Qajar rulers, of using the Divan Khanah for court ceremonies, receptions, and festivities. Although as we saw in Chapter I, the number of such events, as well as the size of their audience, increased steadily throughout his reign, as did the number of his wives and their entourages, leading to various significant expansion phases of the Gulistan Palace.


\textsuperscript{262} Edmund Bosworth, Historic Cities of The Islamic World (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 508.

\textsuperscript{263} Abbas Amanat offers a detailed account of the ceremony in his section “Ascending the Throne” in Pivot of the Universe, 89-108.
The first stage of urban development under Nasir al-Din Shah began soon after he took the throne. Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir (1807-52), the Shah’s reformist chief minister, during his short-lived three-year appointment (1848-1851), made significant improvements to the urban infrastructure of Tehran. This included further expansion of the bazar, the building of water canals throughout the city, and, perhaps most significantly, in 1851, the construction of the Dar al-Fanun, the first modern education institution in Tehran, located on the most north-eastern corner of the arg, just above the harem (Figure 24).

The building of the school marked a new era of development in the core zone of the city, with Gulistan Palace at its epicenter. The school was primarily aimed at teaching the modern sciences, and its inauguration was the engine for bringing in a host of international scholars over the next few decades. In fact, much of Iranian historiography argues that Dar al-Fanun was the primary engine for social change and the modernization
project in Iran during the second half of the 19th century. And yet, it is interesting to note that virtually no scholarship on either Gulistan Palace or Dar al-Fanun has noted the proximity between this focal point of modernization and the royal Qajar harem, which was literally steps away to its south.

During this same period, directly to the south of Gulistan Palace, and outside the main entrance of the arg, a bustling public square was expanded and renamed Sabzi Maydan. The square became a crucial nodal point connecting the palace to the bazar directly outside, as well as the to developing metropolis (Figure 25).

![Fig. 25. Ilya Nikolaevich Berezin, Map of Tehran, 1852, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center.](image)

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265 In her study of the University, Ekhtiar is one of a few authors who takes note that Dar al-Fanun’s “location in the northeast corner of the Arg (royal citadel) is indicative of an intimate bond with the court from its inception.” Unfortunately, she does not elaborate on or extend this bond to the andarun, the nextdoor neighbor of the University. See Ekhtiar, “Nasir al-Din Shah and the Dar al-Fanun”, 155.

266 Gurney, “The Transformation of Tehran in the Late Nineteenth Century,” 52.

267 Compared to the 1826 map (Figure 19), this one features a more detailed visual representation of the arg to the North West of the city, as well as the bazar, the commercial and social center of the city stretched out
Concurrently, a substantial rebuilding and revitalization of the bazar quarter began and continued for over a decade, and in 1862 a major renovation project replaced the old bazar structures with new modern buildings.\textsuperscript{268}

A second phase of development began in 1867 and included the destruction of the old mud brick walls, which made up the city border, and the enclosure of a much larger area with a wall designed by the French polytechnic engineer and teacher at Dar al-Fanun, General Alexandre Buhler.\textsuperscript{269} Tehran expanded to four times its original size, as the area of the city grew from 3 square miles to 7.5 square miles, and the length of the border wall surrounding the city increased from 4 to 11 miles (Figures 26-28).\textsuperscript{270}

\footnotesize{of Gulistan’s southern gate. For a more detailed account of this map, see: Mehyar, Fatullayev, Fakhari and Qadiri, \textit{Asnad-i tasviri-i Shahr-ha-yi Iran: Dawrah-’i Qajar}, 50-52\textsuperscript{268}Bosworth, \textit{Historic Cities of The Islamic World}, 509.  
\textsuperscript{270}Gurney, “The Transformation of Tehran in the Late Nineteenth Century,” 53.}
This more topographically-accurate detailed map of Tehran, created by Dar al-Fanun students under the supervision of Aligholi Mirza Etezadossaltaneh and technical guidance of Monsieur Kershish, is the most detailed map of Tehran prior to the 1867 expansion project. The Persian language signage on the map includes the marked borders of the city, arg, various quarters and streets, a detailed rendering of the various bazars within the city borders, with marked stores, as well as various ravines, gardens, baths, mosques, schools, public squares, and so on. For a detailed account of this map, see: Mehyar Fatullayev, Fakhari and Qadiri, eds., *Asnad-i tasviri’i Shahr’ha’i iran duri’i qajar*, 52-53.
Fig. 27. Mirza Abdulghaffar Najm al-Mulk Isfahani, Map of Tehran, 1890, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center.
By 1890, the old city and arg (left) make up the central rectangle of the expanded city (right).

The newly-expanded octagonal-shaped city parameter included significantly more space to the north, which was developed into an affluent residential area, and a total of twelve elaborately-decorated gates.²⁷²

Much like other major cities in the Middle East, the development of Tehran during this period coincided with accelerated global flows, which included increased contact with both regional neighbors and Europe. Many have read this period as the birth of modernization in Iran, arguing that modernity came through contact with Europe, and meant the application and adaptation of Western civilization to traditional Iranian and Islamic cultures.²⁷³ This is, of course, in line with how many European orientalists

²⁷³ Many historians of Iran have applied this simplistic definition of modernization as mimicry of the West, in particular in relation to the development of Tehran. See: Hafez Farman Farmanian’s “The Forces of Modernization in Nineteenth Century Iran: A Historical Survey” in Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East, The Nineteenth Century, ed. W.R. Polk and R. L. Chambers (Chicago: University of Chicago
encountered Tehran in the second half of the 19th century. For example, the British member of Parliament, George Curzon, during his 1889-1890 trip to Tehran, described the city as a new and modern. Yet for him, the city had certain deficiencies rooted in its Eastern elements. He stated:

At every turn we meet in juxtaposition, sometimes in audacious harmony, at others in comical contrast, the influence and features of the East and the West... European, Tehran has certainly become, or is becoming; but yet, if the distinction can be made intelligible, it is being Europeanized upon Asiatic lines. No one could mistake it for anything but an Eastern capital.  

This reading of Tehran took it to be a deficient emulation of a Western model, with the inferiority squarely placed on the “Asiatic” elements of the city. It thus followed a developmentalist discourse, wherein modernization happened as a result of effective imitations and reproductions of Western, and in particular Western European standards and practices.

In the historiography of both Tehran and Gulistan, the 1867 International Exhibition, which took place in Paris, has been read as amongst the most important vehicles for the intensification of European-influenced urban development throughout the Middle East, and by extension, regional urban modernization projects. Iranian officials, along with representatives from other regional centers like Cairo and Istanbul, visited the exhibition and were profoundly moved by what they encountered. In particular, the Ottoman section of the exhibition featured a blended style of traditional Islamic and Western design motifs, and it became a major inspiration for emerging architectural trends in the region.

Press, 1968); and Ervand Abrahamian, Iran between Two Revolutions (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982).
It is important to note, however, that the trend was in fact based in part on the European rediscovery of the medieval Spanish Islamic style of the Alhambra. It thus showcased the transnational and reciprocal flow of design influences between the regions, which also predated the era of modernity.\textsuperscript{275} It is precisely this reciprocal nature of global flows and influences that Eurocentric and orientalist depictions of modernization in the region fail to account for.

The 1867 exhibition’s impact on municipal improvement plans in Tehran was also only one of several factors that influenced the ambitious expansion plans that were carried out in the city in the second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{276} Other circumstances that contributed to the major development projects undertaken during this period were the accelerated rate of population growth and a catastrophic flood in May of 1867, which caused a great deal of damage in the north of the city and required a major rebuilding effort.\textsuperscript{277} As such, European influence was one amongst the many factors that contributed to the intensified expansion and development of the city that took shape during his period.

The Gulistan Palace also went through a series of simultaneous and elaborate transformations. During his time as Prime Minister, Amir Kabir had ordered the purchasing of a major area of land to the east of the palace, although the development and incorporation of this land into Gulistan only took place later, after his death.\textsuperscript{278} From 1867

\textsuperscript{275}Ernest Tucker, \textit{The Middle East in Modern World History} (New York: Routledge, 2013), 83.
\textsuperscript{277}At the turn of the 19th century, during the summer months, the population of Tehran was estimated at 15,000. By 1867, during the same months, the population had increased to 100,000: see: Bosworth, \textit{Historic Cities of The Islamic World}, 510.
\textsuperscript{278}Golshan, “Gulistan-i Bagh Gulistan,” 45.
to 1892, the *arg*, located now in the central part of the newly-expanded city borders, grew to cover an enormous area of land, surrounded by its own new high walls and secured gates which closed it off from its surrounding exterior. Inside Gulistan, the first phase of expansion concentrated on building a large scale residential building, named Shams al-ʿImarah, in the east side of the *arg*.

Designed by DustʿAli Khan Nizam al-Dawlah and completed in 1868, the five-story building, the tallest of its kind in Tehran at the time, looked over the city and served as the royal family’s residence. The building was the first recreational tower in Tehran, as well as the first royal building that was clearly exposed to the outside public through its height (Figure 29).279

Shams al-‘Imarah was built with the intention of giving its inhabitants a unique view of the ever-developing city, while maintaining the royal family’s privacy. Significantly, the building also housed the first photo studio in Iran, which was established by Nasir al-Din Shah.

European influence permeated the façade and architectural design of the building with features such as a large clock mounted on the central tower and a projected staircase that
led up to the multi-story building, which was visible from outside of the arg. At the same time, the interior architecture, which incorporated ceramic and tile-works with geometric Persian designs and imagery, insured that residents were hidden from public view, thus maintaining the Islamic tradition of andarun privacy. It is important to note that at the time this was the most substantial building within the arg and along with an expanded andarun, located behind the Divan Khanah, it was the primary space in the arg, occupied by the Shah’s many wives and children, as well as their relatives and servants. This point highlights the significance of space occupied by women, familial life, and domestic culture within the Qajar court. Shams al-Imarah allowed its occupants to have a unique view from within the arg of the hustling urban center beyond its walls, while still remaining unseen. It was also the first building to have direct access to the exterior, with a gate that opened directly into the bazar. Combined, these features point to the ways in which residents within Gulistan Palace, including harem women, had multiple forms of access to the developing cosmopolitan life that was taking shape both inside and directly outside the arg, while still maintaining the Islamic principles of gender segregation.

Another substantial building project during this period was the construction of Takkiyah-’i Dawlat, a permanent theatre erected between 1868-1873, to the southeast of the palace.

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281 For a discussion of European influence on the Palace structure during this phase, see: Gurney, “The Transformation of Tehran in the Late Nineteenth Century,” 64-65.
The structure was built in the style of large amphitheaters, and could accommodate up to four thousand spectators (Figure 30-31).

Fig. 30. Imarat-i Badgir (left) and Takkiyah-‘i Dawlat (right), Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center.

Fig. 31. Antoin Sevruguin, Takkiyah-‘i Dawlat (interior view), 1880-1930, Smithsonian Institution Archives.
Takkiyah-'i Dawlat was used primarily for the performance of taʿziyah (passion plays) and ruzih khuni (mourning rituals), and again, despite some European influence on its architectural shape, the building functioned to highlight the royal family’s strong link to Shiʿi Islamic history, marking Gulistan as a public venue for the display of piety.\footnote{Scarce, The Architecture and Decoration, 115.} In her description of Takkiyah-'i Dawlat, where she was invited to attend a taʿziyah play, Lady Mary Sheil, wife of British Lieutenant Colonel Justin Sheil, who served in Iran from 1844-1853, noted that the large audience of “several thousands” housed in the structure, which “fulfilled all the purposes of a theatre”, not only included the Shah himself, his many ministers, wives, and mother, as well as important foreign officials, but also “women of humble condition, who were great in numbers.”\footnote{Lady Mary Sheil, Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia (London: John Murray, 1856), 127.} She gave a detailed account of the collective mourning ritual that took place amongst this motley crew of audience members, highlighting women’s participation in public spectacles (Figures 32-33).
Fig. 32. Ta'ziyah play at Takkiyah-'i Dawlat, oil painting Kamal-al-Mulk, Gulistan Palace Museum.

Fig. 33. Antoin Sevruguin, Takkiyah-'i Dawlat interior during ceremony, 1870-1928, Smithsonian Institution Archives.
Shams al-‘Imarah and Takkiyah-‘i Dawlat are noteworthy structures within the arg because they present us with architectural examples that illuminate the intermingling of Islamic and European influences. As I will argue in the second half of this chapter, the buildings also show the complex ways in which gender was negotiated, both within the boundaries of the arg and beyond it, through spatial design and the social and cultural practices which occupied those spaces.

The Gulistan harem’s physical proximity to the neighboring buildings and spaces, both inside the arg and outside in the ever-developing city of Tehran, cannot be underestimated. Far from being secluded, the residents of the Nasir al-Din harem were situated at the very heart of one of the largest metropoles in the 19th century Middle East. There are many examples of the relationship between harem and bazar. For example, in his diaries, Mu‘ayyir al-Mamlık, the Shah’s grandson, made reference to music played inside the harem announcing the different parts of the day both for court residents and those in the bazar. He stated:

> At two in the afternoon, a drumroll would announce that it was time to start packing up the bazar, and at 3pm, a different sound would announce the bazar closure. There was a curfew at night, so dinner would be served early inside the harem so that cooks and servants who did not reside inside could leave before the curfew.\(^{286}\)

Such tangible connections between the bazar and the harem illustrate that physical proximity had clear material implications. They also function to demystify the understanding of the Qajar harem as a deeply private and isolated interior space and show its intrinsic connection to the busy commercial quarter it neighbored.

The most drastic development phase of Gulistan under Nasir al-Din Shah’s reign took place after his first visit to Europe in 1873. The expansion of the court after this period was deeply influenced by the Shah’s desire to assert Tehran’s place within an increasingly global cosmopolitan culture. This is evident in the newly-built Divan Khanah (constructed between 1873 and 1882), whose façade boasted tall European-style windows and semi-engaged classical columns, as well as an expanded Museum Hall, which housed the court’s mounting collection of local, regional, and European art. Most interestingly, this phase also included the building of an extensive new andarun (Figure 34).

Fig. 34. Jean-Baptiste Feuvrier, Tehran Plan de L’Ark, 1889-1892, Trois ans à cour de Perse.
The andarun is located on the right in between Divan Khanah and Dar al-Fanun.

The newly developed living quarters covered approximately one-third of the palace grounds and was located on the north side of the court, to the east of the new Divan Khanah and south of Dar al-Fanun. Its expansion was a bold statement by Nasir al-Din Shah that the Islamic domestic tradition of harems was not antithetical to Iran’s modernization, and could in fact develop and evolve simultaneously with other large-scale urban modernization efforts (Figure 35).

![Fig. 35. New andarun under construction. Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center.](image)

The newly-built harem was accessible through two entrances, both of which were secured and guarded in order to shield harem women from the intrusion and gaze of non-relative men. They opened onto separate vestibules with long corridors, which linked the andarun
to the court and to the outside, respectively. The first entrance was to Narinjistan, an orangerie located in the north-east quarter of the palace. This was the entrance most commonly used by both harem residents and the Shah himself for entering and leaving the andarun. According to Mu‘ayyir al-Mamlık, about 20 elder eunuchs guarded this corridor. The other entrance to the harem was the diamond gate (Sardar-i Almas), which opened onto the street and was generally kept locked with a court eunuch also in charge of the keys (Figure 36).

Fig. 36. Exterior view of Sardar-i Almas with guards, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center.

289 Feuvrier, Trois ans à cour de Perse, 150.
Built around a massive courtyard, the new andarun featured a series of smaller structures around a rectangular enclosure. The courtyard served as the heart of the harem, connecting all the buildings and giving every house a clear view to the andarun entrance, as well as all of the other houses. Each of the buildings was assigned to house one of the Shah’s wives or sighahs, though eventually many of them were occupied by multiple wives and children, as the number of residents in the harem steadily increased during this period.  

The buildings inside the new andarun each featured a deep columned porch (talar), which had openings on one or three sides and served multiple functions. The variously sized talars were used as entrances, small audience halls, sleeping areas in hot weather, or balconies for sitting and eating. These versatile spaces could offer accommodation and hospitality to all members and relations of the extended family, as well as royal guests, or could be used for the everyday domestic and leisure activities of their residents. Their placement at the outer limit of each building also meant that they were both a part of the interior of their respective homes and accessible and visible to the exterior courtyard—a design feature particular to the Qajar court that again complicates the assumed notion of a clear separation between interiority and exteriority (Figure 37).

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291Scarce, Domestic Culture in the Middle East, 34.
The most architecturally-significant building in the andarun, situated in the middle of the enormous courtyard, was the Shah’s bedchamber (Imarat-i Khabgah)—an elaborate two-story building, whose design borrowed from Ottoman palaces. The majestic building was quarantined from the surrounding area by a large fence with an iron door (Figure 38).  

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While the placing of the Khabgah in the middle of the andarun can be read as an assertion of the centrality of patriarchal rule within this space, it is important to note that this space was most often an empty signifier since Nasir al-Din was frequently not physically present within the harem. The Shah was notorious for going on long vacations, for both state and leisure purposes, and spent most summer months, with some, but not all, of his wives and children outside of Gulistan. As such, despite its location and architectural weight, it would be a mistake to see the Khabgah as the heart of the harem. In fact, as numerous sources in the first chapter attested, the social life of the harem revolved most often around its female residents and eunuchs, and the power negotiations
between them, and took place within various women’s homes, *talars*, and gardens with the gated Khabgah merely serving as a placeholder for harem hierarchy.

A note-worthy building in the new *andarun* which, unlike the Khabgah, was frequently occupied by multiple residents and visitors, was the home belonging to the Shah’s favored wife, Anis al-Dawlah. The building looked out onto a private garden (*Bagh-i Tabani*) from the back, and housed a large reception hall on its upper level, which was the location of the many gatherings, often featuring visiting foreign women, hosted by the de-facto queen (Figure 39).

![Image](image.png)

Fig. 39. “Our women’s party at Anis al-Dawlah’s home,” Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center.

Her house was amongst the few notable ones which also had a bathing room, although she still continued to frequent public baths with other harem women as a collective activity.293

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Directly outside the bedchamber and facing its entrance was the residence of Amin Aqdas, another of the Shah’s significant sighahs. This house was noteworthy, both because of its larger size in comparison to most other harem buildings and by the fact that it served as the residence of important figures in Nasir al-Din’s court, including, at different points, his beloved cat Babri Khan, the young boy Malijak, who was the object of the Shah’s obsession, and Khanum Bashi, a beautiful young recruit to the Shah’s harem in his final years, and one of his last sighahs.294

As we’ve seen, at every step of development and expansion both the arg and its harem paralleled shifts, advances, and progress that Tehran was also undergoing as it transformed into a modern metropolitan city. In fact, throughout Nasir al-Din Shah’s reign, Gulistan, much like the city that surrounded it, was almost perpetually in a state of renovation and expansion. Far from being designated as a space which preserved and maintained tradition, Gulistan was in fact usually the first place of transformation and development in the city center (recall the installation of the first telephone in Iran mentioned in Chapter I, or the first photo studio appearing in Shams al-‘Imarah). As such, both Tehran and Gulistan, in very material ways, were the epicenters of the Qajar’s engagements with Iranian modernity.

**Inside Out: Biruni, Andarun, and Movements within Gulistan**

Throughout its history, and the various phases of renovation and expansion under Qajar rule, Gulistan Palace maintained the basic Islamic domestic principle of a division

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between an administrative and presumably male-dominated exterior part (*biruni*) and the private, familial, and predominately woman-dominated interior (*andarun*). This form of gender segregation was, of course, a normative practice of Islamic social and moral order and, as mentioned, served as a source of legitimation for the political authority of the Qajar rulers. The distinction between male and female space was more generally one of the most important defining characteristics of Islamic cities and domestic architecture.295

Within European accounts, gender segregated space in general, and the domestic space of the harem in particular, carried a particularly heavy symbolic burden. It was a bordered space which was impenetrable to the European male gaze and it represented Eastern patriarchy and the imprisonment of Muslim women’s bodies in its most material form.296 While such orientalist assumptions about the Muslim world have by now been adequately critiqued,297 the basic premise that the harem, in its material form, represented an extreme form of private space occupied by women and segregated from the male-dominated public sphere has continued to hold sway in the historiography of 19th century Iran.298

Gender-segregated spaces within Islamic cultures, however, do not correspond to the modern European divide between public and private spheres as easily or as neatly as many historiographers of the Islamic world have assumed. From the outset, for example,

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296 For a discussion of European attitudes towards Middle Eastern harems, refer to Marilyn Booth’s introduction to the 2011 edited volume *Harem Histories*, 1-10.
297 See for example: Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies*; and Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem*.
298 This is both true in European accounts of the city from the period (James Baillie Fraser, Lady Mary Shiel, George Nathaniel Curzon, Carla Serena…), as well as historical scholarship by Qajar historians including Abbas Amanat and Jennifer Scarce.
the notion of interior (andarun) and exterior (biruni) both referred to areas that constituted the domestic sphere of the home. That is to say, in the context of a traditional Iranian home, and in particular, one belonging to an elite member of Iranian society, the house itself was divided into two sections: the andarun (‘inside’ or ‘innards,’) was the space designated for women, religiously-permitted men (mahram), and in the case of very elite households, their servants, and eunuchs; and the biruni (‘outside’ or ‘public,’), which was reserved for the male head of the household and the visitors he would receive.299 This is in stark contrast to European understandings of private and public spheres where the former referred to the home and the latter to the social world outside of the home.

Jürgen Habermas has famously argued that in Europe the division between the private and public spheres began to emerge towards the end of the 18th century with the rise of bourgeois culture, and this division was a central feature of the modern European state. According to him, there was a set of historically-specific and unprecedented circumstances that allowed for the emergence of this liberal bourgeois phenomenon in Europe, which in turn changed the principles and nature of state power.300 For Habermas, this notion of the public sphere grew at the same time as ideas about the intimate and private sphere of the conjugal family. The private sphere was constituted as the necessary counterpoint to the public sphere, and in the industrial era the divide became highly gendered; men dominated the public arenas of politics and work, while women were

closely associated with family and home. The European bourgeois social order relied on this gendered separation of these spheres, which led to the emergence of the nuclear family as the ideal social unit.\textsuperscript{301} This form of conjugality is what, in fact, allowed citizens (read: male citizens) to have economic autonomy, play an active role in the market, and develop a liberal understanding of their rights, which they could foster within the public sphere. Love and intimacy were relegated to the private realm of the home and were to play a central role in the formation of the conjugal family and as the premise of marriage, though notions of a union between two people from different parts of the social-ladder were still highly frowned upon.\textsuperscript{302}

By now, many feminist scholars, most notably Nancy Fraser, have pointed out the gender-blind bias of Habermas’s understating of the different spheres, arguing that “public” and “private” are themselves categories that, once subjected to historically rigorous scrutiny, don’t adequately account for the nuanced ways that people divided up their intimate, social, and political lives.\textsuperscript{303} Similarly, the notion of domestic interior and social exterior spaces as oppositional and gendered has its own complex legacy in the European context. In \textit{The Emergence of the Interior}, Charles Rice argues that understandings of domestic space as interior and private space began to take shape in Europe beginning in the 19th century. According to Rice, “the interior emerged historically as the context for newly articulated desires for privacy and comfort, the

\textsuperscript{301}Joan Scott, “Secularism”, \textit{Ursula Hirschmann Annual Lecture on Gender and Europe}, European University Institute, Florence Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies Distinguished Lecture, 3 April 2009, 12.


\textsuperscript{303}Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in \textit{Habermas and the Public Sphere}, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT press, 1992).
consolidation of gendered and familial roles in life, and domestic practices of consumption and self-representation.\textsuperscript{304} Both as concept and as material manifestation, the notion of a separate domestic space was a modernist European phenomenon which reflected the newly-articulated and increasingly widespread desires for privacy and comfort and the consolidation of specific gendered and familial roles in life, as well as a newly-emerging consumer culture, which set specific rules for domestic arrangements. Rice argues that discourses about domesticity as a naturalized, stable, and timeless aspect of living is a misconception, albeit a powerful one, which in fact only emerged in 19\textsuperscript{th} century Europe.\textsuperscript{305}

As we saw in Chapter I, such understandings of family, conjugality, and civic life, and the rigid binaries that structured European societies in their idealized form were not always present in other societies. In fact, family and conjugal relations in the royal Qajar harem were distinctly different from their European counterparts. The harem constituted a familial formation composed of multiple wives, with both permanent and various levels of temporary status, and their relatives, as well as a large constellation of nannies, eunuchs, and servants all cohabiting and collectively raising children in a communal setting. As mentioned in the last chapter, multiple sources, as well as family portraits of harem women from the period, attest to the complex nature of conjugality within this context (Figure 40).

\textsuperscript{305}Ibid., 4.
Despite these glaring differences, however, the Islamic architectural tendencies of royal courts and elite families, which were structured around the division between a *biruni* and an *andarun*, have generally been the site of cultural comparisons that regard such practices as material evidence for the severe gendered division between public and private life within Islamicate societies. Both European accounts of the Gulistan court and more contemporary analysis of this space found in the English language tend to rely heavily on such presuppositions in their spatial accounts of the palace and its harem.

For example, Jennifer Scarce, a notable architectural historian of the Qajar period, has argued that despite the modernization plans for Tehran in the mid- to late 19th century, a central component of Nasir al-Din’s expansion plans for Gulistan was the maintenance of the “traditional segregation of public and private areas” through the clear and gendered distinction between *biruni* and *andarun* in Gulistan, and the walls surrounding the
complex which protected these elements from public.\textsuperscript{306} Throughout her body of work on Qajar architecture, she argues that such a division is in accordance with Islamic tradition, where “[p]ublic life takes place in the streets, the service and commercial sectors, while private life looks inwards to courtyard and rooms within wall.”\textsuperscript{307} She notes that while there was a visible attempt by the Qajars to modernize Gulistan (and visibility for her is apparent through the gesture of incorporating European architectural details such as clock towers and columns), the presence of the traditional Islamic social order continued to foil full-scale modernization efforts. She thus makes a clear distinction between modern forms and structures and the traditional practices which occupied them. However, Scarce fails to account for the fact that the notion of a clear division between public and private space, and in particular, domestic interiority and public civic life, was a decidedly 19\textsuperscript{th} century European phenomenon associated with European modernity, and was quite distinct from the traditions and practices which defined the Qajar court—a space that was arguably the very focal point of 19\textsuperscript{th} century Iranian modernity. In fact, as we’ve seen, most objects and practices associated with modernity, from fashion and technology to arts and literature, made their first appearance in Iran within the walls of Gulistan.

In reality, in the context of late Qajar elite culture, this form of gender segregation was not informed by a distinction between the private and public realms, but was instead the product of Islamic ordering and enforcement of gender segregation in both public and private life, and one which was not deemed by many to be incompatible with modernization. Furthermore, far from being “secluded” in the andarun of Gulistan, there


\textsuperscript{307} Scarce, \textit{Domestic Culture in the Middle East},13.
is no shortage of references to harem women from the period moving through the bazar and the streets of Tehran, visiting public shrines, or traveling throughout the country, within the archives of the period—spaces which clearly fall outside the harem or domestic sphere of the *arg* (Figure 41-42).
Within such accounts, the basic rules of gender segregation still remained, either through women covering themselves or the various ways in which men were unable or forbidden to have visible access to public areas that harem women were passing through.

A noteworthy incident, which illustrates this point well, took place in the summer of 1883, when Samuel Benjamin, the first American ambassador to Iran, was traveling with his daughter from Tehran to Shemiran to escape the heat of the city. En route, his caravan reached a coffee house where a number of horses and carriages were parked. They decided to stop and take a break, but almost immediately upon arrival they were attacked by a group of court eunuchs and severely beaten. The reason for this attack, which caused some diplomatic tensions at the time, was that the coffee house was at the time occupied
by harem women who were also on route from Tehran to their summer destination. In such instances, it was not permissible for men to enter public spaces occupied by harem women. The beating, in fact, only stopped when one of the Shah’s wives recognized Benjamin and his daughter and ordered the guards to stop.\textsuperscript{308}

This was one of several examples of harem women occupying space outside the confines of the \textit{andarun} gates. In fact, these women spent most of their time socializing in various public gatherings, attending weekly public baths, and going on trips and pilgrimages collectively. During such outings, men were to stay clear of their path and if they were to get a glimpse of harem women, as the Benjamin example illustrates, it was the men who would be punished.\textsuperscript{309}

Munis al-Dawlah, Anis al-Dawlah’s servant and confident, in her memoirs, for example, gave a detailed account of harem women visiting Kuh-i Bibi Shahrbanu, a shrine located south east of Tehran. She stated:

Men and women often visited shrines together with set rituals which they would follow. There was, however, one shrine that no men and not even boys were allowed to visit –Kuh-i Bibi Shahrbanu shrine. Legend had it that Bibi Shahrbanu was still alive and roaming the mountains and as such, no male visitors were allowed there. Because of this, women loved to visit this shrine where they did not have to cover themselves and could frolic freely.\textsuperscript{310}

\textsuperscript{308}S.G.W. Benjamin, \textit{The Life and Adventures of a Freelance}, being the observations of S.G.W. Benjamin (Burlington: Free Press Company, 1914), 384-391.  
\textsuperscript{309}Azad, \textit{Pusht-i pardah-ha-yi haramsara}, 233.  
\textsuperscript{310}Munis al-Dawlah, \textit{Khatirat-i Munis al-Dawlah}, 137.
She went on to describe how differing classes of harem women made the journey with their eunuchs and partook in collective leisure activities such as singing, eating meals, and reading omens (fal khandan) for the duration of the trip.\textsuperscript{311}

Visits to the bathhouse were another example of public outings that harem women participated in, generally on a weekly basis. Shireen Mahdavi gives the following account of women’s public bathing rituals:

> For the women, the public baths (apart from their original purpose as a location for being cleansed) were a form of amusement and distraction from daily life. It was a social meeting place where the women would go with their extended family and arrange to meet their friends. They would usually spend a whole day there, having their hair and nails dyed with henna, eating sweetmeats and meals, telling stories and anecdotes, and smoking hookah. There were also baths for special occasions, such as on the tenth day after giving birth to a son or prenuptial baths, which would be preceded and proceeded by female musicians and dancers.\textsuperscript{312}

While such collective homosocial activities have been well documented in the historiography of Qajar women, most notably by Afsaneh Najmabadi, few scholars have paid adequate attention to the spatial manifestation of such activities—namely that they often took place in outdoor or public spaces throughout the city, which traditional historiography has deemed inaccessible to harem women.

Even within the arg, there was no shortage of large-scale gatherings and social affairs in which women took part. Mu‘ayyir al-Mamlık, for example, reported in his memoirs that on a few nights each month, the entire arg (so not just its andarun, but also its biruni) would be closed off to visitors so that the Shah and the residents of the harem could tour

\textsuperscript{311}Ibid., 138.
\textsuperscript{312}Shireen Mahdavi, “Amusements in Qajar Iran,” \textit{Iranian Studies} 40, no. 4, (September 2007), 494.
the grounds. They would spend time in the Divan Khanah and the garden, and musicians and entertainers would perform for large audiences. Harem women would often end the evening by sharing a collective dinner with the Shah in the Diamond Hall (Talar-i Biliriyani). 313

While Mu‘ayyir al-Mamlik’s account often centered the Shah in the daily activities of the harem he described, it is important to note that in actuality Nasir al-Din was rarely present in Gulistan, and most of these activities generally took place in his absence. As Naghmeh Soharbi has pointed out, Qajar kings were frequently nomadic, and Nasir al-Din in particular spent much of his rule outside the capital on hunting trips, state tours, or foreign excursions. 314 As we saw in Chapter I, while on rare occasions he was accompanied by certain favored wives and daughters, for the most part the majority of his harem was left behind during these long periods of absence. I’timad al-Saltanah, for example wrote that by 1886 Nasir al-Din had embarked on 24 major trips, each lasting several months. The Shah’s own travel diaries, which he began writing in 1867, chronicled several of these trips, each ranging from two to seven months. 315 Aside from these travels, Munis al-Dawlah also wrote that the Shah spent a few months of each

winter and summer in more temperate climates wintering (qishlaq) and summering (yaylq) outside of Tehran.\(^{316}\)

As such, generally, harem women spent much of their time in the absence of the Shah, participating in collective activities within the andarun, which were primarily homosocial. Yet it is important to remember that the harem was never an exclusively female space. As noted earlier, the harem population included male children and eunuchs, as well as a small number of other male figures who had various forms of access. For example, many of these women were pious and spent a part of their day praying together.\(^{317}\) According to Mu'ayyir al-Mamlik, the harem had daily visits from Shykh Asad Allah, a blind Quranic scholar, well-versed in religious issues.\(^{318}\) Photographic evidence also depicts the large crowds of women who routinely gathered around blind religious figures in order to listen to sermons, pray, and discuss blessed and forbidden acts (Figure 43-44).

\(^{316}\)Munis al-Dawlah, Khaterat-i Munis al-Dawlah, 164.

\(^{317}\)As an example, Taj al-Saltanah gives an account of the centrality of religious practices in her mother’s daily life and blames her lack of maternal skills on such pious practices. See: Taj al-Saltana, Crowning Anguish, 78.

\(^{318}\)Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik also gives a descriptive account of such sermons. See: Mu'ayyir al-Mamlik, Yaddasht-ha-yi az zindigani-i khususi-i Nasir al-Din Shah, 20.
Fig. 43. “Women’s congregational prayer led by the blind Shaykh Assad Allah Qari,” 1864-1881, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center.

Fig. 44. “Women’s religious mourning ceremony with a Mullah,” 1864-1881, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center.
Furthermore, religious recitations (*ruzí-khuni*) and passion plays (*ta‘ziyah*) were amongst the most popular forms of entertainment for harem women. Interestingly, most *ta‘ziyah* plays were performed by an all-male cast. Since male performers would cross dress to play female roles, harem women would watch such performances covered by veils in order to protect themselves from the returned gaze of the cross-dressed performers (Figure 45).

Fig. 45. Antoin Sevruguin, *Ta‘ziyah* performance, 1870-1930, Smithsonian Institution Archives.

Harem women also had their own *ta‘ziyah* theater, which usually took place in Imarat-i Muniriyah, the house of Munir al-Saltanah. Such plays were performed by all-female

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319 For a more thorough discussion of leisure activities in the harem, see: Shireen Mahdavi, “Amusements in Qajar Iran.”

casts, and thus did not require women spectators to cover themselves. Munis al-Dawlah offered a vivid account of the ease and comfort women experienced amongst each other when watching female ta‘ziyah performances in the andarun.\textsuperscript{321} Interestingly, since most of the women who performed these plays were illiterate, court eunuchs would often learn the dialogue and music for these plays from male writers and directors, and then teach it to the female harem performers.\textsuperscript{322} The musical groups that accompanied the ta‘ziyah plays were also often composed of eunuchs and blind male performers.\textsuperscript{323}

As the above example illustrates, not only was the biruni section of the arg regularly accessible to harem women and their servants, the supposed strict gender-segregated structure of the andarun accommodated in multiple ways the presence of a small number of non-female bodies, whether they be blind men, eunuchs, or male children. As such, the characterization of the royal andarun as a private female space in and of itself requires further interrogation.

Understandings of the harem as a “private” sphere of domesticity ignore both the spatial configuration of it and the ways in which the women living within it constituted a public in their own right, which was in constant contact with both the court and the many bodies and identities which surrounded and passed through it. In her description of harem life, Taj al-Saltanah, one of the Shah’s daughters noted:

His Imperial Majesty, my father, had about eighty wives and concubines, each of whom had about ten or twenty maidservants and domestics. The number of women in the harem thus reached some five or six hundred. Moreover, every day

\textsuperscript{321} Ibid., 98.
\textsuperscript{322} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{323} Ibid.
the wives, concubines, or domestics received numerous relatives and visitors, so that there was a constant flood of about eight or nine hundred women in the harem.\textsuperscript{324}

It would be hard to argue that a space occupied by 800 to 900 bodies should be considered a private domain. In fact, looking at accounts of the Qajar harem from the late 19th century, one is struck by the amount of sociality and communal practices that made up the day-to-day life of the residents even within the andarun. Many of the architectural details which were explained in the last section were developed specifically for this purpose—let us recall, for example, the large talars that were built into certain buildings, or Anis al-Dawlih’s guest room on the second floor of her home which was referenced in the many accounts from the period.

**Conclusion**

In a letter written to Nasir al-Din Shah, the writer informed the Shah of a physical altercation that took place between harem servants and workers outside of the harem. Agha Bashi, the Shah’s loyal eunuch, was mentioned as the arbitrator of the fight. According to the letter, Agha Bashi made the harem servants promise not to “loiter on the street and pick fights.”\textsuperscript{325} This letter is interesting in that it shows that while, in some sense, there was in fact a desire to keep a separation between the harem and its exterior, the boundaries between the interior and exterior were regularly crossed. In this case, they

\textsuperscript{324}Taj al-Saltana, *Crowning Anguish*, 88.

\textsuperscript{325}“Namah bah Shah: barrisi-yi niza’-i farashan-i khiyaban ba nukarha-yi andaruni va islah tarfin va jilugiri az tarddu’d-i pishkhidmat-ha dar khiyaban,” 1872, document 295-2592, National Arvhives of Iran.
were crossed by harem eunuchs who, as we will see in the next chapter, were perhaps the most mobile figures between these two realms.

Thinking through the material space of late 19\textsuperscript{th} century Gulistan and movements between its \textit{andarun} and \textit{birun} and their immediate surroundings, as well as its location in the heart of a fast-developing urban center, allows us to move beyond fetishizing the harem as a token of idealized Eastern patriarchal sexuality, or denouncing it as a prison house of Muslim women. Instead, we can interrogate certain social relations in late Qajar Iran through their spatial manifestations at the very heart of the empire. Both textual and photographic evidence point to the fact that the Gulistan \textit{andarun} was at once a space of domesticity within which, for example, children were raised in a collective environment, a space of sociality wherein a constant barrage of familial, local, and transnational guests were entertained; a host of rituals both secular and religious were performed; and a series of politics, both local, national, and international were interrogated and negotiated. This folding in of deeply private and extremely public activities within the same space is perhaps the most unique and interesting feature of the royal court and its \textit{andarun}, and one which has been severely understudied. What was particularly unique about this space was that, for the most part, the day-to-day affairs of the harem and its occupants occurred outside of patriarchal male control. Seen in this light, the Gulistan harem was a kind of heterotopic liminal zone where gender, ethnic, and class differences intersected and where the successive development of the space both formed and was informed by the domestic, leisurely, cultural, and political practices that took shape within it.
Chapter III
In the Shadows of Gulistan:
The Servant Class of Nasir al-Din Shah’s Court and Harem

This dear nanny of mine, having also brought up my mother, had risen to the rank of “Matron Nanny.” Wielding a good deal of authority, she had complete control over food and drink supplies and the cellar, and enjoyed numerous privileges. She was very affectionate to me . . . I had grown so accustomed to her presence . . . if she was parted from me for a day, I cried the entire time and nothing could console me. I never left her side, and there was no remedy for being apart from her. Thus it is that, to this day, in memory of my beloved nanny, I am averse to fair-skinned people while having a special regard for tawnier faces.326

Taj al-Saltanah

. . . it is believed that, in general, cruelty, or even harshness, is rarely practiced towards slaves in Persia. Their customary treatment is similar to that of other servants of a family, or even sometimes better, particularly when they happen to be Nubees or Habeshees. They are never employed as field labourers, their occupation being confined to the duties of the household. . . They are not treated with contempt as in America; there are no special laws to hold them in a state of degradation; they are frequently restored to freedom, and when this happens, they take their station in society without any reference to their colour or descent.327

Lady Mary Sheil

Introduction

These excerpts from Taj al-Saltanah and Mary Sheil’s memoirs are typical of the descriptive accounts of Qajar-era servants and slaves written by both local and European writers from the period. Taj al-Saltanah’s description of her nanny in particular recalls harem intimacies distinctively marked by sentimentality, nostalgia, and familial affect, and is consistent with the kinds of harem relations I have explored thus far. Within such accounts, the cruelty of hegemonic power, traditionally associated with master/servant relations, is diluted or altogether deflected, often through reference to the affective, nurturing, and familial bonds between servants and masters. In fact, intimate bonds, and

326Taj al-Saltana, Crowning Anguish, 81.
327Sheil, Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia, 244.
close relations of proximity between royal women and children and their servants, have been a reoccurring theme in the late Qajar court and harem historiography, and is well-documented in both textual and photographic accounts of the period (Figure 46).

Fig. 46. “Some andarun residents near the servants chamber,” Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center.

As noted in the first chapter, royal women and children of the Qajar court were most often in the company of a large constellation of devoted servants and it is not surprising that many developed strong affections with such individuals. Within Qajar court and harem photographs, variously ranked domestic servants and eunuchs are often visible in close proximity to royal family members. Such images depict these individuals variously as supporting cast to elite Qajar figures, primary caregivers to their children, or blended
in as part of large groupings of wives and *sighahs* (see Figures 1, 3, 12, 16 and 45). One can read these images as testament to the privileged positions such servants held within late-Qajar harem and court life. Within Qajar family albums, servants are both the subject of individual portraits, where they showcase their status through pose and dress, and group photographs where they are blended in with royal women and children, situated firmly within the domestic order, and displaying the kinds of complex familial intimacy I discussed in Chapter I. Such a reading of these images is consistent with larger narratives of the history of slavery within Islamic contexts, wherein, in contrast to their American and European counterparts, slave labor was limited to the domestic sphere. Slaves and servants were afforded far better life opportunities and were thought to have been organically absorbed into the familial and patronage networks of their owners.328

In contrast to narratives and images of naturalized familiarity and domesticity between royal family members and their servants, which are relied upon for such claims, some scholars who have looked at the larger institution of slavery in 19th century Iran have shown that the use of slaves in Iran during this period, which saw a sharp increase in the trade, was in fact not limited to the domestic sphere. As Thomas Ricks pointed out in his study of the Persian Gulf, throughout the 19th century slave labor, and particularly male slaves, were used in a great variety of ways including as soldiers in local and regional forces, as farmers and cash crop workers, irrigation and canal workers, pearl divers, fishermen, dock workers, and more.329 As such, it is important to recognize the diverse—

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and often contradictory—conditions of enslavement during this period of Iranian history.

This contradiction was ever-present in Taj al-Saltanah’s own account. In contrast to the description of her personal nanny, her description of the larger class of court and harem servants offered a very different tone:

These poor people were kept in captivity and abject submission, made the instruments of their owners’ greatness, and called “bond servants.” They were bought and sold like so much cattle. . . These unhappy people have always been looked down upon and treated no differently from brutes. Their masters have relegated them to the abyss of ignorance and rendered them incapable of distinguishing “a” from “b,” let alone observing the rules and protocols of civilized life.330

While Taj’s personal account of her “dear nanny” was seeped in affection and intimacy, her moralistic description of the servant class more generally mimicked an enlightenment critique of the institution of slavery as barbaric and uncivilized. Such a description was also in line with European abolitionist discourses about the slave trade in the Middle East, from the second half of the 19th century onwards. During this period, the British, in particular, were deeply invested in putting an end to the slave trade in the region. Their “civilizing tone” was often supported by recordings of the instances where enslaved servants sought their freedom from Qajar masters, often through turning to European officials and seeking asylum in their consulates.331 For example, George Nathaniel Curzon, member of British Parliament and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, who

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330 Taj al-Saltana, Crowning Anguish, 81.
traveled to Iran in 1889, wrote of “some eighty fugitive slaves” who “are living as fugitives on British territory.”332 He boasted that while the British had not yet succeeded in extinguishing the slave traffic in the region, “several [slaves] are still rescued and freed every year by exertions of British gunboats.”333 While those who sought out their freedom in this manner certainly did not represent the norm of slave-master relations in Iran during the late Qajar period, and particularly in the context of servants of the royal family and court, it is important to remember that such narratives pointed to a drive for emancipation that was a common theme in the transnational historiography of slavery, and is understudied in the parallel scholarship on Islamic slavery.

In this chapter I take up the category of court and harem servants, many of whom were initially brought in as slaves, and examine them as liminal figures who have been cast in two contrasting and contradictory lights within my sources: either as beloved and nurturing servants who were “part of the family,” or as subaltern subjects with no agency, and in need of European saviors. I offer a challenge to these two prevailing narratives about late Qajar court servants: the first seeped in a nostalgia about cherished servants who enjoyed a good life; the second, a story of subjugated figures with no agency who are victims of Qajar despotic rule and in need of European civility. This chapter explores how both renderings at once reveal and obscure the complex positioning of these figures within the broader population of court and harem residents, and the various ways that they navigated this intricate positioning within and outside these institutions. Instead, this chapter argues that court servants did in fact participate in the affective economy of

332 George Nathaniel Curzon, Persia and the Persian Question, Volume II (London: Longmans, Green, And Co., 1892), 412.
333 Ibid., 451.
Gulistan Palace in a myriad of complex ways, often within profoundly uneven power relations. However, their participation was strategic and performative rather than reciprocal, and often was used as leverage in order to give them access to better life conditions. While there are many visual and textual traces of this class of constituents, there has been little scholarly work that examines their history in relation to the late Qajar court and harem. This chapter attempts to write such figures back in as core constituents of Gulistan Palace, who were, nevertheless, also products of a long-lasting and evolving Iranian slave trade.

Slavery in the Islamic World

Within the historiography of slavery, the Atlantic slave trade has dominated the attention of most scholars. Far fewer studies have examined the complex slave trade within the Islamic world, and the lives of the slaves who were forced to cross the Sahara, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean to various parts of the Muslim world. Fewer still have focused on the study of the trade in Iran. Within this limited body of work, scholars have emphasized

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334 As we will see in the next section, Behnaz Mirzai, in particular her most recent work, is a notable exception. See Behnaz Mirzai, A History of Slavery and Emancipation in Iran, 1800-1929, (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2017).
335 Some notable exceptions of scholarship which have began the process of historicizing the legacy of slavery in the Muslim world include: Robert Harms, Bernard Freamon and David Blight’s, eds., Indian Ocean Slavery in the age of abolition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Behnaz Mirzai, Ismael Musah Montana and Paul Lovejoy, eds., Slavery, Islam and Diaspora, (Trenton, NJ : Africa World Press, 2009); Madeline Zilfi, Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); M. Miura and J. E Philips, Slave Elites in the Middle East and Africa; A Comparative Study (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 2000); Ehud Toledano, Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East (Seattle: Washington University Press, 1998).
336 Behnaz Mirzai’s recently published monograph, A History of Slavery and Emancipation in Iran, as well as a number of published papers by her, have offered the most in-depth English language analysis of slavery in Iran. Vanessa Martin also dedicates a chapter to the history of slavery in Qajar Iran in her seminal work, The Qajar Pact. Among those writing in the Persian language, Narges Alipour’ scholarship is notable. See: Narges Alipour, “Nigahi b tijarat-i ghulaman va kanizan-i afrigayi dar asr-i Qajar,” in fashnami’i tarih va ravabiti khariji 11, no. 44, Fall 1389/2010; and the introduction to asnad-i bardah furushi va man’a an dar ‘asr-i Qajar (Tehran: Parliamentary Library and Archives, 1390/2011), 9-29.
the different status of slaves under Islam as compared to the Western world. In particular they have focused on the high status of elite slaves in the military, bureaucratic, and court culture of the region. For example, in Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Empire, Ehud Toladan argues that while in Islamic legal terms “slavery grants one person ownership over another person,” in the late Ottoman sociocultural context “slavery sometimes meant high social status or political power when applied to male slaves in the military and the bureaucracy (mamluks and kuls) and to female slaves in elite harems.”

Narges Alipour has gone so far as to make a distinction between slavery and servitude (bardigi and bandigi), arguing that in Iranian historiography most slaves, in fact, functioned as servants rather than “slaves,” which she argues is a term that should be reserved to describe the European practice.

Relying on the Islamic teachings on, and limits to, slave ownership, she argues that while in Europe slaves were unpaid laborers used for the purpose of production, in the Islamic world they were highly regarded servants of elite and noble households, and many received salaries.

Although the Qur’an does not forbid slavery, within Islamic law the selling and buying of humans is forbidden and the institution of slavery is regulated by a number of provisions that protect the life slaves and encourage manumission. For example, Islam prohibits

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338 Toledano, Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East, 4.
342 Martin, The Qajar Pact, 151.
the enslavement of Muslims, and the category of slave, according to Islamic jurisprudence, only applies to non-Muslim infidels captured in war.\textsuperscript{343} In general, slavery is not condoned, and amongst the most pious action that a believer can partake in is the freeing of a slave.\textsuperscript{344} Islamic legal stipulations also hold that free status be accorded to any children born of master-slave unions, and prescribe the mandatory liberation of the slave women who birthed such children after their master’s death.\textsuperscript{345}

Throughout Islamic history, the category of slave was, by and large, limited to prisoners of war captured from non-believer communities. As such, unlike the history of American slavery, religion and geography were more relevant to what constituted a slave within Islamic contexts, while racial and ethnic characteristics played more minor roles. In practice, since Muslims were forbidden from owning other Muslims as slaves, slave populations were accumulated through conquest and forced recruitment. As Madeline Zilfi has noted in relation to the Ottoman institution, throughout its history the largest number of slaves in the empire were “foreign and non-Muslim men, women, and children irrespective of race or ethnic origin.”\textsuperscript{346} Furthermore, as Vanessa Martin has pointed out in her study of slavery in Iran under the Qajars, while the American slave trade was closely connected to capitalism, and slaves were perceived as goods and chattel who functioned as units of labor in the production process, the work of slaves in Islamic contexts like 19th century Iran was mostly, though not entirely, limited to the service

\textsuperscript{343} Lydon, “Slavery, Exchange and Islamic Law,” 121.
\textsuperscript{344} The case of Zayd, a slave of the prophet Mohamad, who was granted manumission by him, adopted as his son, and married to the prophet’s cousin, serves as an example for Muslim attitudes about slavery. See: David Powers, Muhammad Is Not the Father of Any of Your Men (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).
\textsuperscript{345} Brunschvig, “’Abd,” 24-40.
\textsuperscript{346} Zilfi, Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire, 98.
sector. Martin uses this fact to also put forth the argument, common amongst historians who examine Middle Eastern slavery, that since slaves in Islamic societies had the status of a person and were not mere possessions, their treatment was far better than their counterparts in North America.

Despite the strict guidelines and limits with regard to slavery in Islamic doctrine, it is clear that slavery, as a practice, was a widespread phenomenon throughout the Muslim world and that the ownership and treatment of slaves did not always adhere to strict Islamic principles. Islamic protocols for slavery were interpreted by religious scholars, rulers, and slave owners in various ways, and in accordance to accommodating their own needs. Furthermore, slave-master relations, even under the strictest interpretation of the Islamic legal code, were still inherently based on the social and economic exploitation of the former by the latter. This happened regardless of all rhetoric about the more humane treatment of slaves under Islamic law and all attempts by enslaved people to resist hegemonic relations and gain access to various forms of power. This is not to deny the important differences between the status and position of slaves within Islamic societies and those who suffered the more cruel conditions of for example, the American slave trade.

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348 Fatima Mernissi has also contributed to the narrative of the better treatment of slaves within Muslim society by pointing out the number of slave women who rose to positions of power during the Muslim Golden Age. She, for example, notes that a large number of the significant caliphs in Muslim history were born of slave women. See Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (Mineapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 57.
While it is true that the conditions of both life and labor under the European and American slave industries were, in general, far more vicious than those within Islamaic societies, this fact must not get in the way of a critical examination of the brutal history of the trade and the mistreatment of slaves in Muslim countries such as Iran. Similarly, while it is important to avoid an undifferentiated view of slavery that takes the condition of plantation slaves in the Untied States South as the universal experience, we must avoid also casting other cultural iterations of slavery as simply comparatively more mild. Instead we must pay attention to the specific conditions of the trade, ownership, and livelihood of various enslaved populations. To that end, while we can acknowledge and engage with the ways in which servants and eunuchs exercised unique forms of power within the Qajar court and harem, it is also imperative to foreground the various forms of abuse and mistreatment such figures faced, both within the Qajar court under Nasir al-Din Shah and throughout the empire.

More recently Madeline Zifili, in her study of slavery in the late Ottoman Empire, has asserted:

The notion that slaves and other oppressed groups, despite overwhelming odds, sometimes managed to mitigate their plight, even gain advantage, has given rise to polarity in the characterization of repressive systems. In effect, the scars of victimization are weighed against evidences of indomitability and assertions of agency . . . given the irrefutable horrors of chattel slavery, it is hard to argue that social and cultural resiliency, or the triumphs of a singular few, offset the perniciousness of the system as a whole. Slavery may have been of benefit to fortunate individuals . . . but the notion of systematic neutrality, much less advantage, is insupportable.  

The same holds true for the history of slavery under the Qajars. While, as we will see in the following sections, there were several instances of court and harem slaves being

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350Zifili, Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire, 96-97.
treated as prized possessions and rising to powerful positions and high status, individual agency and empowerment did not erase the damaging legacies of slavery to individuals, societies, and communities. Any ethical recounting of the history of Iranian engagement with slavery must then include a recounting of the material reality of the trade and the brutalities of the institution, along with narratives of social mobility and various forms of empowerment. To that end, it is important to remember that the high-ranking servants and slaves who served in Nasir al-Din’s court and harem were rarely (though sometimes) born into their rank. More often they entered the court after being captured and sold into the Qajar slave trade. This process included being torn away from indigenous cultures and enduring bondage, a long harrowing journey, a dehumanizing economy, and more. Furthermore, those few who did work their way up the Qajar court and harem hierarchy, as we will see in the next section, rarely relied on the benevolence of their masters or on Islamic doctrine. Instead, they ascended through their own determination, ambition, and cunning negotiations. And still, regardless of their ascent, they too were a product of a cruel slave trade that can and must not be divorced from their historiography.

**Historicizing Qajar Slavery**

While the history of slavery in Iran can be traced back to the pre-Islamic period, there were significant shifts that took place in the ethnic composition of slaves under the Qajars. Previously, enslaved Circassians and Georgians, captured primarily as war booty, as well as Iranians themselves who were enslaved in lieu of paying taxes and tributes, or kidnapped and sold into the institution as a result of poverty and famine, were the
primary enslaved populations in the region.\textsuperscript{351} During the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, conquest was no longer a viable option for the Qajar empire and as a result, African slave-trade networks increasingly became the primary source of slave acquisition. In particular, after the 1828 war with Russia, the Russian Empire’s control and annexation of central Asia and the Caucasus from Iran meant that there was a significant decrease in the number of slaves from those regions, which had served as the primary reserve in previous centuries, and a parallel growth in the Gulf slave trade, which emerged as the principle site for the purchasing of new slave populations.\textsuperscript{352} While a smaller number of Circassian and Georgian slaves continued to reach the empire from the Caucasus, it was the African slave trade, which primarily drew on populations from Central Africa, the Sudan, and Western Ethiopia, which was primarily responsible for fulfilling the needs of the slave markets of both the Ottoman and Qajar empires (Figure 47).\textsuperscript{353}

\textsuperscript{352}Martin, \textit{The Qajar Pact}, 152.
\textsuperscript{353}Toledano, \textit{Slavery and Abolition in Ottoman Middle East}, 7.
In fact, while the African slave trade was increasingly stigmatized and banned in the rest of the world, in the Ottoman Empire and Iran the importing of African slaves, most notably from East Africa, increased considerably during the 19th century. Between 1842 and 1872, for example, an estimated 2000-3000 slaves were imported into the Persian Gulf region from Africa (estimated 300-400% increase from the previous century).\footnote{Ricks, “Slaves and Slave Traders in the Persian Gulf,” 67.} Paul Lovejoy has offered a more substantial estimate. He argued that over two million Africans were transported into slavery across the Sahara, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean in
the 19th century. African slaves from the region were seized and sold, mainly to Arab traders who, having transported them in appalling conditions, would then sell them through a chain of dealers along established regional routes. For example, as Patrick Manning has noted, slaves who were exported from Central Africa and Sudan began their journey with a forced 600 kilometer march to the edge of the desert. They then had to cross the Sahara through the caravan routes of North Africa on foot before being sent to the slave markets of the Ottoman and Qajar Empires. Slaves from East Africa, places like Ethiopia and Somalia on the other hand, were shipped eastwards in appalling conditions through the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea routes before making their way to the Iranian and Arabian markets. The passage through the Persian Gulf was particularly brutal. It was plagued by illness and death, and only an estimated ten to twenty percent of captured Africans survived. In fact, as far as severe conditions and the ill treatment of slaves in the transportation stage was concerned, there seems to be little difference between the Atlantic and Gulf slave trades. Interestingly enough, European, in particular British, sources from the period offer some of the most detailed accounts of the brutalities of the slave trade in the 19th century Islamic world.

In the November 7, 1872, issue of The Times of India, British Captain Robert B. Cay gave the following account of a slave ship confiscated by a British vessel, “The Vulture”, in the Persian Gulf:

356 Martin, The Qajar Pact, 152.
The number of slaves it was impossible at the time to estimate; so crowded on
deck, and in the hold below was the dhow, that it seemed but for the aspect of
misery, a very nest of ants. The hold, from which an intolerable stench proceeded,
was several inches deep in the foulest bilge-water and refuse. Down below, there
were numbers of children and wretched beings in the most loathsome states of
small-pox and scrofula of every description. A more disgusting and degrading
spectacle of humanity could hardly be seen. . . When the slaves were transferred
to The Vulture the poor wretched creatures were so dreadfully emaciated and
weak, that many had to be carried on the board, and lifted fore every moment. . .
But perhaps the most atrocious piece of cruelty of the Arabs was heard afterwards
from the slaves themselves; viz., that at the first discovery of smallpox amongst
them by the Arabs, all the infected slaves were at once thrown overboard, and this
was continued day by day, until, they said, forty had perished in this manner. . .
Many of the children were of the tenderest years, scarcely more than three years
old, and most of them bearing marks of the brutality of the Arabs in half-healed
scars, and bruises inflicted from the lash and stick.\footnote{The account is reprinted in \textit{"The Slave Trade on the East Coast of Africa" Courier Journal (1869-1922): Nov 7, 1872}; ProQuest, 1.}

Beginning in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the British government began to take an interest in the
abolition of slavery in both the Qajar and Ottoman empires, and the suppression of the
slave trade became a major point of diplomatic relations between Britain and regional
governments throughout the century.\footnote{In 1807, the British declared that slavery was illegal, and soon after it instituted a worldwide abolitionist agenda.} The Anglo-Persian Slave Trade Agreement was
the first treaty signed between the British, represented by Colonel Shield, and Nasir al-
Din’s government, under the leadership of Amir Kabir.\footnote{A previous agreement had been signed between Nasir al-Din’s predecessor, Muhamad Shah, and the British government a few months before his death. For details of this agreement, see: \textit{“The Imperial Farman of 1848”} in Mirzai, \textit{A History of Slavery and Emancipation in Iran}, 144-149.} Established in 1851 as an
eleven-year agreement, it granted British naval patrollers authority over the Gulf region
and ports. The treaty gave the British the right to board Iranian vessels, under local
supervision, search and seize any black slaves on board, and to automatically place them
in British custody, where they would be granted a freedom certificate.\textsuperscript{363} Any punitive measures enforced against smugglers, including fines, would be in the hands of the Qajar government, and by 1853 a Persian Slave Commission composed of Iranian nationals was established to pursue abolitionist goals.\textsuperscript{364} Arguably, the Qajar government’s participation in such agreements was primarily a diplomatic move in response to British pressure.\textsuperscript{365} Certainly elite Iranians, and most notably, the Qajar royal family itself, continued to import and rely on slave labor within their domestic sphere throughout Nasir al-Din’s reign.

Slave traders in the region developed a variety of strategies for avoiding British interference.\textsuperscript{366} For example, as Mirzai has pointed out, in order to avoid British sea patrollers, enslaved African people were increasingly brought through land routes, notably by pilgrims returning from Baghdad, Karbala, Mecca, and Medina.\textsuperscript{367} There was also an increase in the kidnapping and trade of enslaved Baluchis during this period throughout the Arabian slave market,\textsuperscript{368} in which the British did not intervene. Mirzai notes that foreigners did not implement any particular abolitionist strategy towards the trade of enslaved Baluchis until the end of the 19th century.\textsuperscript{369} In fact, official records and documents that chronicle abolitionist negotiations between Iranian and British officials

\textsuperscript{363}Nargess Alipour, \textit{Asnad-i bardah furushi va man’a an dar ‘asr-i Qajar} (Tehran: Parliamentary Library and Archives, 1390/2011), page 33-34.
\textsuperscript{365}Diplomatic documents between British administration and Qajar government make it clear that the abolition of the trade was a primary point of negotiation between the two governments throughout Nasir al-Din’s reign. See: Alipour, \textit{Asnad-i bardah furushi va man’a an dar ‘asr-i Qajar}, 69-186.
\textsuperscript{366}For a discussion of such strategies, refer to Behnaz Mirzai’s section “The Era of ‘Illegal’ Trade in Enslaved African,” in \textit{A History of Slavery and Emancipation in Iran}, 153-154.
\textsuperscript{367}Mirzai, \textit{A History of Slavery and Emancipation in Iran}, 158.
\textsuperscript{368}\textit{Ibid.}, 43-45, 84.
\textsuperscript{369}\textit{Ibid.}, 87-88.
were noteworthy for consistently mentioning black and African slaves with little to no regard for the other enslaved populations in the empire.\textsuperscript{370}

More generally European-directed abolitionism was not well received by most Middle Easterners, since it coincided with imperial expansion into the region. Certainly, the civilizational tone was ever-present in diplomatic communiqués between British officials and the Qajars throughout the period in relation to the slave trade. Consider the excerpt from the following letter addressed to Mirza Taghi Khan Amir Kabir by the British Consulate, and written on July 31\textsuperscript{st}, 1850 in the lead up to the signing of the Anglo-Persian Slave Trade Agreement:

\begin{quote}
All European and American governments, as well as all civilized Asiatic states, have united with England to put an end to the trade of blacks by way of sea, and to do so in collaboration with British efforts. Is it possible that the Iranian government would make itself an exception to this rule?\textsuperscript{371}
\end{quote}

Many historians have argued that the British intervention in the slave trade was another element of European imperialism, and a move that had less to do with offering freedom and life chances to enslaved populations and more as a part of a broader civilizational discourse that emerged in response to a weakening British empire. It has been seen as a means for the British to assert their political and economic interests in the region.\textsuperscript{372}

Mirzai extends this argument to show that, in fact, both Britain and Russia used

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\textsuperscript{370}See the section on political correspondence and negotiations between European and Persian governments in: Alipour, \textit{Asnad-i baradah furushi va man'a an dar 'asr-i Qajar}, 67-186.
\textsuperscript{371}Ibid., 122.
\textsuperscript{372}The notable Qajar social historian, Fereydun Adamiyat, makes this argument about British abolitionist policies in Iran. See Adamiyat, \textit{Amir Kabir va Iran}, 514-534. For similar arguments about British abolitionism more broadly, see Seymour Drescher “Emperors of the World: British Abolitionism and Imperialism,” \textit{Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain, Africa and the Atlantic}, ed. Derek Peterson (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010); Zilfi, \textit{Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire}, 98.
\end{flushright}
abolitionism as one of the factors that justified their continued imperialist presence in the region during the Great Game. However, despite this contradiction, European abolitionism did have a tremendous impact on both the Iranian and Ottoman slave trades throughout the second half of the 19th century. During this period, Britain relied on humanitarian discourses to launch a major effort to suppress and control both the Ottoman and the Qajar trade in African slaves. In Iran these efforts were primarily, and almost exclusively, focused on the African trade, which was in the south, the part of the empire wherein British imperial efforts were also concentrated. As mentioned, white slavery and the slave trade in the north was notably excluded. The campaign climaxed with the Ottoman and Qajar governments’ signing of the Brussels Act in 1890, although the full abolition of slavery did not take place in Iran until well into the twentieth century, in 1923.

The shift in policies with regard to slavery that took place in the second half of the 19th century had a significant impact on the composition of the Qajar court and harem—one of the primary sites inhabited by foreign domestic workers, eunuchs, and slaves. Throughout the 19th century the royal Qajar harem was among the most significant patrons of the slave trade. Specifically, eunuchs, slave children, and concubines were a significant categories of harem residents. These individuals were often gifted to the royal family by local governors and tribal leaders in order to maintain political alliances with the government, or by other individuals who sought the favor of the Shah and his court.

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Others were purchased by the royal family during their travels. However, in both cases, most slaves who lived and worked in the court and harem of the Qajar royal family, were at some point in their lives victims of the slave trade. Once they arrived in the court and harem, their lives followed multiple trajectories; some were indeed able to seize powerful positions. However, it would be wrong to tell their stories without situating their identities as slaves within the historical context of their origins and the cruelties they, their families of origin, and their communities suffered as a result of the Qajar slave trade.

The Demographic Composition of the Gulistan harem

As mentioned in Chapter I, during the second half of the 19th century, the Gulistan harem was increasingly a contact zone between Iranian women and the rest of the world, and the cultural and ethnic diversity within the royal harem was, for its time, quite unique. This was in part due to the increased presence of foreign visitors, most notably Europeans who had various forms of access to the royal court, which I will examine in the final chapter. The demographic diversity of Gulistan Palace itself, however, was primarily the result of the presence of servants and slaves from neighboring regions who made up part of the permanent constituents of the harem and court (Figure 48).

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375 This was the case with some of the Shah’s concubines discussed in Chapter I.
Many held sensitive positions within these elite institutions, making them both indispensable to the Shah and his family and knowledgeable of the most intimate details of their complex lives. Most of these individuals first entered Iran either through being captured as war booty or exported by land through the northern regions and the Arabian Peninsula or by sea via the Gulf slave trade. The constituents of the Qajar harem included Caucasian and Kurdish people from Georgia, Armenia, Circassia, and the various Kurdish tribal regions who had entered Iran from the northwest; Turkic people from north and northeast Central Asia, including the states of Turkmenistan, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Northern Pakistan, the North Caucasus, and northern Iran itself; and East Africans who originated from places like Ethiopia, Nubia, Tanzania, and Zanzibar, and
entered from the south, as well as through the land trade routes of Mecca, Medina, and Karbala. A smaller number of royal court and harem slaves were brought from Makran and Baluchistan. These individuals had different religious backgrounds, including belonging to the Christian and Jewish religions.

Along with the increase in European officials living in the capital of the Qajar dynasty in the second half of the 19th century, the presence of this diverse demographic of servants and laboring people marked Tehran as truly a multicultural metropolis. According to a population count of Tehran conducted by Mirza Abdal-Ghaffar in 1869, the capital had 147,256 inhabitants. Within that, Abdal-Ghaffar counted 11,324 male servants and eunuchs, from which 10,568 were various kinds of menial and house servants (nukar), 1,269 were bondsman or slaves (ghulam), and 756 were black slaves and eunuchs (ghulam va khawjah siyah). He also counted 6,327 female servants, 2,525 of whom were black slaves (kaniz siyah), and 3,702 who worked as maids (khidmatkar). In total 17,651 servants were counted, making up a sizable portion of the total residents of the capital (almost twelve percent), with a little over two percent of the total count being registered as “black.” Gulistan Palace was perhaps the only domestic space within 19th century Iran inhabited by all of the above categories of migrant laborers and residents. Together with the royal family, they represented a significant portion of Tehran’s multi-ethnic population.

Mirzai, “Qajar haram: Imagination or Reality?,” in Slavery Islam and Diaspora, 80.
While some servants had entered the harem during the reign of prior Qajar rulers and had lived within Gulistan for several generations, many were gifted to Nasir al-Din Shah and royal family members by individuals who wished to gain favor. Such gifting practices were common amongst both tribal leaders and elite regional figures, as well as courtiers. A letter, addressed to Nasir al-Din Shah and likely written by Aghl Bigah Khanum, a Turkmen *sighah* of the Shah and in charge of running the Gulistan coffeehouse, is illustrative of this point:

I found two or three Turkmen bondswomen for you. One is here. She is admissible. There is no account of her being owned by someone. She is good for you. She is extremely beautiful. If you are interested, I will send her to you. She looks like the servants in *A Thousand and One Nights* . . . I work in your coffeehouse, and am not a woman who can come to you. . . My intention is to please your highness.

As noted in Chapter I, Amin Aqdas was also responsible for bringing a number of attractive service women into the harem in order to gain favor with the Shah.

European accounts of the court and harem described a strict racial hierarchy which existed amongst these constituents. Its primary function was to determine the status of servants within elite Qajar households. For example, as Charles Willis noted about African slaves in Iran:

They vary in colour and value: the “Habashi” or Abyssinian is the most valued; the Souhali or Somali, next in blackness, is next in price; the Bombassi, or coal-black negro of the interior, being of much less price, and usually only used as cook.

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Lady Mary Sheil offered a similar racial hierarchy. She argued that East African servants from places like Zanzibar, as well as other towns on the Swahili coast, were generally considered lower-class servants due to their darker skin tone. They were “in great disrepute,” and were categorized as “ferocious, treacherous and lazy.” According to her account, these darker-skinned slaves cost less to purchase and were employed as cheap laborers—men worked as outdoor and field workers, while women performed menial household work. By contrast, Sheil stated that north east African slaves, who were primarily Nubians and Habashi (Ethiopians), did not “present the usual negro characteristics” and were thus the most valued black servants, highly prized possessions who were considered “mild, faithful, brave and intelligent, and are generally confidential servants in Persian households.” In her assessment, at the top of the racial hierarchy of slavery within elite Qajar households were the white slaves who “frequently rise to the highest employments.”

Behnaz Mirzai has argued that such forms of racial analysis, which appeared within many European accounts, were overwhelmingly motivated by the authors’ own “idiosyncratic tendencies to dwell on racial considerations.” Indeed race-thinking, a predominate feature of European colonial ideologies in the 19th century, can be seen throughout the Western orientalist travel literature of the time. It did indeed extend to descriptions of regional slaves. Consider the following description by Curzon:

There is also throughout the country a considerable admixture of the African element, due to the large importation of slaves from Muscat and Zanzibar. Some

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383Sheil, Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia, 243.
384Ibid.
385Ibid., 244.
386Ibid., 92.
of the faces present a thoroughly negro type. The ordinary Beluchi, of whom I have seen is not nearly so formidable a specimen of humanity as the Afghan. . .

Consider also the following account by Samuel W.G. Bejmamin, the first American Minister to Persia, where he spoke about the Aryan nature of Iranian cities and noted:

Although the Iranees have intermarried with foreign slaves, they have never done so to the same degree as the Turks, and they have generally selected Circassian women: as the result, their race is comparatively genuine, what intermixture there has been having rather tended to improve than deteriorate the quality of the original stock.

More recently, scholars who have examined representations of slave demographics and racial thinking in regional sources have noted that within them, enslaved people and their social and work status were not primarily differentiated by racial categories. For example, Mirzai argues that although East African slaves sold for lower prices than their Nubian and Ethiopian counterparts, which lent legitimacy to the hierarchy described by Mary Shiel, this price differentiation had more to do with maritime distribution networks that were well equipped to traffic these populations through the Persian Gulf, as opposed to those who arrived through long stretches of desert land. As such, geography and ease in transportation, rather than racial characteristics, were the main reason for the price differentiation between these enslaved populations. It also affected how their status was determined. Furthermore, local Islamic slave traders tended to categorize servants as free/enslaved, Muslim/non-Muslim, and via the lens of other religious denominations rather than through the racial categorizations that dominated in European accounts. In fact, as Zifili asserts in her account of the Ottoman slave trade, throughout the Islamic

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387 Curzon, Persia and the Persian Question, Volume II, 259
388 Benjamin, The Life and Adventures, 130.
389 Mizarai, A History of Slavery and Emancipation in Iran, 1800-1929, 92.
390 Ibid., 95.
world race and ethnic categories were highly fluid, historically contingent, and varied regionally. She argues that while in some specific instances lighter skin was privileged, in general “no race or ethnicity was excluded by shari‘ah law from the possibility of enslavement. . . [or] the opportunities of manumission and social achievement.”

Indeed, Taj al-Saltanah’s own account of race was consistent with this line of thinking. For example, in describing her African nanny, she offered the following account:

A wet nurse from the middle ranks of society and two nannies, one of them a negress, were engaged for me. The nanny specifically had to be a negress, since honor and grandeur at that time were measured by ownership of creatures whom God has made no differently from others, except for the color of their skin—a distinction that in all honesty does not exist at the divine threshold.

While race was acknowledged, and certainly many sources noted the presence of both “white” and “black” slaves, a hierarchy pertaining particularly to the latter category seemed to exist as a constituent feature of European narratives about the region. For example, within photographic representation of the Qajar servant class, one cannot determine the status of servants based on race. Rather, as we will see, posture, pose, clothing, and proximity to important court and harem figures were markers of status, all of which seemed to be evenly distributed between “white” and “black” slaves (Figure 49).

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391 Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 106.
392 Ibid.
393 Taj al-Saltana, *Crowning Anguish*, 80.
394 Such photographs are in stark opposition to 19th century Western images of slaves, where race-thinking was central to image production. For example, as Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer have argued, in the Atlantic context, slave photography was used to advance arguments about the racial inferiority of black bodies and to maintain the existing paradigms of racial difference. See Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer, *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 4.
Taking note of such significant discrepancies between European and Iranian sources, my exploration of the lives of servants and slaves in the Qajar court attempts to complicate and counter European and orientalist narratives by primarily, though not exclusively, looking at Iranian accounts. In the next section, I rely heavily on diaries and biographies of elite Qajar figures, primary sources from Iranian archives as well as European texts, in order to examine the lives and conditions of court servants. Such sources remain limited in what they can tell us about the lives of the most minor and marginalized figures for whom first person testimonies barely exist. However, we can obtain some glimpses of their lives and experiences through careful cross-readings between multiple local and European accounts, documents, and photographs. Reading such sources both along and against the grain of their intentions can be a generative exercise that reveals the centrality
of such residents in the daily life of the court and harem, and the forms of power they could seize within the complex Gulistan structure.

The Servant Class of Gulistan

In a striking image taken and captioned by Nasir al-Din Shah himself, a large gathering of servants, primarily composed of eunuchs, fills the steps leading up to a door (Figure 50).

Fig. 50 “Group of eunuchs on the steps of the bed chambers in Tehran,” 1887, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center.
Not unlike the various group portraits of harem women discussed earlier, here, close to forty servants and eunuchs from various racial backgrounds, including a small number of women and children, sit in close proximity to each other in front of the main entrance of the Shah’s bed chambers (Khabgah), located in the heart of the Gulistan andarun. They are at once comfortably lounging, asserting their sense of belonging, and posed in formation, sitting guard and returning the camera’s gaze with fierce intensity. These individuals are amongst the most liminal figures of the Qajar court, able to move between its interior and exterior sections. With access to its deeply private realms and highest ranked administrative offices, they were often in charge of granting or refusing access to others who moved between the two realms. The setting on the front steps of this most exclusive building within the Gulistan andarun, affirms their status as both guards and intermediaries. The image includes a small cross-section of the multi-ethnic laboring class who resided in Gulistan, who were a significant part of the larger Qajar family structure.

The maintenance and day-to-day function of the Gulistan court and its harem relied on this large and complex labor force, made up of men, women, eunuchs, and children. They entered Iran through the various slave trades described in the previous section and who have thus far been unrecognized and understudied within the historiography of late Qajar Iran. Servants were a sizeable segment of Gulistan’s occupants and were vital to the functioning of both the Qajar government and family. As we saw in Chapter I, some members of this class, like Amin Aqdas, who began her tenure as a low-ranking slave maid, were able to maneuver their positions in cunning ways and rise to powerful
positions, although such an ascent was not readily available to most members of the servant class. However, while the majority of these individuals were amongst the lowest-ranked members of Gulistan Palace, a closer look at their everyday lives reveals the ways in which they too were able to access various forms of power—notably through their intermediary status as individuals who had the ability to move between the andarun, the court, and the exterior world of the city; the information they were able to gather while they participated in the daily rituals of their masters and mistresses; and the close and familial bonds they were able to foster within and across their social class. In other words, not only was this class of residents intimately connected to the most powerful figures within the Qajar court, including Nasir al-Din himself, but like the court women discussed in Chapter I, they played a central role in the daily operations, as well as broader social, political, and familial affairs of the court and its harem.

As Chapter II demonstrated, one of the most pronounced features of the Gulistan Palace was the physical separation between the andarun, the space of domestic and social life of the royal family, the court itself (biruni), where political affairs unfolded, and the developing urban metropolis outside the palace, with strict guidelines about who could travel between these spaces and under what circumstances. The security, protection, and comfort of the court and royal family, and the maintenance of such clear borders, required a large constellation of various forms of servants and guards. They protected the different boundaries both inside and outside of Gulistan, including the citadel, the court, its harem, and the Shah’s sleeping quarters within the harem, as well as his

395Mu‘ayyir al-Mamlık notes that Nasir al-Din was constantly accompanied by seven eunuchs: Mu‘ayyir al-Mamlık, Yaddasht-ha-yi az zindigani-i khususi-i Nasir al-Din Shah, 19.
Furthermore, it was customary for the Shah and other royal family members to be accompanied by several servants when they moved outside the palace or went off on various trips (Figure 51).

Fig. 51. Antoin Sevruguin, Nasir Al-Din Shah (under umbrella on black horse) with his Cavalry, on Expedition to Lar, 1880-1890, Smithsonian Institution Archives.

In a letter addressed to Nasir al-Din, the writer described the Shah’s accompanying entourage for an upcoming trip:

> As you requested the day before yesterday, I sent news to one hundred and fifty slaves (ghulam) and one hundred migrants (muhajir), who are ready to follow the steps of your highness on your hunting trip tomorrow before dusk . . .

Similarly, Munis al-Dawlah, one of Anis al-Dawlah’s servants and closest confidants, in her memoirs described visits by harem women to the Royal Garden (Bagh-i Shah), just

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396Ibid., 28.
397“Ta’īn-i ashhkas jahat-i hamrahi-yi shah,” 1863, document 295-2041, National Archives of Iran.
outside of Tehran. In her account, royal women would travel in carriages accompanied by a large ensemble of maids, eunuchs, cooks, musicians, and entertainers (see Figure 40).\textsuperscript{398}

Such forms of accompaniment were in line with Islamic principles of gender segregation, which guided the strict control of relationships between the sexes, and thus, limited harem women’s visibility while they moved between various spaces, as well as their contact with the world outside their homes. Female servants and eunuchs had the important task of mediating the social relations of royal harem women according to such principles. In doing so, they also participated in elite rituals, activities, and celebrations. For example, in her description of royal nuptial ceremonies, Munis al-Dawlah noted “women from all classes, including servants and salves, participated in wedding celebrations,” and offered a detailed account of the elaborate wedding rituals.\textsuperscript{399}

The intermediary status of servants also gave them access to various forms of education. Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik, the Shah’s grandson, recalled how his mother was one of the first women in the harem to learn to play the newly-acquired piano, which was housed in Anis al-Dowlah’s home (see Figure 17). This was in the early days of the instrument being introduced to Iran, and the main piano teacher was a man by the name of Muhamad Sadigh Khan. Since his mother could not take piano lessons from a na-mahram man, a servant was tasked with teaching her. He stated:

My mother would send one of her bondswoman, named Tabasum, to the instructor, so that she could learn how to play the piano from him, and whatever she learnt, she would come back and teach to my mother.\textsuperscript{400}

\textsuperscript{398}Munis al-Dawlah, \textit{Khaterat-i Munis al-Dowlah}, 140.
\textsuperscript{399}Ibid., 56.
\textsuperscript{400}Ibid., 23.
Munis al-Dawlaha, has a similar recollection about the women-lead ta’ziyah plays, which were a popular leisure activity amongst harem women. She stated:

Since most harem women of the period were illiterate, black and white eunuchs would go Muin Al-Bikah [a famous ta’ziyah director], and read and memorize the songs which were performed by women. They would return and teach it to their mistresses.401

In this way, the servant class of Gulistan was not only exposed to and participated in the most elite religious and secular rituals of the empire, they also had access to a highly exclusive level of education, as well as a vast body of literature, arts, music, and culture.

Furthermore, as mentioned previously, as a result of his numerous foreign trips, state affairs, and leisure activities such as hunting, Nasir al-Din was often not physically present in Gulistan Palace. Like many of the top-tiered harem women, servants and slaves played an even more significant role in this day-to-day life of the court and harem during his long stretches of absence and were often the main contact point between the Shah and his ministers, foreign diplomats, and family members. Several court letters, for example, attested to the fact that while the Shah was traveling, it was court eunuchs that kept him updated about harem affairs and the health and well-being of his wives, descendants, and powerful mother.402 While these letters in some ways attested to the Shah’s long-distance reach over harem affairs, their vague retelling of domestic and state matters also revealed that during periods of absence, he in fact had little knowledge of or control over the court and harem. Most of the letters were short accounts, which gave a

401Ibid., 98
brief description of key figures (often his mother, favored wife, or children), and ended
with an assertion that all was in order at home and everyone was anxiously awaiting the
Shah’s return. For example, court eunuch Haji Agha Juhar Khan Muatamad al-
Haram wrote to the Shah:

Everyone in the harem is doing well and they pray to reunite with you soon. All is
in order in the harem. I spend the days taking care of Agha Sayed Razi and Mirza
Hussayn Ali [the Shah’s sons]. They are still a little sick, but feeling better and
drinking cow’s milk. The doctor has ordered them to walk around a bit. Mahd-i
Ulya [the Shah’s mother] has ordered me to accompany them along with some
other servants and eunuchs to go outside of the arg. We go on daily jaunts and
return before dusk.

Such mundane reports of daily life were undermined by first-hand accounts, written by
harem residents, which described a complex set of networks, activities, allegiances, and
sociality. Munis al-Dawlah, for example, offered a far more detailed account of the
compelling lives of harem residents. She noted for instance that in the absence of the
Shah, affairs between sighahs and other men were not uncommon in the harem. As
such, one could argue that court servants were key power holders who protected the
harem’s secrets from the outside gaze of even the Shah himself, and, as we will see, used
their insider knowledge to gain access to various forms of power and privilege.

Eunuchs in particular played a significant role as liminal figures. They were a part of both
male and female homosocial worlds, guarded the moral and physical border between the

403 Guzarish-i bah Nasir al-Din Shah dar khusus-i muzakirah ba Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik va Amin al-Saltanah
raji’ bah abyari-yi Qanat-i Nasiri,” 1869, document 295-4814, National Archives of Iran.
404 According to Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik, Agha Juhar Khan Muatamad al-Haram and Suru Khan ‘Itimad al-
haram were the two head eunuchs, also referred to as Agha Bashi. See: Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik, Yaddasht-ha-
405 “I’lam-i khabar-i salamati-yi shahzadigan va mukhadarat-i haramsara bah shah va intizam-i umur-i
anja va tafrighgha burd-a-yi viki az zanan-i haram bah manzur-i raf’-i kisalat,” 1871, document 295-2529,
National Archives of Iran.
406 Munis al-Dawlah, Khaterat-i Munis al-Dawlah, 15.
gendered spaces of the court and could easily cross the strict boundaries. This class of servants could travel and liaise between the harem, the court, and the outside world with no restrictions, and at once limited and facilitated contact across the various realms. As such, they were responsible for mediating relationships while ensuring that Islamic gender segregation practices were followed. This was true when harem women were in public as well as when na-mahram men entered the andarun.

In his description of a visit to the harem, Feuvrier, the French court physician, wrote:

. . . if a patient asks for me, I arrive at the street door, and enter first into the courtyard of the eunuchs’ quarters. From there, I go to their leader, the eunuch, Khaji Bashi, an Abyssinian who is more than two meters tall . . . From there, his excellency, the head eunuch I’timad al-Haram accompanies me, to the inner door of the harem, which is at the end of a corridor, where the personal eunuchs of the woman who has requested me await my arrival. They accompany me in through the door, which shuts behind us, and we soon enter a vast courtyard, from which I hear cries of the eunuchs in all directions, announcing my arrival. A number of ghost-like women, wrapped head to feet in cotton shrouds rush back into their apartments, which encircle the courtyard. . .

As the description noted, at every point, beginning from the very corridor that served as the access point to the Gulistan harem to inside the homes of the royal women, court eunuchs acted as guards, protectors, and enforcers of Islamic gender segregation laws, and dictated who, and under what conditions, could access the Shah’s harem. They were not only charged with the task of protecting portals and gates to the andarun and the Shah’s sleeping quarters, but various duties associated with the daily maintenance of the court and its harem, including being the holders of keys to the harem and treasury, and

407 Most Qajar court eunuchs were slaves, castrated prior to entering the market by either family members or, in the case of African eunuchs, village sorcerers. Due to the castration process, the mortality rate for eunuchs was quite high, and as such, they were rare and valuable commodities that signaled wealth and status. For more details see Mirzai, A History of Slavery and Emancipation in Iran, 23.
409 Feuvrier, Trois Ans a Cour de Perse, 156.
accepting and delivering petitions to the royal family. Unrestricted mobility between various realms was a privilege reserved only for Nasir al-Din himself and the many royal servants. Servants, and in particular, eunuchs, more than any other figures, including the Shah, crossed the boundaries between the harem and its outside world on a daily basis and mediated the relationship between the andarun and birun. Furthermore, while both the court and its harem were hierarchically-organized institutions, eunuchs maintained contact with different levels of occupants, since they served various ranks of the noble family, and again, acted as intermediaries between them. Being entrusted with the spatial and moral etiquette of the royal household was far more than having control over “private” or “domestic” responsibilities. As Chapters I and II have noted, the andarun was also a politicized space, and deeply implicated in imperial affairs. As such, the servants’ high level of access allowed for multiple forms of social and political opportunities.

Agha Baharm Khan, a high ranking African eunuch in Nasir al-Din’s harem, provides us with a good case study of how some eunuchs navigated their position to gain access to power, further their status and protect their personal interests (Figure 52).
Agha Bahram was the chief eunuch of one of the Shah’s favored wives, Amin Aqdas.\textsuperscript{411}

Her nephew, the Shah’s favored pageboy Malijak, offered the following description of him:

\begin{quote}
Agha Bahram was one of the clever and intelligent eunuchs of the court. He was thin and black, with sunken cheeks and a wide nose, and he was unparalleled in his pride and arrogance . . . when he entered the Shah’s home, he first stayed with Agha Juhar Agha Bashi . . . the Shah kept him for a period of time, as part of the harem eunuchs. When Amin Aqdas rose in rank, she requested him from the Shah, and he became her personal eunuch. When she gained more power in the harem, he was named her chief eunuch and took charge of all her affairs. He was trusted, loyal, and lived a respectable life.\textsuperscript{412}
\end{quote}

The emphasis on the loyalty of eunuchs was a common feature of descriptive accounts of this class of Gulistan residents. The belief stemmed from the idea that since eunuchs were

\textsuperscript{411}He is cited in several sources as the chief eunuch of Amin Aqdas. However, Mu’ayyir al-Mamlık, the Shah’s grandson, in his description of Agha Bahram describes him as Anis al-Dawlah’s chief eunuch. It is possible that this is a mistake, or that he was in fact assigned to Anis al-Dawlah after Amin Aqdas passed away: Mu’ayyir al-Mamlık, \textit{Yaddasht-ha-yi az zindigani-i khususi-i Nasir al-Din Shah}, 19.

\textsuperscript{412}Malijak Sani, \textit{Ruznamah-yi khatirat}, 70.
slaves who were purchased at a young age, stripped from all familial ties and cultural allegiances through having been removed from their blood-lines and raised in the harem, and castrated, and thus prohibited in their reproductive potential, they had no choice but to form intimate bonds with their masters. Their trusted attachment to the Qajar ruling class was believed to ensure their loyalty. It was key to their high status within the court and harem, where they were charged with the most important and sensitive affairs, and had many opportunities for promotion. However, such attachments also meant that eunuchs, as trusted confidents, had intimate knowledge of their masters, which they could and did deploy in various ways to promote their own needs and status.

According to Malijak, Agha Bahram Khan was smart and calculating in how he navigated his position, and within a short time he took full control of Amin Aqdas’s affairs. In order to heighten his influence over her, the eunuch caused a rift between Amin Aqdas and her brother Amin Khaqan, eventually convincing her to lose trust in her own brother, dismiss him as her trusted confident, and to confiscate all his belongings. Malijak argued that because Amin Aqdas was uneducated, she both trusted and depended on Agha Bahram completely and was susceptible to his manipulations. According to him, the servant used her and the then five-year-old Malijak, who was favored by the Shah and lived with Amin Aqdas, as tools to wield power and influence over Nasir al-Din Shah.

\footnote{For a thorough discussion of the process of enslavement, castration, and socialization of eunuchs in Islamic society, see: Shaun Marmion, *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Society* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 86.}

\footnote{Malijak, *Ruznamah-yi khatirat*, 71.}
including convincing the Shah to appoint his allies to high-powered positions in the Qajar bureaucracy.\footnote{Ibid.}

Other writers, including Feuvrier, and the court chronicler I'timad al-Saltanah, also confirmed a similar characterization of Agha Bahram Khan.\footnote{Feuvrier, for example notes, that it was Agha Bahram who convinced Amin Aqdas to venture to Europe for her eye surgery, and it was only because he was eager to accompany her on these travels. Feuvrier, \textit{Trois Ans a Cour de Perse}, 210.} For example, on January 13, 1883 I'timad al-Saltanah wrote: “Agha Bahram, the eunuch, who has been working for Amin Aqdas for a short time, and who she has trusted completely, has suspiciously managed to accumulate four thousand tomans of wealth. He was discharged, and his account has been closed.”\footnote{I’timad al-Saltanah. \textit{Ruznamah-yi khatirat}, 212.} However, only two days later, on January 15th, I’timad al-Saltanah wrote “I saw Agha Bahram, who had been removed, back at the house. A group of ministers and royal decedents were summoned. Apparently, they had come to vouch for Agha Bahram. The Shah has accepted him back.”\footnote{Ibid.} Clearly, he held sway over these important figures, and they, in return, maintained his position of power within the harem, much to the dismay of I’timad al-Saltanah.\footnote{I’timad al-Saltanah maintains a disdain for Agha Bahram, and a few years later, in 1890, complains that the eunuch has appointed himself the title of Muin al-Sultan: “Agha Bahram, Amin Aqdas’s eunuch, has, without the Shah’s permission, given himself the title Muin Al-Sultan. He even signs off on telegraphs with this title . . . They asked him via telegraph, was this title bestowed upon you? He did not give a clear answer and was wanting to claim this title through trickery.” I’timad al-Saltanah, \textit{Ruznamah-yi khatirat}, 715.} Agha Bahram lived a long and prosperous life in Tehran, was able to accumulate a significant level of wealth, and maintained it even after Nasir al-Din’s assassination and the disbanding of his harem. In fact, towards
the end of his life, he spent a large sum of money to build a mosque and school in Tehran, which were named after him.420

Agha Bahram Khan was only one of the many high-ranking servants who exercised control over important domestic and political matters and were able to establish a comfortable life for themselves within the Qajar court. Such figures were often the object of scorn from European officials, and Iranian reformers and modernists. For example, Mirza Muḥammad ʿAli Maḥallati, better known as Haj Sayyah, the famous constitutionalist who was a very vocal critic of the Qajar ruling class, recalled the following encounter in his memoirs:

One of the people who came to visit me was Agha Juhar, a royal harem eunuch. He was uneducated, and was a castrated black slave. He said to me: I used to work for a landowner and was only able to afford bread and stew [dizzy] from the bazar. Now god has blessed me. I live in such luxury that even the most elite figures envy my life. And he was right. One of the signs of tyranny is that these eunuchs have access to those with the title of minister, as well as the royal elders and princes, who flatter them and use them as intermediaries. In reality, the affairs of the country are run through the private interventions made by women, who these eunuchs are confidents to, and are highly regarded by. As a result, people must flatter and bribe them to get things done. Unfortunately, these ignorant people and their relatives are the ones in control of the country.421

Similarly, within Western accounts, servants and eunuchs’ powerful positions in the Qajar court were also highly criticized.422 The first American Minister to Persia, Samuel Benjamin, for example, described them as deceitful and lazy individuals with an inflated

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420For a detailed discussion of the school and mosque, the latter of which is still a functional institution in Tehran, refer to Hooshang Sadafi’s “Masjidi ki khajih yi darbar sakht,” Mahaleman, accessed August 25th: http://www.mahaleman.ir/detail/news/13870
sense of importance.\textsuperscript{423} He complained of servants being able to bring members of their family into elite households,\textsuperscript{424} and went so far as to blame the royal family’s large entourage of servants for the economic problems of the empire:

It requires little reflection to perceive that nations having only nine millions of people must suffer very seriously, especially when it is in a state of decadence, by such a steady drain on its most valuable resources. This army of servants absorbs the wealth of the country and produces nothing in return.\textsuperscript{425}

Such descriptions, steeped in enlightenment and orientalist biases, mimicked broader critiques of gender relations in Iran, presenting servants as an ignorant and corrupt class and as a product of Eastern decadence, which was responsible for the downfall of a backwards empire. These accounts, however, ran counter to the ways in which court servants were described in the majority of Persian language sources from inside the Qajar court. Most Iranian accounts attested to the fact that many of the court servants and eunuchs were well-educated, and as a result, in charge of important child-rearing and administrative tasks. Malijak noted, for example, that one of his childhood playmates, a eunuch named Abdullah Khan, was responsible for his education and instilled in him a love of science.\textsuperscript{426} In fact, throughout the Qajar dynasty, the education of most royal descendants, including future Qajar kings, was primarily at the hands of various servants.\textsuperscript{427}

Similarly, it was common practice for the Qajars to promote eunuchs who excelled at administrative tasks to high state offices. Early in Nasir al-Din’s reign, the court eunuch

\textsuperscript{423}Benjamin, \textit{The Life and Adventures}, 151-153, 159.
\textsuperscript{424}Ibid., 162.
\textsuperscript{425}Ibid., 170.
\textsuperscript{426}Malijak Sani, \textit{Ruznamah-yi khatirat}, 73.
\textsuperscript{427}Azad, \textit{Pusht-i pardah-ha-yi haramsara}, 278.
Ahmadkhan Nava’i was assigned to be the deputy chief of ceremony. Within five years, in 1862, he rose to the status of governor of Bushehr, Dashti, and Dashtestan.\textsuperscript{428} Such high-ranking eunuchs also earned lucrative incomes.\textsuperscript{429} This was due to the fact that since eunuchs had no heirs, they were generally better paid than other servants, since it was believed that upon their passing, their assets would be absorbed back into the royal family’s possessions.\textsuperscript{430} Court financial records from 1864, for example, showed that the six-month budget for the highest-ranking court eunuchs (\textit{ghulaman-i makh\textsuperscript{s}us}) was 3,571 tomans, with 2,397 tomans allocated for salary, and 1,174 tomans for provisions.\textsuperscript{431}

Of course, not all servants of the court and harem rose to such high and lucrative positions. Lower-ranking servants received significantly smaller pay salaries, and were in general less implicated in political and administrative matters. Despite this fact, they still played an important role in the daily functioning of Gulistan as the organizers and executers of domestic life, which included the laundry, baths, meals, the hosting of guests, and the preparations for special celebratory holidays. Such daily rituals involved close collaboration and choreography between different levels of lower-ranking servants. For example, the preparation and serving of daily meals alone required a large constellation of cooks, waiters, attendants and cleaners. According to Mu‘ayyir al-

\textsuperscript{428}Mirzai. \textit{History of Slavery and Emancipation in Iran}. 113.
\textsuperscript{429}The Austrian physician, Jakob Polok, notes that Nasir al-Din’s chief eunuch, an Ethiopian slave named Bashir Khan, earned two thousand tomans annually, and later in life married one of Muhammad Shah’s concubines. See: Jakob Polok, \textit{Persien, dans Land und seine Bewohner} (Leipsik: Borkkhaus, 1865), 258.
\textsuperscript{430}Azad, \textit{Pusht-i pardah-ha-yi haramsara}, 296.
\textsuperscript{431}“\textit{Surat-i baravat-i ghulum-i makh\textsuperscript{s}us va savarah-nizam va luzum-i shinasay-yi zanan tavasut-i khavajah qabl az vurud bah andarun},” 1864, document 295-1040, National Archives of Iran.
Mamlık, around 300 maids were involved in the execution of harem lunch and dinner customs (Figure 53). 432

Everyday harem life allowed different levels of servants and royal family residents within Gulistan to participate in numerous, though uneven, forms of emotional and affective exchange amongst and between each other. While higher-ranking servants had more contact with powerful officials and the outside world, lower-ranking laborers were more

deeply implicated in the intimidate and private lives of harem residents. Aside from cooks and waiters, they served as beauticians, seamstresses, bathers, wet nurses, nannies, playmates to royal descendants, and more. In other words, the culture of servitude in the elite space of the Qajar harem meant that servants and members of the royal family shared what Stoler and Strassler have termed “the emotional economy of the everyday”—the various spaces, times, and people within daily life with whom sentiment was displayed, shared, withheld, and demanded. They argued that the everyday domestic acts such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare affected sensibilities and sentiments between and amongst various classes of people who shared relations of proximity. As such, lower-ranking servants charged with such tasks could leverage these relations of proximity to gain intimate knowledge of the private affairs of their masters and mistresses, and to use them to further their status and place within the harem hierarchy. Munis al-Dawlah noted that harem beauticians, who were responsible for waxing and threading royal women, had a great degree of access to royal family gossip and were able to accrue the most intimate details of these women’s private lives, which they used to wield power as valued informants.

Furthermore, while such relationships were defined by structures of social status, class, entitlement, and obligation, this did not foreclose the possibility of intimate bonds. Within the Gulistan harem, affection, love, and desire were regularly articulated across social class boundaries, along with other more traditional and hierarchical structures of power between masters/mistresses and servants. Cross-class intimacies were a central

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factor which informed both the composition of Nasir al-Din’s harem and the circulation of social status and political power within it. Nasir al-Din was notorious for taking a liking to women from the slave and servant classes, often promoting them to the status of a high-ranking wife. While some women who entered the harem as servants, such as Jayran, Anis al-Dowlah, and Amin Aqdas, were noteworthy women who were able to use their positions to ascend to the highest levels of power, many other lesser-known servant and slave women were also the objects of the Shah’s affection. For example, on January 22nd, 1883, I’timad al-Saltanah wrote “Yesterday morning, the Shah’s Turkmen female slave, named Marjanah, gave birth to his daughter” (Figure 54).  

Marjanah, later known as Marjan Khanum, became a sighah, and in 1890 bore the Shah a son. She made regular appearances in the Qajar family photo albums. Furthermore, I’timad al-Saltanah, who was often critical of the Shah’s various attachments to the

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servant class, himself became infatuated with and later married a Sudanese slave woman who had a tremendous influence on him.\textsuperscript{436}

Intimate and affective relations which cut across social class were not limited to the romantic or sexual encounters between the elite men and the lower-class women who became their wives and concubines. Nasir al-Din also shared close relations with other members of the servant class. Aside from his unique relationship with Malijak and his many wives and concubines, which I discussed extensively in the first chapter, other slaves, servants, and their children were important figures throughout his life. They were his young playmates as a child, his earliest adolescent friends, and in later years his constant companions. This form of homosocial intimacy, beyond blood or conjugal ties, can be seen in his relationship with Bashir Khan, an Abyssinian eunuch purchased by his mother, Malik Jahan, when the Shah was born.\textsuperscript{437} Nasir al-Din’s upbringing from childhood onward was primarily at the hands of Bashir Khan, and growing up he was the crown prince’s closest companion. Upon taking the throne in 1848, he was appointed as the chief eunuch of the harem, in charge of the most important affairs.\textsuperscript{438} Bashir Khan was one of the few eunuchs who was the subject of posed portrait photographs of elite harem figures, taken by Nasir al-Din himself, and included in family albums. In this genre of portraits, the subjects were seated in European-style chairs, which often acted as a prop to signal the modernization of customs and elite status (Figure 55).\textsuperscript{439}

\textsuperscript{436} Mirzai, “Qajar harem: Imagination or Reality?”. 78.
\textsuperscript{437} Amanat, Pivot of the Universe, 36.
\textsuperscript{438} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{439} As Ingvild Flasherud has pointed out, the shift in portrait seating arrangements of elite Qajar figures, from jeweled carpets and beds to Western style chairs, took shape in the second half of the 19th century and symbolized a modernizing empire. Nasir al-Din himself is also often pictured in such chairs throughout the
Nasir al-Din’s bond with Bahir Khan was based on experiences of proximity and interaction, rather than biological connection, conjugality, or racial and class affinity.

Such relationships were a common outcome of royal family child-rearing practices, which required the highest-ranking children to be served by a collection of wet nurses, nannies, child servants, and eunuchs. Malijak, for example, also had a large and prestigious entourage of servants with whom he spent most of his time with and with whom he was often photographed (Figure 56). \textsuperscript{440}

![Fig. 56. Group of court servants, with Malijak seated in the middle front row on Jujuq Khanum’s lap, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center.](image)

Muʻayyir al-Mamlik gave the following account of the number of servants for the young Malijak:

A few black bondswoman and servants were put at his disposal, as well as thirty slave children who were his playmates. . . He had two nurses, one with a white complexion named Jujugh, and the other, a black woman named Gul

\textsuperscript{440}In his diaries, Malijak gives a detailed account of the servants who were allocated to him. They included wet nurses, manual laborers, private physicians, various eunuchs, and several other servants, slave children and page boys. See: Malijak, \textit{Ruznamah-yi khatirat}, 52.
Chihrah, who were in charge of taking care of him . . . Abdil Khan and Agha Bashir were his chief eunuchs. He also had twelve footmen who dressed in red, with embroidered colors and wristbands, and were at his service from the age of nine to twelve . . .

As Ann Stoler pointed out in her study of Dutch colonial child-rearing practices, relations between elite children and their servants led to a host of “affective ties, affective kinship,” as well as “confusions and transfusions of blood and milk,” which undermined pre-established social and cultural orders through carnal knowledge. While the Qajar practice of assigning slaves and nannies to royal offspring and other important court figures was taken from ancient Turco-Mongol tradition and pre-dates the formations that are the subject of Stoler’s inquiry, the Qajar practice did share some important characteristics with the child-rearing practices examined by Stoler. Most notably, the fact that such servants were indispensible members of elite households, firmly situated them within the intimacy of family life. As a result, they formed various forms of affective bonds.

A common composition of Qajar portrait photographs of royal descendants often featured children posing with groups of servants and slaves (Figure 57).

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441 Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik, Yaddasht-ha-yi az zindigani-i khususi-i Nasir al-Din Shah, 121.
442 Stoler uses Foucault’s concept of “education of desire” to argue that childrearing practices amongst Dutch colonial families, which relied on racialized servants and nannies, led to the “cultivation of emotional ties” between these individuals, which crossed carefully marked boundaries of class and race. See Ann Laura Stoler, Race and Education of Desire: Foucault’s Hisotry of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things (Durham and London: Duke, University Press, 1995),
Most royal children were assigned these individuals at birth, and thus they served as their closest companions in their formative years. Later they were natural confidants. It was not uncommon for many of these figures to exert great control over the affairs of the royal descendants. As mentioned, these servants were responsible for several tasks, including nursing and feeding, bathing and dressing, and bedtime and morning rituals. They also acted as playmates, travel companions, and teachers to their young masters and mistresses. Thus, royal children grew intimate attachments to such figures, and often were closer to them than to their blood relatives. Throughout her diaries, Taj al-Saltanah gave a detailed account of the deep love she bore for her wet nurse and nannies. In fact,
her extreme attachment to her black nanny, which was described at the beginning of this chapter, had replaced maternal love for her as a child:

The love between Matron Nanny and me had grown so deep that I shied away from my dearly-revered mother completely. If she tried to hold me in her arms and kiss me, I screamed and ran at once to the refuge of my nanny’s arms. Her pockets and her dark, veined hands were a constant source of curiosity, and she always had something to give me . . . Even today, after all these years, when I come across some relation of my beloved nanny’s, I am overcome with joy and can talk to him very clearly and fluently in his dialect. This affection for my black nanny has forged an enduring spiritual and emotional bond between me and her relations . . . How I wish I could have felt the same tenderness for my venerable mother that I did for my nanny . . .

Malijak offered a similarly loving, though perhaps less verbose portrait, of his two favored nannies, the Turcoman woman named Juju Khanum and his beloved black nanny Gul Chihrah, both of whom often accompanied him in court photographs (See Figure 12). As Mu‘ayyir al-Mamlık noted, Malijak’s love for these women gave them a high status in both the court and its harem.

Malijak also made note of several court slaves and servants, many of whom were at his disposal, who were later granted high-ranking positions. For example, Hussay’n Khan Shagird, a page boy who was one of his childhood playmates, later rose to the rank of general. As he stated:

Page boys were low-ranking child servants (a few degrees lower than slave children) responsible for serving lunch and dinner, and delivering mail. Most harem women had a page boy working for them who would deal with their menial tasks. When they got older, they had to be kicked out of the harem . . . But those who were most valued would be kept as guards and overseers of

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443 Taj al-Saltana, *Crowning Anguish*, 82.
444 Malijak Sani, *Ruznamah-yi khatirat*, 104.
446 Malijak Sani, *Ruznamah-yi khatirat*, 63.
their mistresses. Most of the harem guards were initially pageboys who rose in rank.\textsuperscript{447}

There is ample evidence to suggest that servants used their close bonds with their royal masters and mistresses to gain access to wealth and privilege. For example, both Malijak and Taj al-Saltanah described receiving an allowance from the Shah, which they would then secretly give to their favorite servants.\textsuperscript{448}

The complex combination of affective ties and asymmetrical relations between servants and their masters and mistresses, which is the most prevailing theme within the sources, does not lend itself to a simple interpretation. In fact, the intimate relationships with such servants, in whose company childhoods were spent, speaks to the forms of harem intimacies which are primarily present in writings of elite Qajar figures and photographs held in royal family collections. Such representations are marked by nostalgia, sentimentality, and a claim to shared affection, while obscuring the power relations at play between servants and their child masters/mistresses. It’s important to note that such visions of domestic bonding across race and social class lines, by-and-large, come to us from the perspective of those in the master/mistress position.

Though such sources attested to the many instances where servants were able to leverage their positions to gain access to resources, privileges, and rank, there was also ample evidence of the myriad ways in which servants and slaves of the court were treated as property, subjected to violent abuse, and suffered through highly oppressive conditions.

\textsuperscript{447}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{448}Malijak Sani, \textit{Ruznamah-yi khatirat}, 80; Taj al-Saltana, \textit{Crowning Anguish}, 86.
First and foremost, those who entered the harem as slaves had already experienced the agonizing conditions of the slave trade outlined earlier. Once within the harem, the subordinate status of slaves and servants within the harem hierarchy was reaffirmed on several registers. For example, their masters and mistresses controlled much of their lives including if, to whom, and when they could marry.449 Their positions within the homes of those they served were often precarious, and at any point their masters or mistresses could decide to confiscate their wealth and property and banish or expel them. In fact, they themselves were often treated as property and given away as dowries or gifts, with no control over their destinies. For example, in a letter of request to the Shah, written on behalf of his wife Iffat al-Dowlah, the writer complained of the eunuch that had been provided for her:

Agha Kusru was sent by you to be in the harem. The mother of Zil al-Sultan [Iffat al-Dowlah] is unhappy with him and weeping over this fact day and night. She doesn’t want him. He gambles, drinks wine, and is a liar. . . Please send a better eunuch.450

On several occasions, I’timad al-Saltanah wrote about the beatings, torture, and sometimes death of servants, as well as low-ranking temporary wives, at the hands of their masters and mistresses.451 Such accounts were rarely accompanied by a glimpse of why such beatings occurred, or what the fate of servants who faced such severe punishments was. For example, on February 28, 1889 he wrote of the severe beating a slave woman received at the hands of Shams al-Dawlah, one of the Shah’s primary wives: “I have heard that Shams al-Dawlah has beaten her female servant so severely she

449 Mirzai, A History of Slavery and Emancipation in Iran, 101.
is close to death." There was no further mention of the incident or the servant in the days and weeks after this entry.

The case of the Circassian slave girl, who was referred to as Najm al-Sahar, provides us with perhaps a more illuminating example of the kinds of cruelties inflicted by the Qajar ruling class and endured by some of their servants. Najm al-Sahar was purchased at the age of twelve from an Istanbul market by one of the Shah’s ministers for 700 Lire, and gifted to Nasir al-Din during his final trip to Europe in 1889. At the time, I’timad al-Saltanah wrote that he was tasked with watching over her, and that the Shah regularly requested her company. There were rumors that because she was prepubescent, during his visit to Paris the Shah dressed her as a eunuch in order to keep her close and spend more time with her. She returned to Tehran with him and became a low-ranking sighah for the next several years. However, on September 25, 1895, I’timad al-Saltanah wrote:

. . . today, a few harem servants, including the Circasian “Najm-al-Sahar” . . . were beaten so badly. She was treated as though she was trash and thrown out of Saltanat Abad and cast away out of the city. Someone told me that the reason for this punishment was that the night before, when the royal servants were dining out in the garden, they had seen her with Aziz al-Sultan [Malijak], and some others, messing around and partaking in pleasure. Someone was sent to intervene and viciously punish them.

This was Najm al-Sahar’s last appearance in I’timad al-Saltanah’s diary.

Carla Serena also wrote of encountering servants of elite households in the bazars of Tehran, where they would meet daily to buy amenities for their homes and take the

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\text{\textsuperscript{452}}\text{Ibid.}, 620. \\
\text{\textsuperscript{453}}\text{Ibid.}, 1034. \\
\text{\textsuperscript{454}}\text{Ibid.}, 652. \\
\text{\textsuperscript{455}}\text{Azad, } Pusht-i pardah-ha-yi haramsara, 380 \\
\text{\textsuperscript{456}}\text{I’timad al-Saltanah. } Ruznamah-yi khatirat, 1034.\]
opportunity to gossip amongst themselves and with shopkeepers. According to Serena, the gossip included stories of abuse suffered by servants at the hands of their masters and mistresses.\footnote{Serena, Hommes et Choses en Perse, 59-60.} Such stories of abuse alert us to the fact that despite the claims to familial bonding between harem women and their servants, the hierarchical power relations had tangible and sometimes violent implications for the lives of the servants. They serve as a counterpoint to narratives that foreground the intimate bonds between royal harem residents and their servants, and which appeared in the writings of elite Qajar figures such as Malijak and Taj al-Saltanah.

Furthermore, for the most part, we do not have access to sources which would confirm that these feelings of love, tenderness, and familiarity were reciprocated by the servants, whose domestic relations were part and parcel of their jobs, and were in the less-privileged position within the power relations.\footnote{Malijak is exceptional in this sense, since he himself did enter the harem as a page boy who gained elite status through the Shah’s affection and has left behind his own autobiography wherein he shares his own love and affection for the Shah.} In fact, most written accounts by lower-ranking servants who did not rise to powerful positions come to us in the form of letters written by them. Within these letters, there are far less traces of the intimacy and affection between harem servants and the royal family. For example, most letters addressed to Nasir al-Din by his servants relied on formal language to praise the Shah, and then went on to share with him their requests or complaints about their jobs and daily circumstances. There was a marked lack of affective sentimentality in such letters, and instead, the tone showed a concrete concern for access to provisions and their status as workers. Consider the following letter by a court eunuch asking for a raise:

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\footnote{Malijak is exceptional in this sense, since he himself did enter the harem as a page boy who gained elite status through the Shah’s affection and has left behind his own autobiography wherein he shares his own love and affection for the Shah.}
May I be sacrificed at your royal feet; it has been two and half years since I have been working in your grand royal harem. I have diligently pursued my duties in this time. But despite my hard work, I have not been shown the same level of kindness as other eunuchs. I ask that you give me the same monthly salary of five tomans that other eunuchs are receiving, and that the gifts and provisions that you provide for them should also be given to me so that I can continue my work.459

Other letters with a similar tone put forward requests for everything from time off for health issues460 to provisions such as new clothes461 and mediation of conflicts between different workers.462 Unlike the writings of elite figures and royal family members, which were seeped in sentiment, these letters from court servants showed a consistent concern for their own work and life conditions. In other words, they did not seem to subscribe to the imagined vision of domestic bonds and shared affections that their masters and mistresses described.463

These unsentimental letters also suggest no easy interpretation: while they showed a consistent interest in the conditions of everyday domestic work within the court and harem, there was no concrete evidence that these relations were utterly lacking tenderness and affection. In fact, as I have noted throughout this chapter, one of the primary access points to better work and life conditions for servants was precisely through the everyday intimacies they built with other harem residents. Furthermore, as Chapter I demonstrated, many of the servants who established high-ranking positions, wives such as Amin Aqdas

460 “Guzarish dar murid mubadilah-i qararnamah-i Savalan va umid bah ahdas-i rah dar Iran,” 1864, document 295-962, National Archives of Iran.
462 “Namah bah Shah: barrisi-yi niza’i farashan-i khayaban ba nukarha-yi andaruni va islah tarfin va jilugiri az tarddu-d-i pishkhidmat-ha dar khayaban,” 1872, document 295-2592, National Archives of Iran.
463 Stoler and Strassler note a similar uncozy and "charmless" tone in the accounts of Indonesian servants who worked in Dutch colonial homes. See: Stoler and Strassler, “Castings for the Colonial,” 6.
and Anis al-Dawlah, or favored individuals such as Malijak, did indeed leave a record of their affection and love for royal family members. It is thus important to place the servant class of Gulistan within the context of the contradictory nature of their positions--at once as familial figures with intimate access, and, at least at times, affective relationships with their masters/mistresses, and as subjugated workers who had to navigate such positions carefully in order to give themselves better life chances.

**Conclusion**

One of the key signifiers of modernity in Iran has been the shifts in gender relations, motherhood, marriage laws, and domesticity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries—shifts, which, as I have noted earlier, have been studied extensively by scholars such as Afsaneh Najmabadi and Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet. Few scholars have, however, engaged with simultaneous changes in the demographic composition and structure, as well as the role of migrant and domestic laborers and slaves within upper class households during this same period. Such shifts were, in fact, also in large part a product of European influence and values, including an international abolitionist agenda, and played an important role in the changes and eventual dismantling of the royal harem as an institution. While it is important to critically engage with European, and, in particular, British humanitarian interventions, particularly in the African slave trade in Iran, and place them within the context of a larger campaign to garner public support for imperialist pursuits in the Middle East, it is equally important to acknowledge that the institution of slavery was central to such family formations and that it, in every guise,
encompassed a host of brutalities which cannot be ignored in favor of nostalgic renderings of sentimental and affective bonds between slaves and those they served.

As this chapter attests, some servants did indeed enjoy significant privileges within the royal Qajar court and harem, often resulting from their intimate bonds and shared relations of proximity with royal family members. At the same time, as a social class, servants maintained a marginalized status and most likely experienced many forms of undocumented suffering and anguish at various points in their lives. Most notably, the circumstances of the capture and transit of slaves necessitated experiencing various forms of hardship including malnutrition, heat exhaustion, dehydration, and disease, as well as the trauma of being torn away from their familial and tribal networks. Such forms of brutality cannot be divorced from the story of how some court and harem servants rose to important positions in the Qajar court.

This chapter acknowledges the central role of servants and slaves within the domestic, urban, national, and transnational landscapes of late 19th century Qajar Iran. These constituents of Gulistan, who were a part of the various categories of servants, including eunuchs, maids, slave children, wet nurses, and so on, made up one of the most demographically diverse groupings in 19th century Iran, and are an overlooked, but primary, site of shifting race and gender politics in the late Qajar period. Through focusing on the differing classes of servants that resided and worked within the royal harem and court and the conditions of their everyday lives, as well as tracing their history in parallel to the history of migration and slavery in Iran and its inter-regional networks
during this period, this chapter writes these figures into the historiography of the late Qajar court and family and examines their central role in governance, social reproduction, and royal family order. Furthermore, not only were these servants politically and socially significant persons, and thus important to our understanding of the Qajar court and harem, their history also serves to diversify our knowledge of the history of slavery, in particular the Central Asian and African diaspora, in the 19th century imperial world at large, and in Iran in particular.
Chapter IV
Women’s Prison or Privilege: Critically Assessing Narrative Representations of Nasir al-Din Shah’s Harem

Females in Mohammedan countries are scarcely more than the slaves of a sensual despot... [the harem] is most commonly a perpetual prison, from whence scarce one female in six or seven ever has the good luck to escape... But privation of liberty is by no means the worst evil that exists in these melancholy abodes... Even new-born innocents are murdered, either by actual violence or the denial of that nourishment which it is a mother’s duty and should be her delight to give. Such are the consequences of this iniquitous violation of the laws of nature.  

James Bailey Fraser

It is impossible for a man to conjure up in the real of his imagination a sweeter, easier life. In the course of the year they were not visited by any grief, difficulty, pain, or bitterness. I am sure that if someone had asked one of them, “What is suffering?” she would have gaped in amazement at the questioner, unable to answer the question, incapable even of understanding it.

Taj al-Saltana

Introduction

In his essay “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,” literary critic and historian Hayden White argued that the narrativity of historical accounts is always “intimately related to, if not a function of, the impulse to moralize reality, that is, to identify it with a social system that is the source of any morality that we can imagine.”

History, he argued, “requires stacking the facts in favor of a thesis,” and a narrative structure is a prerequisite for this gesture. This chapter’s exploration of European and Iranian accounts of Nasir al-Din Shah’s harem aims not only to understand how various narratives depicted the harem, but also the authorial strategies and motivations that

464 Fraser, Historical and Descriptive Accounts of Persia, 258-259.
465 Taj al-Saltana, Crowning Anguish, 94.
467 Ibid., 27.
underlay these depictions. My claim is not that a given account, or set of accounts, was more accurate than others. Instead, my goal here is to position each account in accordance to its own ideological temper, to what Ann Stoler has called the “common sense logic” of a source, that which governs what is included and excluded in a narrative.468

Comparing and contrasting European, Iranian, orientalist, modernist, gendered, autobiographical, and chronological accounts of Gulistan Palace’s harem, this chapter examines the ways the institution of the andarun has been imagined and memorialized as both a loaded signifier of 19th century Iranian culture and as a primary site of engagement with Iran’s modernizing project. The tensions between Western imperialist interests, Iranian modernization, local tradition, and evolving nationalist sentiment, and the ways in which gender was a focal point in all these debates, are illustrated by this form of comparative analysis. After all, as I have thus far pointed out, these tensions and negotiations encompassed all aspects of life in the Gulistan harem, from politics and social mores, to architecture and familial life.

These multiple representations of the harem also point towards the changing perception of this important location through the eyes of different witnesses, exploring the shifting meanings attributed to it from those who resided in it, visited it, and imagined its interior life. Central to my analysis is an engagement with Hayden White’s understanding of

468In Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense, Stoler urges us to look for what she terms “the pulse of archival sources” or “the preoccupations and predicaments” that determined the tone and content of the works, in order to unearth the social and power relations they were embedded in. See Ann Laura Stoler, Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 35.
how narrative and narrativity function in historical writing. In other words, as he put it: “how to translate *knowing* into *telling*, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific.”

I combine White’s insights with Stoler’s call for a methodological shift in approaching historical sources, particularly ones associated with centers of colonial power. Stoler urges us to move away from “reading against the grain,” which she argues is a form of critical data mining, and towards a “reading along the grain,” an immersive approach that allows the historian to understand “the pulse” of each source, which dictates the logic of its content. She offers this strategy as a counterpoint to critical and postcolonial approaches, which have primarily aimed to excavate subaltern voices by reading against the grain of historical documents that originated with elite actors. Stoler argues that such approaches to colonial archives and imperial history have relied on tactics of the inversion, excavation, and recuperation of subaltern subjectivity, which locates “structure” with colonizers and “human agency” with the subaltern. While this can be a generative project, she insists that European colonial knowledge, much like the governing practices that accompanied it, was never monolithic. Instead, it was filled with inconsistency, uncertainty, anxiety, and the vulnerabilities that were a central feature of colonialism and a fruitful site of its study. Taking to heart Stoler’s warning, this chapter engages with the accumulation of conflicting narratives about the Gulistan.

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469 Ibid., 6.
470 Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 47-49.
471 Ibid., 47.
472 Ibid., 4.
harem—descriptions, assessments and anecdotes—in order to examine what they reveal about the tensions between various forms of knowledge production and the divergent interpretations of everyday life that underwrote them.

**Situating 19th Century European Male Narratives**

The Gulistan harem and its residents were a constant preoccupation for the vast majority of European travelers to Iran throughout the 19th century. This section takes a cross-section of representations and reads them both along and against their archival grain to see what they reveal to us about the institution, as well as the European authors who represented it. It should be emphasized that to dismiss all travel writing about this institution under the same monolithic rhetoric of orientalism would not allow one to excavate the multiple sites of meaning embedded within such texts. European travelogues about 19th century Iran continue to serve as important primary sources for the historiography of Iran. Such sources offer long and descriptive accounts of a series of loaded encounters between Iran and a dominating imperial Europe, which cannot be ignored merely in favor of supposedly more authentic local voices. Instead, I am interested in examining these travelogues as belonging to an ideologically-marked archive of imperial encounters with Iran in the 19th century, as well as site of transcultural contact and translation, with a specific investment in the ways in which discourses about gender and domesticity were produced within this body of literature.

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473 In his seminal work on *Orientalism*, Edward Said defines the term as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’ which allows the latter to dominate, restructure, and have authority over the former. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 2-3.
This chapter begins with looking at representations of the Gulistan harem and its residents, through materials produced by a range of European travelers throughout the 19th century in order to reveal some of the imperialist impulses and Eurocentric understandings of modernity that underscored such representations. Previous chapters have shown that throughout its history, the Gulistan palace was continuously modified and expanded, and individuals and groups among its inhabitants gained and lost forms of institutional and informal power and prestige. Significantly, most European accounts of the palace and its social and domestic arrangements rarely noticed such shifts. For the majority of these writers, the palace, and in particular its harem, formed the enduring image of an unchanging Islamic cultural practice and institution.

In describing court and royal familial life, most European visitors to 19th century Tehran generally relied on the essentialist fantasies that recurred across centuries of orientalist descriptions of the Muslim world. Since the assumption was that the Orient and its enduring institutions were frozen in time, authors and travellers deemed it unnecessary to note the actual physical and social transformations which affected the royal andarun. Instead, they relied on descriptions of this institution as timeless in order to make their claims about the repressed and imprisoned Iranian women who occupied such spaces, and whose conditions were generally read as standing in for the suffering faced by all Muslim women.

The works of James Bailie Fraser (1783-1856), a Scottish writer, painter, and colonial entrepreneur, who wrote extensively on and about Iranian women, were typical of this
form of representation. Born in Edinburgh, Fraser, following the path of his family, began to visit British colonies at the age of sixteen, first going to the West Indies and later to India. Fraser traveled extensively in both India and throughout the Middle East in the early to mid-19th century, at the height of British interest in the region. He produced a large body of ethnographic documents and fictional writings about the region, including several paintings and travelogues, the most notable of which were his later writings on Iran. While Fraser was not formally trained as a scholar and he barely spoke the language, he was considered amongst the greatest European experts on the region.

When the British Empire was concerned about Russia’s influence over Turkey in 1833, Fraser was commissioned by the Foreign Office to return to Iran and report on this issue. It was during this period, in his capacity as a Foreign Office representative stationed in Iran to monitor British imperial interests, that Fraser wrote his most famous work, *An Historical and Descriptive Account of Persia*. The work was published in 1836, just over a decade before the end of Fath‘Ali Shah’s reign. The book contained a great deal of ethnographic information about the landscape, scenery, and above all, the people of Iran, including copious descriptions of Iranian women that deserve our consideration.

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474 Fraser’s father was a cotton and sugar plantation owner in Guyana, and all four of his brothers were employed by the East India Company in India. See: Dennis Wright, “Fraser, James Baillie,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online edition, 2012, available at [http://wwwiranicaonlineorg/articles/fraser-](http://wwwiranicaonlineorg/articles/fraser-) (accessed January 5th, 2017).

475 Ibid.

Throughout his travels, Fraser encountered a host of Iranian men from a variety of regions and social classes, and he offered a robust account of such encounters. His accounts of the local women, on the other hand, were seldom anything more than descriptions of their physical appearance. In a letter published in Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia, Etc, he admitted: “although I saw multitudes of females . . . they presented little more than a host of blue and checked chaders, wrappers, or figures in the ordinary costume of Persian peasants.” Consistent with the orientalist genre, Fraser’s most extensive writing about Iranian women was in reference to the royal Qajar harem. While his descriptions of the men of the Qajar courts relied heavily on personal encounters, when speaking of their female counterparts, he unhesitatingly stated: “Of the women belonging to the classes we have hitherto described we can say little. Females in Mohammedan countries are scarcely more than the slaves of a sensual despot.” Such an orientalist generalization of the role of women in Muslim societies was indicative of his lack of access to them, far more than it was an accurate description of their circumstance.

Throughout this section of his text, Fraser relied almost exclusively on narratives about the Iranian royal andarun written by Sir Jean Chardin (1643-1712), a 17th century French traveler who visited the Safavid court and wrote extensively about it in his work The Travels of Sir John Chardin into Persia and the East Indies (1668), and to a lesser extent, Sir John Malcolm who visited the region on three diplomatic missions and was the author of The History of Persia (1829).

477 James Baillie Fraser, Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia, & (London: Richard Bentley, 1840), 119.
478 Fraser, Historical and Descriptive Accounts of Persia, 258.
Describing the royal harem, Fraser quoted Chardin:

[The harem] is most commonly a perpetual prison, from whence scarce one female in six or seven ever has the good luck to escape; for women who have once become the mothers of living children are provided with a small establishment within the walls and are never suffered to leave them. But privation of liberty is by no means the worst evil that exists in these melancholy abodes. Except to that wife who is so fortunate as to produce the firstborn son, to become a mother is the most dreaded event that can happen to the wretched favorites of the king. When this occurs, not only do the mothers see their last chance of liberty and marriage cut off from them, but they live in the dreadful anticipation of seeing their children deprived of life or of sight when the death of their lord shall call a new tyrant in the person of his son, the brother of their offspring, to the throne.\footnote{Fraser, \textit{Historical and Descriptive Accounts of Persia}, 259.}

Based on Chardin’s account, he suggested that it was common practice for women to kill their children so that they might have a chance at being sold out of the harem: “Even new-born innocents are murdered, either by actual violence or the denial of that nourishment which it is a mother’s duty and should be her delight to give.”\footnote{Ibid., 260.} For Fraser, such cruelties were common practice amongst the women of the royal harem and were “the consequences of this iniquitous violation of the laws of nature.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Fraser himself never witnessed such cruelty. Instead, he echoed a 17\textsuperscript{th} century account of the Safavid court, which, one might add, was itself steeped in false claims. Chardin’s account of the harem hardly counted as an authentic historical document.\footnote{As Ruth Yeazell has pointed out, studying European travelers’ representations of the harem from this period is in large part “a study of their imagination,” as many of them constructed their fantasies of this institution “from a loose compound of lore about the Grand Seraglio and atmosphere trappings freely borrowed from the \textit{Arabian Nights}.” Speaking of Chardin specifically, she shows that Chardin himself acknowledges that he has virtually no access to this institution, referring to it as an unknown world (“un monde inconnu”), and yet, he goes on to make a host of elaborate claims, and tells detailed fantastic stories about the royal Safavid harem. See Ruth Yeazell, \textit{Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature} (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 1-2, 16-17.} In fact, it was
well-known for serving as the source material for an early French translation of One Thousand and One Nights by the orientalist scholar Antoine Galland, which was completed in 1717.484 Thus, in spite of his long stint in Iran, Fraser’s narrative of the Qajar domestic realm was much more a recycling of fictitious orientalist fantasies about harems than a descriptive account based on actual encounters.

In Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation, Mary Pratt has argued that, beginning in the 17th century and continuing well into the 19th century, European travel and exploration writings were largely a product of the continent’s global economic and political expansionist policies. Thus they reflected colonial and imperial encounters.485 While such works often claimed “to constitute the everyday with neutrality, spontaneity, numbing repetition,” she argues that, in fact, “redundancy, discontinuity, and unreality” are amongst the chief characteristics of these works.486 A critical reading of such narratives then needs to look for the tensions and inconsistencies between subjective experiences and objective claims to truth and knowledge production.

Fraser’s account, for example, portrayed the women of the Qajar royal harem as victims of despotic cruelty and, in turn, perpetrators of a similar kind of cruelty in relation to their children. He stated:

[Persian women] are utterly wanting in all that delicacy of sentiment and language which is the greatest charm of females in more civilized countries; and, ignorant of what we consider propriety, they express themselves on all subjects with disgusting grossness. Their terms of abuse are indecent in the extreme, and are

485Pratt, Imperial Eyes, 4.
486Ibid.
used with equal fluency by high and low... women in Persia, as in all other parts of the globe, are the creatures which circumstances and education have made them. If these have been adverse, if the softer sex have been basely degraded by their proud and oppressive lords, shall we blame the sufferers for a misfortune which they owe to the tyranny of Eastern customs.487

In doing so, he offered his readers an image of Iranian people as barbaric, uncivilized, and in desperate need of salvation. The harem stood not just as a signifier of difference but of social and cultural backwardness. Consistent with other European travel writings of the period, Fraser’s work bore the markings of what Ivo Kamps and Jyotsna Singh characterize as a “colonizing imagination.”488 They argue that a consistent feature of these works is that the writers frequently fall back on defining the cultural others that they encounter in terms of differences which perpetuate certain binaries—"civilization versus barbarism, and pious Christianity versus impious Islam”—which can easily consolidate to justify full-blown colonialism.489

While European travel writing, both in its tone and the ways it was relied upon to narrate authoritative accounts of other cultures consistently made claims to objectivity, neutrality of knowledge production, and universality of human morality, the texts also generally reflect a subjective experience and narrative form. Thus, it is important to read such accounts in accordance with the multiple coordinates which made up their logic. Narratives such as Fraser’s beg for imperial intervention to restore reason and civilization to a deprived people. In fact, in the years following the writing of Historical and Descriptive Accounts of Persia, and upon his return home, Fraser openly advocated for

487 Fraser, Historical and Descriptive Accounts of Persia, 261.
489 Ibid., 3.
the development of an Oriental Department in the Foreign Office and urged the British government to assert itself in the affairs of the Qajar government “as delicately as may be but decidedly and directly.”

Hayden White has argued that one of the defining features of the narrative form, on which historical writing relies, is that it offers “a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted.” For White, narrativity forms “between our experience of the world and our efforts to describe that experience in language.” He argues that historical discourses fall under two categories, those that narrate (“a discourse that looks out onto a world and reports it”), and those that narrativize (“a discourse that feigns to make the world speak itself and speak itself as a story”). Part of what is unique about European travel writings is that while most can be said to fall under the category of a discourse that narrativizes, they also, without critique or acknowledgement, are used as the primary sources which develop discourses that narrate 19th century Iranian history. Thus, there is a smooth transition from subjective account to objective knowledge. The writings of George Curzon (1859-1925) provide us with a case in point.

Born in 1859 to an upper class British aristocratic family, Curzon was raised in Derbyshire, educated at Oxford University, and served as a Conservative member of the

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490 From a memorandum submitted by James Fraser to Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerson, on September 17, 1835: JBF to Palmerston. London, 17.9.1835. 38 F/B100.
492 Ibid.
493 Ibid., 7.
British parliament between 1886-1898.\footnote{Denis Wright, “Curzon, George Nathaniel,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online edition, 2011, available at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/curzon-george-nathaniel (accessed August 12, 2017).} From an early age, Curzon developed a keen interest in the eastern colonies of Britain. This interest later led him to travel extensively in the region. Curzon’s elite upbringing and travels had instilled in him a profound belief in the civilizing virtues of the British Empire in the east. He regarded British India as “the noblest fabric yet reared by the genius of a conquering nation,”\footnote{Curzon, Persia and the Persian Question, Volume I, v.} and believed that “without India the British empire could not exist.”\footnote{Ibid., 4.} The defense of India thus came to dominate much of his thinking. It led to his appointment as Viceroy and Governor-General of India in 1898. In the context of the ongoing Great Game, Iran and the waters of the Persian Gulf, much like Afghanistan and Tibet, were, for him, the borderlands that had to be protected from the expansionist policies of czarist Russia. With the defense of India in mind, he considered that “the preservation, so far as it is still possible, of the integrity of Persia must be registered as a cardinal precept of our Imperial creed.”\footnote{Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, Volume II, 605.}

In the preface to the first volume of what is widely considered his magnum opus, *Persia and the Persian Question*, Curzon acknowledged that the book was the product of a six-month stay in the country, which took place between 1889-1890 towards the end of Nasir al-Din Shah’s reign.\footnote{Ibid., vii.} While Curzon traveled extensively around the world during his years as a parliamentarian, this was his sole visit to Iran. Despite the short length of his stay, and his lack of Persian language skills, he boldly declared his work to be “a compendious work dealing with every aspect of public life in Iran, with its government,
institutions, resources, trade finance, policy, and present and future development.”⁴⁹⁹ He boasted of having read the 200-300 works “which have been written in European languages on Persia during the last five centuries.”⁵⁰⁰ Yet he omitted any reference to vernacular or local sources, because in his account there were none that were reliable. He stated:

. . . in the East there are no official sources of knowledge accessible to the public, no blue books, no statistics scientifically compiled, no census, no newspapers, no periodicals . . . Figures and facts—which are, in their very essence, an insult to the Oriental imagination—are only arrived at in Persia after long and patient inquiry and by careful collation of the results of a great number of independent investigations; and I can truly say that single lines in this book have sometimes cost me hours of work and pages of correspondence.⁵⁰¹

Thus, Curzon’s seamless shift from a subjective account of his limited stay in a country where he lacked local language skills to his objective narrativizing of its entire history, geography, culture, and people happened within the first few pages of the massive two volume text. The plausibility of such an account relied almost exclusively on orientalist assumptions, and a colonial “common sense” that governed understandings about the limits of local Iranian knowledge production. For Curzon, like for so many travelers to the region before him, the possibility of offering an objective narrative of Iran’s history was a privilege exclusively reserved for European observers. Not surprisingly, his account of 19th century Iran was firmly in line with orientalist logic:

In a country so backward in constitutional progress, so destitute of forms and statues and characters, and so firmly stereotyped in immemorial traditions of the East, the personal element, as might be expected, is in the ascendant; and the government of Persia is little else than the arbitrary exercise of authority by a

⁴⁹⁹Ibid., viii.
⁵⁰⁰Ibid.
⁵⁰¹Ibid., x, xi.
series of units in a descending scale from the sovereign to the headmen of a petty village.\textsuperscript{502}

While Curzon claimed to have respect for the Nasir al-Din Shah and his rule, this respect was tempered by the same orientalist logic. He stated, “the shah, indeed, may be regarded at this moment as perhaps the best existing specimen of a moderate despot.” This moderate nature of his despotism, not surprisingly, was credited to his visits to Europe, his sensitivity to foreign opinion, and the criticisms he received from the European press.\textsuperscript{503}

Throughout his descriptive account of the Qajar ruler, Curzon relied heavily on Nasir al-Din’s personal and familial life to discredit his character:

The domestic life of the Shah is shrouded in the mystery common to the Mussulman countries. No glimpse of the Harem is caught by males, either Persian or European . . . The Shah is reported to be a kind master in his harem, for on so extended a scale of matrimony it is scarcely possible to apply the European nomenclature of a good husband.\textsuperscript{504}

Curzon’s account of Nasir al-Din’s harem, while moralistic in tone, was riddled with factual inaccuracies about the most basic details. For example, he stated that the Shah had three primary wives (\textit{aqdi}), including Anis al-Dawlah who, according to him, was first a \textit{sighah}, but later became his third \textit{aqdi}.\textsuperscript{505} In fact, as noted in Chapter I, Anis al-Dawlah remained a \textit{sighah} throughout her life. The Shah, in fact, in accordance with Muslim custom, had four permanent wives (Galin Khanum, Sitarah Khanum, Shukuh al-Saltanah, and Taj al-Dawlah). During the earlier part of his reign, he divorced his second \textit{aqdi} wife,

\textsuperscript{503}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{504}Ibid., 408.
\textsuperscript{505}Ibid., 409.
Sitarah Khaunu, in order to promote a favored sighah to the position. As noted in Chapter I, it was Jayran and not Anis al-Dawlah, who took the honor.

Curzon also spoke with a condescending tone of the Shah’s intense fondness for the low-ranking members of his harem, including Amin Aqdas, whom he described as a Kurdish slave. He stated that “[i]n Oriental and Mussulman countries it is absurd to speak of any individual wife as queen.” Upon offering a series of anecdotes about the Shah’s affection for these low-ranking women, as well as his obsession with the young Malijak and a host of animals that reside in the court and its harem, Curzon noted that the Shah’s intense fondness for these strange characters pointed to his “personal idiosyncrasies… [and] illustrate the bent of a character which could hardly have been molded in any other surroundings than those of an Asiatic throne.”

Given Curzon’s position as a British official, with a plainly-articulated imperialist agenda, it was clear that his writings were far from neutral accounts of the region and its ruler, and instead were squarely situated within a genre of orientalist writing which claimed to offer comprehensive accounts of regions of the world that were a target of European economic expansionism and empire. This form of Western knowledge and its assessment of the world served to maintain the ideological position from which Western civilization presumed and sustained its sense of superiority.

506 Ibid., 409.
507 Ibid., 400.
508 As Said argues, the governing force of orientalist accounts is geo-political imperialism. Thus, as he puts it, Orientalism is a discourse that “is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with ideas about what ‘we’ do and what ‘they’ cannot do or understand as ‘we’ do).” See Said, Orientalism, 12.
What is perhaps most interesting is the fact that, while a descriptive account of the Shah’s harem was a consistent feature of this form of 19th century European writings about Iran, Islamic homosocial practices that were endemic in 19th century Iran meant that Western visitors to the land, who were predominantly male, rarely encountered Muslim women’s domestic lives, particularly in the urban metropolitan context of Tehran. Curzon himself noted that his only encounter with harem women would be possible through “the passage of a closed litter with silken curtains, or of an ancient coach containing undistinguishable masses of drapery.” It is easy to see then why so much of the writing about the Qajar harem by European men was focused on their forced absence from the public realm through processes such as veiling and imagined spaces such as the harem. The royal harem represented the ultimate site of this form of seclusion, since any look at the Shah’s harem was a punishable offence. Yet despite the noted absence of any form of contact or encounter, royal harem women were a consistent presence within European accounts of 19th century Iran. Such accounts are to be read, rather, as records of non-encounters, and the fascinations and frustrations associated with this lack of access.

Travelers showed a consistent and strong interest in the Gulistan Palace’s domestic quarters and the life behind its walls. These narratives at once represented and constructed accounts of Iran, in particular of the cultural institutions and religious practices associated with domestic life through imagining what hid behind those walls. In Veiled Half-Truths: Western Travelers’ Perceptions of Middle Eastern Women, Judy Marbo argues that European travelers had a continuous interest in presenting harems and

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509 Rural women were more visible during this period and one finds descriptions of them in many European travelogues.  
510 Curzon, Persia and the Persian Question, Volume I, 408.
the veil as both exotic and backwards precisely because they were sites which hid the
women’s bodies from the Western gaze. In other words, they were sites of non-
encounters. She argues that despite the fact that large-scale harems as they were
understood in the West “[were] extremely rare and would have appeared just as ‘exotic’
to the majority of Middle Eastern women who lived in rural areas, were poor, and did a
large proportion of the agricultural labor,” they, along with the veil, were amongst the
most popular motifs in Western accounts of Eastern women.\textsuperscript{511} The harem and the veil
fueled assumptions made by European travelers that Muslim women were necessarily
more oppressed, more passive, and more ignorant than their European counterparts.
Looking at the representation of Muslim women within such texts, wherein the authors
had little to no access to their subjects, is an ideal way to debunk their claims to
authoritative objectivity and revealing instead a host of anxieties and uncertainty about
the knowledge they produced as they attempted to make the foreign territories they were
narrating intelligible to themselves and their European audience.

In the preface to his 1887 work \textit{Persia and the Persians}, S.G.W. Benjamin (1837-1914),
the first American minister to Iran who was stationed there between 1883-1885, made an
overt claim to objective neutrality as a defining feature of his account.\textsuperscript{512} He stated: “[t]he
position of the diplomatist should be that of absolute impartiality towards all foreign
nations and governments in times of outward peace, and strictly colorless with respect to

\textsuperscript{511}Mabro, 2.
\textsuperscript{512}Throughout the second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, while there was increasing contact between the United
States and Iran, the United States had little interest in influencing Persian affairs and the diplomatic
relations between the nations remained cordial.
politics at home.\textsuperscript{513} Despite such explicit assertions of objectivity, orientalist ideology and colonial logic dominated the descriptive accounts of Iranian people in his narrative. For example, Benjamin offered a detailed explanation of the inherent differences between Europeans and Asians:

A Persian mounts his horse on the right side; he draws the saw towards him in cutting wood; he reads and writes from right to left. These may appear trifling in themselves, but they are typical of the profound divergences existing in the intellectual East . . . a European, by greater flexibility and adaptive power may accommodate himself to the Asiatic and become almost an Asiatic; but the Asiatic never succeeds in wholly adapting himself to the conditions of European life, or to a knowledge of European character.\textsuperscript{514}

Nowhere were these inherent differences more noticeable than in domestic life, which he saw as steeped in “a profound mystery and seclusion.” He attributed this to “the percepts of the Koran” that have been “a marked feature of oriental life in all ages.”\textsuperscript{515} Benjamin’s description of domestic affairs again reaffirmed an orientalist discourse fueled by non-encounters. He stated:

\ldots there is another phase of life in Persia, of which he who lives years in that country knows little or sees less—a state of mystery, a system hidden in the midst of a city busy and apparently open to the widest public. I refer to the domestic customs of Persia, and mode of existence followed by women in the land of romance and song . . . in Tehrân one sees but rarely the face of a woman . . . unless he be a mussulman, in which case he may have all the concubines he pleases.\textsuperscript{516}

Yet Benjamin’s view of Iranian women marked an evolution within orientalist narratives—an evolution, which paralleled the shifts in diplomatic relations between America and Iran in the late 19th century, as contrasted with those of Europe in general and Britain in particular. For example, he noted that while women’s faces were hidden

\textsuperscript{513}S.G.W. Benjamin, \textit{Persia and the Persians} (London: London J. Murray, 1887), x.
\textsuperscript{514}Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{515}Ibid., 89.
\textsuperscript{516}Ibid., 104.
and they had less access to education and public life than their European counterparts, “they are, from all I can gather, by no means stupid, and enjoy an influence and controlling power in domestic and state affairs not inferior to that of women elsewhere.”\textsuperscript{517} Furthermore, unlike many of his European predecessors, Benjamin acknowledged that the veil, while constricting in certain ways, did offer ordinary women freedom of movement in the public realm:

In her mantle or veil, completely covering her from head to foot, a woman can go wherever she pleases without the slightest possibility of her identity being detected . . . the women of Tehran can thus go anywhere with little risk of detection.\textsuperscript{518}

However, for him, the women of the royal harem did not enjoy this form of freedom:

The wives of the Shah and of his sons are debarred the privilege, never going abroad without numerous attendants. The former are always accompanied by the royal guards, who, at a certain distance before and behind the royal ladies, keep the way clear. When these ladies propose to leave the palace, the event is announced by heralds in all the streets by which they are to pass.\textsuperscript{519}

In Benjamin’s critique, the condition of harem women was primarily described through their lack of access to freedom of movement in the public realm. Interestingly, this was precisely the site within which Benjamin’s only contact with these women took place.

On June 12\textsuperscript{th}, 1884, as recounted in his travelogue \textit{The Life and Adventures of Freelance}, Benjamin and his daughter, accompanied by the American legion, were traveling from Tehran to their summer rest spot in Shimran. Upon reaching a caravanserai, they took a pause, not realizing that the caravanserai was, at the time, occupied by the Shah’s wives who were also mid-journey. He stated:

\textsuperscript{517}Ibid., 105.  
\textsuperscript{518}Ibid., 106.  
\textsuperscript{519}Ibid., 106.
For ages it has been and may still be, for aught I know, “a law of the Medes and Persians which changeth not,” That no one shall pass the King’s wives on the road, and if any one meets them, he must either face the other way or turn, if possible, into another street or byway. The day is still within memory of some living, when any helpless individual caught looking or crossing the road in front of them has been slaughtered on the spot.  

However, rather than turning away, Benjamin’s entourage decided to continue to pass by, believing that more recent social norms suggested that foreign ministers no longer had to follow such traditional customs. Yet the royal guards did not adhere to these modern standards. Upon seeing Benjamin’s carriage nearing, they decided to attack:

On this occasion we were much surprised to see a squadron of the royal guards spur their horses from each side of the road and fly at my outriders who immediately yelled, “The American minister is in the carriage!” This did not seem to produce the effect desired for the troopers continued to bear down on my outriders, striving to arrest them; my men in the meantime, resisting with admirable pluck. Then my carriage itself was attacked. I shall not soon forget the Captain’s position as, mounted on a fiery gray steed, and with tawny beard and flashing eyes, he vainly strove to check the wild dash of my black Afghans as they flew past the carriage of the royal wives until he was forced to let go, to save himself from being hurled under their hoofs.

Benjamin’s anger at the situation spanned several pages of the last section of his travelogue, as he awaited a formal apology from Nasir al-Din’s court. In fact, he went so far as to threaten to “haul down his flag” and cease diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran if his request was not granted. It is possible to imagine that Benjamin’s generalized assessment of the horrible life conditions of harem women was in fact quite colored by his personal experience—in this case, his only contact with harem

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521 Ibid.
522 Ibid., 384-385.
523 Ibid., 389.
women was narrated through the violent reaction of their guards to his presence and the humiliating attack that his entourage suffered at their hands. The reinforcement of the orientalist myth that royal harem women were amongst the most imprisoned and isolated constituents of the Qajar empire was then perhaps less a product of either the colonizing gaze or the supposed unbiased objectivity that Benjamin lay claim to, and more the result of a personal grudge or the remnants of a negative encounter.

While a reading of any of these Western accounts of the Gulistan harem can easily identify the orientalist impulse within them, it would be a mistake to discount the possibilities of alternative narratives that also simultaneously unfolded within these texts. Western male writers did not have a singular experience of 19th century Iran, and their various reflections and representations of Iran held a number of productive inconsistencies. For example, while thus far the 19th century European and American travelers I’ve engaged with were all government representatives stationed in Iran, there were also other categories of visitors whose accounts revealed different levels of access to and intimacy with the women of Nasir al-Din’s harem.

As part of a broader set of French diplomatic efforts which took place during Nasir al-Din’s reign, the Qajar court had a French physician serve as the Shah’s doctor throughout the second half of the 19th century. For almost 30 years, this post was filled by the French physician Joseph Désiré Tholozan (1820-1897). Upon his retirement in 1888, Tholozan was replaced by Jean-Baptiste Feuvrier (1842-1926), a French military doctor who was

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employed by the Qajar court for three years from 1888-1892. Feuvrier’s tenure, though significantly shorter than Tholozan’s, was noteworthy because he kept a daily journal chronicling his time at Nasir al-Din’s court. The journal provided detailed accounts of daily court life, including both government and domestic affairs, which he later published as a travelogue, entitled *Trois ans à la cour de Perse*, in 1900.

Though Feuvrier’s presence in the Qajar court had diplomatic significance, he was not officially a political representative or diplomat. As such, his perception was less riddled with the imperialist logic that we find in the works of figures such as Fraser, Curzon, and Benjamin. Furthermore, because the work was primarily composed of daily journal entries, it offered an account of late 19th century Qajar court in a chronicle format, which did not rely on an overriding ideology that would serve to structure his account. Hayden White argues that, unlike historical writings that narrativize reality into ideologically driven human universals, often through telling moralized stories, there are two forms of representation of historical reality in writing that are non-narrative in form: annals and chronicles. While the former lacks any semblance of a narrative component, and is simply a record of events in chronological order, the chronicle still wants to tell a story, often through a central subject who narrates. However, the chronicle is generally marked “by a failure to achieve narrative closure.” White states that “[w]hile annals represent historical reality *as if* real events did not display the form of story, the chronicle represents it *as if* real events appeared to human consciousness in the form of unfinished

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525 Although Jean Calmard states that Feuvrier served from 1889-1892, Feuvrier’s own account begins in 1888.
527 Ibid., 20.
Feuvrier’s travelogue, and in particular, its descriptions of the *andarun*, fall within this latter category of historical writing. While the impulse to moralize Islamic gender relations was still somewhat present in the work, this was notably less of an overarching theme than in the works of other European writers, as Feuvrier’s account was far more focused on detailed descriptive accounts of events he witnessed. The book was based on daily journal entries, which chronicled observations made by an individual who had close proximity to the Shah and his court. This allowed for the recording of a unique perspective.

For his time, Feuvrier was one of the only male Europeans with a significant level of access to Gulistan’s domestic affairs and he kept a record of his observations. Furthermore, Feuvrier’s writing showed that he had a great deal of respect for Nasir al-Din Shah. Unlike other European writers who presented him as a despotic leader, Feuvrier painted a sympathetic picture of the king. Early on in the text, he referred to him as “His Majesty Nasir al-din Shah, who has the qualities of an open-minded sovereign, and has shown benevolence towards me in all occasions.”

Interestingly, his descriptions of the institution of the harem, and the women who occupied it, were less ideologically marked than the other writers I have thus far examined. They were a recording of his own experience of living amongst, and being

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529Ibid., 9.
530Feuvrier, *Trois ans à cour de Perse*, vi.
somewhat enamored with, the most elite sector of Qajar society. For example, instead of viewing the practice of polygamy as a backward tradition attributed to Islam, Feuvrier was impressed by the Shah’s many wives and saw this as a testament to his monarchical grandeur:

Yes! A thousand women—and more, I have heard from someone well informed—a thousand women live at the andaroun. And forty black and white eunuchs are the shepherds of this flock. An average king, a very average king, takes on a poor appearance when compared side-by-side to the King of kings! One can imagine Naser al-Din's surprise during his first trip to Europe, at the court of Berlin; He could not believe that the Emperor William had "one wife," the Empress Augusta, and a woman so old no less.531

Due to his high level of physical access, Feuvrier’s travelogue offered one of the most comprehensive descriptions of both the arg and its andarun written by a European writer from the period. It includes a detailed map of the grounds, which my own work in the Chapter II relies upon for understanding the spatial organization of Gulistan (Figure33).532 Consider the following account Feuvrier offered on the 12th of November 1888 of the various forms of access he had to the andarun:

I have entered the andarun, located in the northern part of the palace, several times already. Sometimes, I enter through the door of the Orangerie which is generally reserved for the Shah, and other times through the common door, which is on Rue de l'Anderoun, and which is the counterpart to the Diamond Gate. . . Through the Orangerie gate, I go directly to where his majesty has ordered me to go, preceded by a eunuch who has been ordered to accompany me. Otherwise, if I have been invited to go inside by a patient, I go through the street door, which opens to the first courtyard around which are the lodgings of eunuchs. I then encounter the chief eunuch, Khajeh Bachi, a great Abyssinian who is more than two meters tall, and whose legs and arms—as I have seen on several eunuchs—have developed beyond measure. His excellency Etemad el Harem accompanies me, if not everywhere, at least to an inner door which is at the end of a corridor where the personal eunuchs of the women who are calling me await. With them I pass this door, which closes heavily behind us, and together we enter a vast court,

531Ibid., 157-158.
532Ibid., 146.
wherein many women escape like phantoms upon hearing the cries of the eunuchs. A piece of fabric covers them from the head to the feet, like a shroud.  

While as a court physician, Feuvrier was one of the very few namahram men (amongst both Europeans and Iranians) to be allowed to enter the royal andarun, his acquaintance and familiarity with harem women evolved throughout his three-year stay. The above description was from his first year as the resident physician, and while he was able to visit the andarun regularly, harem women still appeared in this account as an unidentified and covered collective. Though his description of physical space of the interior quarters offered great detail, there was no indication of any personal encounter between him and these women—the only figures who were named and described in some detail were the eunuchs. However, throughout the text we see the increased level of contact he had with the residents of the andarun. Initially, he stated that “caring for these women is not easy. The doctor has to also act as diplomat simply to understand what they are suffering from.”  

However, later in the text one got the sense that there was an evolving feeling of comfort that many harem women felt with the French physician. In turn, Feuvrier got to know many of them and he developed personal rapport with individual women. This was particularly noteworthy in Feuvrier’s descriptions of his growing relationship with one of the Shah’s favored wives, Amin Aqdas.

As mentioned in the Chapter I, in the later part of her life Amin Aqdas suffered from a degenerative eye disease, and Feuvrier was one of many physicians who attempted to

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533Ibid., 155-156.
534Ibid., 189.
treat her condition.\textsuperscript{535} In his initial interactions with Amin Aqdas, he was unable to properly examine and diagnose her. He stated, “I had difficulties getting to know the disease from which she suffers. . . I had to overcome the resistance of the patient who complained of everything except her eyes which were the main source of trouble, and which I didn't even get to see in my first three visits.”\textsuperscript{536} Eventually, the Shah intervened and, escorted by a eunuch, Feuvrier returned to the andarun for a proper examination: “I arrive at the patient’s place, who, this time, uncovers her face and answers my questions frankly.”\textsuperscript{537} The material opening of the andarun’s door, along with the symbolic lifting of the veil, marked an important instance of a recorded contact between a European man and a Qajar harem woman (recall that the previous accounts were all primarily based on “non-encounters”). In fact, after he was able to offer her some relief from her pain, Amin Aqdas began to cultivate a trusting relationship with Feuvrier, offering him tea and sweets during visits, showering him with presents, and confiding in him about the affairs of the court.\textsuperscript{538} The growing intimacy between the two was evident through the numerous mentions of her throughout the text during Feuvrier’s last two years in Tehran, as well as his increased investment in and concern for her health issues.\textsuperscript{539} On February 16, 1890, she even went so far as to offer him a tour of her private bathhouse, a space that was technically forbidden not only to namahram men, but to all Christians. Feuvrier stated:

. . . Emin Agdas shows me proof of her confidence by sending me to visit her bath. It consists of two rooms whose floor and walls are all in white marble: the

\textsuperscript{536} Feuvrier, \textit{Trois ans à cour de Perse}, 191, 295.
\textsuperscript{537} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{538} Ibid., 191-195, 375.
\textsuperscript{539} She is mentioned frequently in his entries during this period, and there is clearly a developing sense of familiarity between the two. See: Ibid., 215-217, 228, 251, 279, 288, 289,
toilet room and what is properly called the bathroom. In the center of the room is a small basin with a jet of water, intended to diffuse a mild freshness; A *takhtcheh* contains the various objects of dress; Two larger niches, facing each other, and furnished with thick carpets, resemble couch-beds. Here the bather leaves her clothes before entering the second room, which feels like an oven, half filled by two large basins full of different-tempered water. The bathing ritual usually consists of submerging for ten minutes in the warm basin, ten minutes in the hot one, and ten minutes out of the water, exposed to steam. After this is done, wrapped in soft woolen blankets, the bather returns to the bedroom to lie down on the carpet, often for an hour, until the reaction is complete. Then the long and meticulous process of applying toileteries begins: the hands and feet are dyed red with the aid of henna; the kohl blackens the eyebrows by enlarging them and uniting them above the nose, the depilatory pastes do their work, the hair is braided tightly in an infinity of mats. Nothing, in a word, is neglected so that the woman to whom the sovereign has thrown the handkerchief appears with all her advantages. And this toilet after the bath lasted . . . half a day.  

This entry into Amin Aqdas’s bathroom marked a significant shift from the earlier accounts of the harem offered by European travelers to the region, and even those from Feuvrier himself. While his initial description of the *andarun* primarily focused on its façade and courtyard, by 1890 he was showing unparalleled access to the most deeply interior and private realms of the Gulistan haram and contact with one of its highest-ranked residents.

The level of comfort that Amin Aqdas had with Feuvrier, and her increased level of trust in his ability as a physician and confident, was also a testament to the increased presence and familiarity of Western ideas and people in Iran during this transformative period in the last decade of the 19th century. It was perhaps as a result of the bond she developed with him that she was eventually comfortable embarking on a trip to Europe in search of a cure for her failing eyesight. There was a great deal of opposition to this trip, most notably by Amin al-Dawlah, the Shah’s supposedly Westernized advisor, who argued

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540Ibid., 195
that she should receive the surgery somewhere within the Ottoman empire, where she would be amongst other Muslims: “It is a Muslim city and the crossing through of Iranian women would be less strange there.” Despite much resistance, Amin Aqdas did eventually embark on a trip to Vienna. This was the first solo trip taken to Europe by a harem woman unaccompanied by the Shah, and thus was an important instance of the opening up of royal Qajar women’s travels abroad to farangistan.

**A European Woman’s Revisions**

The second half of the 19th century marked a period of a significant growth in cultural contact between European and Middle Eastern women more generally as both groups began to travel transnationally. In *Gender, Modernity, and Liberty*, Reina Lewis and Nancy Micklewright offer an edited volume of writings by Western and Middle Eastern women which were produced between 1837 and 1937. Through a collection of extracts from Ottoman, Egyptian, British, and American women’s writings from the period, the book showed that in the decades leading up to WWI, the role of women as either guardians of tradition or sites of modernity was hotly contested in both the East and West. While Iranian women are notably absent from this volume, Lewis and Micklewright argue that this period witnessed the emergence of organized feminism in both the West and the Middle East, including Iran. They view many of the elite women travelers they review as the transmitters of, and contributors to, a dialogically developing

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542 As noted in Chapter I, previously Anis al-Dawlah had traveled to Russia with the Shah, only to be sent back home.
The period also saw the emergence of a new genre of literature, referred to as harem literature, an emergent category of travel writing primarily authored by European women travelers.

Harem literature was different from previous forms of travel writings about Muslim women in several ways, and it challenged the orientalist and patriarchal tendencies of European male writers in their descriptions of Muslim women. Rather than relying on an overemphasis on the surface representation of Muslim women, as hidden figures who were absent from public culture, the genre was concerned with the material conditions of the lives and everyday domestic experiences of these women. As such, the focus was less on the writer’s journey. Instead, the authors delved into the customs, manners and morals of the Muslim women they encountered in the harems they visited. An important feature of this emerging genre was that, unlike most of the previous male accounts, harem literature drew on encounters, experiences, and exchange, rather than on external textual authority to narrativize its accounts of Muslim women’s lives. While the majority of harem literature from the 19th century was focused on the Ottoman context, the writings of Lady Mary Sheil were an important instance of a European woman’s encounter with the royal Qajar harem.

In 1851, just a few years into Nasir al-Din’s reign, Lady Mary Sheil (1825-1869) accompanied her husband, Lieutenant-Colonel Justin Sheil, to Iran where he had been

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serving in the British legation since 1836.\textsuperscript{544} During their years there, the couple had three children, and while much of Sheil’s time was occupied with child-rearing activities, she also learned Persian and wrote extensively about her experiences traveling in the country. Her work, \textit{Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia}, was published in 1856, and is considered to be the first travel book about the country written by a woman. While Sheil’s text often relied on her husband’s official dispatches for its qualitative data about Iran, since in her own words, “there are in Persia many subjects not accessible to female inquiry,”\textsuperscript{545} it was her own observations that offered an important site for investigating the gendered nature of the imperial gaze. The text was in fact a product of a European women’s encounter with elite domestic life in the Qajar capital.

In the preface to her work, Sheil acknowledged her familiarity with previous travelogues written by British male travelers to Iran, namely John Malcolm, James Baillie Fraser, and James Morier.\textsuperscript{546} She admitted to studying such texts prior to her arrival, and her initial observations of Qajar empire mimicked the writings of these European male observers. As such, her first impressions of Iranian women were in line with the kinds of colonial common sense so central to Fraser’s text. She stated, “In Persia a woman is a nobody.”\textsuperscript{547} Iranian women were described as secluded and imprisoned, backwards and barbaric. They were accused of frequently murdering their husbands. She stated:

\begin{quote}
The jealousy and animosity of the harem often drive its inmates to vengeance by means of “Kahwa e Kajaree,” the Kajar’s coffee. Kajar is the tribe-name of the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{544}Geoffrey Nash, \textit{Travellers to the Middle East from Burckhardt to Thesiger} (London: Anthem Press, 2009), 114.
\textsuperscript{545}Sheil, \textit{Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia}, a2.
\textsuperscript{546}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{547}Ibid., 86.
reigning dynasty; and allusion is to the poisoning of the cup, which that family has been accused of practicing.\textsuperscript{548}

Later in the text, she continued: “Power in the anderoon is nearly despotic. An immense deal of cruelty, even murder itself, can be committed in the harem, without any atonement.”\textsuperscript{549} She also re-told a tale she had heard of upper-class women who “instead of being stricken with fear . . . hail with glee the approach of cholera or plague, which to them brings freedom and release from monotony.”\textsuperscript{550} It is important to note that such embellished accounts of elite women’s unfathomably horrific lives were written prior to her encounters with and observations of, actual elite Qajar women and their domestic practices.

More broadly, much of her initial criticism of gender roles in Iran were based on her assumptions about the seclusion of women from public spaces and their lack of visibility in public life—assumptions which were consistent with her orientalist male predecessors’ accounts. She described how a woman “cannot move abroad without being thickly veiled; she cannot amuse herself by shopping in the bazars, owing to the attention she would attract.”\textsuperscript{551} As I noted in earlier chapters, this evaluation took the European liberal distinction between the public and the private as a given, and placed a premium on the former as the space of individual liberties. However, it was Sheil’s accounts of the private sphere which Iranian women occupied that was her greatest contribution to a more nuanced understanding of gender roles in Qajar Iran. Her work, written more than three decades before Feuvrier’s, marked the first instance that a European writer was able

\textsuperscript{548}Ibid., 92.
\textsuperscript{549}Ibid., 147.
\textsuperscript{550}Ibid., 93.
\textsuperscript{551}Ibid., 122.
to have direct access to royal Qajar women, to enter the domestic sphere of their
*andarun*, and to give an eyewitness account of “the condition of women in that portion of
the East.”

Upon such encounters, Sheil’s observations and writings offer us a site for an alternative
reading of imperialist narratives of the harem, one that reveals the patriarchal nature of
European imperialism and to some extent undermines some of its key premises. While, as
already mentioned, Sheil’s initial accounts were ideologically in line with civilizing
discourses such as Fraser’s, her narrative took a notable shift once observational accounts
of the harem were introduced. She stated:

> When I had acquired a sufficient knowledge of their language to be able to form
> an opinion, I found the few Persian women I was acquainted with in general
> lively and clever; they are restless and intriguing, and may be said to manage their
> husband’s and sons’ affairs. Persian men are made to yield to their wishes . . .

Far from being victims of despotic rule, Iranian women were described as managers of
the affairs of their husbands and sons. This description of the managing of male, and by
extension, public affairs by women who occupied the private/domestic realm was
amongst the first instances in the text where we see a blurring of the public/private
divide. It is also important to note Sheil’s emphasis on the acquisition of language skills
was a prerequisite for her access to these women. Recalling not only important male
interlocutors’ Fraser and Curzon’s lack of Persian linguistic skills, and also their
complete disinterest in acquiring them, Sheil’s account can be read as a counter-narrative

552Ibid., preface b.
553Ibid., 134.
or revision of the forms of orientalist knowledge production about Iranian women practiced by such authors.

In particular, Sheil’s text also gave a markedly different account of the space women occupied in the royal court. During her first official visit to Gulistan Palace, she visited with Nasir al-Din’s mother, Mahd-i ‘Ulya, who she referred to as the *Khanum* (the lady). Describing her, she stated:

She is very clever, and is supposed to take a large share in the affairs of the government. She has also the whole management of the Shah’s anderoon; so that I should think she must have a good deal to occupy her mind, as the Shah has three principle wives, and eight or nine inferior ones. These ladies have each a separate little establishment, and some a separate court from the rest, but all the courts have a communication with one another.\textsuperscript{554}

This account not only described the powerful position of the Shah’s mother within the harem, but also took note of a larger network of women with power and influence over the Qajar monarch. Descriptions of jealousy and barbaric behavior amongst them were now replaced with accounts of their clever dispositions, cooperative communication, and economic and social prosperity.\textsuperscript{555} She stated, “[w]hen a woman happens to possess unusual talent, or has a stronger understanding than her husband, she maintains her supremacy . . . over her husband, his purse, and property.”\textsuperscript{556}

Furthermore, throughout most instances in the text where Sheil was observing royal harem women interacting with each other, she showed them to be enjoying weekly baths, various leisurely activities in the garden, visits from a range of guests, eating elaborate

\textsuperscript{554}Ibid., 131-132.
\textsuperscript{555}Ibid., 130.
\textsuperscript{556}Ibid., 145.
meals, listening to music, and watching theatrical performances—all primarily in homosocial contexts, which as I argued in the first chapter, displayed the strong bonds amongst these women as well as their daily participation in public culture. Such accounts undermined the descriptions of rivalry and jealousy between harem women and instead revealed an intimate, elite, and complex familial structure within which their everyday lives took shape. Towards the end of her text, Sheil herself made a clear break away from previous European narratives of Iranian harems and offered a notably different observation that contradicted her own initial accounts:

My residence here has thoroughly dissipated my English ideas of the seclusion and servitude in which Persian women are supposed to live. Bondage, to a certain extent, there may be, but seclusion has no existence. Daily experience strengthens an opinion I had formed of the extent of the freedom in which they spend their lives... Jealousy, at all events, does not seem to disturb Persian life in the anderoon.557

Speaking of Iranian women as a whole, she stated:

All classes enjoy abundance of liberty, more so, I think, than amongst us. The complete envelopment of the face and person disguises them effectively from the nearest relatives, and destroying, when convenient, all distinctions of rank, gives unrestrained freedom.558

While initially Sheil’s narrative flaunted the superiority of European values over Iranian society, particularly with regard to gender relations, her conclusions offered a very different understanding of women’s freedom and liberty—one in which the private and public domain did not share the liberal European logic of distinction. Sheil concluded by saying that “I begin to think Persians are better people than travelers are willing to allow.”559 This was a clear indictment of Fraser and other European male travelers’

557 Ibid., 212.
558 Ibid., 245.
559 Ibid., 272.
accounts of Iran. It was also a revelation of the ways in which her relationship to empire, as well as her negotiations of the boundaries between private and public, and self and other, were all mediated through a highly gendered experience of cultural encounter.

**Multivocal Iranian Accounts**

While within the English language historiography of Qajar Iran European narratives were often the primary sources relied upon for insight into 19th century Iranian cultural practices, my dissertation has primarily examined local sources, which I argue offer a more complex and in-depth account of the everyday lives of residents of Gulistan Palace. Still, even within these sources, one can note a range of subjective positions and ideological motivations that influence and determine their descriptions of women’s lives in the Qajar court. For example, works that were written during Nasir al-Din’s reign were often markedly different from works about the court which were written after his assassination, and in particular during and after the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911). Furthermore, since the period marks a shift in public discourse about gender roles as a measure of modern progress, or alternatively, loss of traditional values, much like the European body of literature I have thus far examined, the role of women in society was addressed as a significant site of public discourse. An examination of Iranian accounts reveals some of the more interesting and nuanced ways in which the individuals who were a part of the Qajar royal court narrated gender roles within this institution against a background of discourses about Iranian modernity, which were endemic of the period.
Perhaps the most significant chronicle of court life under Nasir al-Din’s reign was attributed to I’timad al-Saltanah. Muhammad-Hassan Khan Sani’ al-Dawlah, later known as I’timad al-Saltanah (1843-1896), the son of Ali Khan Hajib al-Dawlah, one of Nasir al-Din’s chief attendants. Muhammad-Hassan Khan was amongst the first group of students to attend Dar al-Fanun university, where he developed his French language skills. At the age of twenty, he joined the first Persian mission to Paris, where he served as the second secretary and military attaché for five years. This allowed him to improve his language skills and gain familiarity with European culture, and upon his return he joined Nasir al-Din’s court as the court translator. He remained there until his death, serving under various titles. In 1886–87 Nasir al-Din Shah offered him the title of “I’timad al-Saltanah” (Confidant of the Realm), a high-ranking position which had previously belonged to his father. I’timad al-Saltanah accompanied the Shah on all three of his European tours, as well as most of his regional travels and official functions throughout the country and in its capital, giving him an exclusive form of access and a privileged perspective on the public and private life of the king.

Significantly, his daily entries were primarily transcribed by his wife, ‘Izzat-Malak, also known as Ashraf al-Saltanah. While most engagements with this source note that the diaries are in her handwriting, few scholars have paid adequate attention to the implications of this fact, or the potential for the presence of traces of her perspective in the narrative voice. Even a cursory engagement with this fact would note her high level

561 Ibid.
562 Ibid.
of literacy, which was unique, even for a woman of her stature. One could however, also argue that in the act of transcribing, her own observations and perspective could not help but enter the text. While I'timad al-Saltanah rarely mentioned her in the text,563 as his intimate confidant and observer of court life, as well as participant in harem culture, Ashraf al-Saltanah’s presence within and contributions to this text must be taken seriously.

Ashraf al-Saltanah 'Izzat-Malak was herself of the royal Qajar bloodline and the granddaughter of Fath‘Ali Shah. In his biographical account of aristocratic Qajar women, Camron Amin quotes her nephew Yaman al-Dawlah’s description of her:

Since she had no children, she spent most of her life studying books. She was partial to history and medicine. Owing to her closeness with E‘temad al-Saltaneh, she was well-informed about the politics of the Iranian court, national events, and foreign relations . . . She had wide latitude in Nasir al-Din Shah’s harem and in the service of the king . . . In sum, she was a manly woman who in all qualities—superficial and meaningful—excelled over most other women, as well as her spouses.564

'Izzat-Malak was also amongst the first female photographers of the Qajar period, having learned the medium from her brother, Prince Sultan Muhammad.565 By all accounts, she had an observant eye, and a significant level of influence over her husband. As such, though Ruznamah-‘i khatirat is credited exclusively to I‘timad al-Saltanah, one could,

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563Though he does at one point, prior to his trip to Europe, speak of his deep love for her and the strength of their 19-year union, despite not having had any children together. See: I’timad al-Saltanah, Ruznamah-‘i khatirat-i I’timad al-Saltanah 632.
565Scheiwiller, Liminalities of Gender and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century Iranian, 203.
and perhaps should, read it as a bi-vocal text generated through the collaboration between the “author” and the “writer.”

This work was a unique document of the period in part because of the ways in which it offered the most thorough and linear representation of temporality in the context of Nasir al-Din Shah’s court life. The journal, which was published almost two decades after I’timad al-Saltanah’s death, and consisted of regular daily entries that covered almost 17 years of his time serving in Nasir al-Din’s court in various capacities. An important feature of the Ruznamah-‘i khatirat was that the work did not have a well-marked beginning, middle, and end, or a clear narrative arc. However, the recording of certain incidents and events, both significant and mundane, and his often disapproving tone of Nasir al-Din’s behavior, offered us its own situated perspective, as well as a unique window into daily court life as seen by an individual who was a fixture in the institution for over two decades.

The work was not structured as a historical narrative, but rather, written as a recounting of key daily events in chronological order. The often short entries possessed very few of the attributes we associate with the kinds of historical narratives I have thus far examined. While the work did, in some ways, narrate accounts of reality, through the recording of events that were perceived by the author/writer as noteworthy, it did not narrativize that reality. This format, what Hayden White refered to as “a non-narrative

566While I take ‘Izzat-Malak’s potential and likely contribution to the work seriously, for the sake of consistency I have attributed the work to I’timad al-Saltanah throughout this dissertation, since he is the acknowledged author.

representation of historical reality,” did not offer a grand narrative or an overarching structure of meaning associated with each event, and as such could be classified at best as a chronicle or perhaps, more accurately, as situated in the category of annals. For White, these forms of non-narrative historical accounts offer conceptions of historical reality that are “alternatives to, rather than failed anticipations of, the fully-realized historical discourse that the modern history form is suppose to embody.”

Although the work was written as a private diary and was not intended to be a chronicle of official Qajar court history, it can be credited with capturing some of the most intimate and at times trivial and mundane details of court life, and the sordid social relations within in it. As such, it serves as a primary site of investigating what Stoler would term the “minor histories” of Qajar court life. She argues that, unlike traditional historical accounts which offer meta-narratives about the social, political, military, and economic affairs of a state, a minor history marks “a differential political temper and a critical space. It attends to structures of feeling and force that in ‘major’ history might be otherwise displaced.” That is not to say that minor histories tell the “real” story, or are separate from the economic, military, and political affairs that make up the bulk of “major” history. Instead, she argues that minor histories “make incisions” into the narrative assumptions of historical knowledge and attend to the nuanced forces within and general logic of that history that may otherwise be ignored or displaced. One of the

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568 White argues that while annals consist only of “a list of events ordered in chronological sequence,” the chronicle makes an attempt at telling a story through the sequence but typically fails to achieve narrativity. See, White, “The Value of Narrativity,” 9.
569 Ibid., 10.
570 Stoler, Along the Archival Grain, 4.
571 Ibid.
key incisions that *Ruznamah-‘i khatirat* makes within the historiography of Qajar Iran is to re-cast gender roles, particularly as they are negotiated with the Gulistan court and harem.

Far from showing harem women as secluded from public life, the text was filled with complaints about the level of access that harem women had to the outside world. As noted in previous chapters, the journal showed harem women to be in constant contact with high-powered officials and foreign visitors, both male and female, as well as wielding tremendous influence over the Shah.\textsuperscript{572} I‘timad al-Saltanah bemoaned the new generation of women in the harem who continuously broke from Islamic tradition, and on several occasions he was angered by the fact that harem women were so highly visible to him.\textsuperscript{573} In one particular instance, he described seeing a group of young harem women sitting out on a balcony overlooking the street. He stated:

> Every time someone passed by the street, they would taunt him. As I was passing by, they said, “Why are his trousers so wide?” I responded, “Why is this of importance to you?” and walked past them. I asked, “Who are these women?” I was told the group was made of the daughter of his highness the crown prince, who is the daughter-in-law of ‘Izzat al-Dawlah, and ‘Izzat al-Dawlah’s own daughter, and others. I was in shock and dismay at such behavior.\textsuperscript{574}

This behavior was indicative of the broader shifts in gender roles that he was begrudgingly witnessing, and he often equated this with a loss of Iranian cultural values.\textsuperscript{575} He was particularly critical of Nasir al-Din’s obsession with the young Malijak, as well as the increasing number of *sighahs* entering his harem.\textsuperscript{576} Though in public he

\textsuperscript{573}Ibid., 188, 450, 745.
\textsuperscript{574}Ibid., 697.
\textsuperscript{575}Ibid., 866.
\textsuperscript{576}Ibid., 866.
was one of Nasir al-Din’s closest confidants, in the private journals he often sided with the ulama class in their critique of the Shah’s affront to Islamic values. In one instance, he cited Mullah Fayzullah Tark, a preacher at the Saghabashi mosque, who complained about Nasir al-Din’s behavior:

What is this obsession with Malijak? They have brought shame to Islam. Why would they send a Muslim woman to Europe? Why did they send Amin Aqdas away? The hell with her blindness. Why would they break with Islamic tradition?577

He also criticized the significant impact harem women had on the political affairs of the court, and in particular, the power held by the many favored *sighahs* of Nasir al-Din, including Anis al-Dawlah, Amin Aqdas, and Khanum Bashi. He complained that these women were from lower classes, and disapproved of the level of influence that such village women had on the Shah, going so far as to argue that they, along with Malijak, had emerged as the true prime-minister to the Shah.578 Throughout the diary entries, the Gulistan harem was depicted as a primary site wherein tradition and modernity met, intermingled, and sometimes clashed. Ideas about the status of women in society, marriage, and family were shown to be the shifting terrain of these encounters.

While *Ruznamah-‘i khatirat* offers us the most vivid non-narrative representation of daily life in Nasir al-Din’s court and harem in a published format, a host of other residents have also written accounts and memoirs chronicling their lives within this institution. Amongst the most noteworthy accounts were those written by the Shah’s grandson, Dust-Ali Khan Mu‘ayyir al-Mamlik, whose work *Yaddasht-ha-‘i az zindigani-i khususi-i Nasir al-Din Shah* (Notes of the Private Life of Nasir al-Din Shah), chronicled his life growing

577Ibid., 697.
578Ibid., 971.
up in the Shah’s harem; by Taj al-Saltanah, one of the best-known daughters of the Shah, whose memoirs, *Crowning Anguish*, have been translated into English; and by Munis al-Dawlah, one of Anis al-Dawlah’s servants and confidants who published her memoirs about the late Qajar period as four essays in the journal *Zan-i Ruz* (Today’s Woman). While there are significant differences in both perspective and ideological positioning between these three works, their consistent characteristic is that they were all written several years after the events and context they described. Significantly, all three figures were, in their own way, responding to the post-constitutional era, and the texts were marked by their relationship to this important moment of socio-political shift and fracture. The specter of Europe, and its relationship to Iran, was a significant feature in all three works.

Dust-Ali Khan Mu‘ayyir al-Mamlık (1876-1966), one of the Shah’s grandsons from a daughter with his first wife, Galin Khanum, who was herself the granddaughter of Fath‘Ali Shah, opened his memoirs, *Yaddasht-ha-‘i az zindigani-khususi-i Nasir al-Din Shah*, by recounting his family’s relationship with the European ministers stationed in Tehran, as well as with their wives and children. He stated: “In those days, only two families had social relations with important Europeans in Tehran; one of them was my family.” He boasted of his father’s frequent hunting trips with English and French ambassadors, and his mother’s friendships with their wives. Descriptive accounts of proximity to, and contact with, European agents acted as an anchor at the beginning of

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the text. They reaffirmed his family’s privileged status as modern elite subjects. Unlike most modernist reformers however, his text is steeped in a nostalgic attitude about both Nasir al-Din and the period of his reign. In addition, it was filled with praise and awe for the former Shah, and went so far as to absolve the king of having played any role in Amir Kabir’s unfortunate death.

In his memoirs, Mu‘ayyir al-Mamlık gave one of the most detailed insider accounts of both the spatial and social organization of the Gulistan harem where he spent his youth. What is unique about his account is the fact that it was consistently mediated through his desire to recast Nasir-al Din as a well-educated and benevolent leader and his Qajar family as progressive modern subjects. His description of the harem showed it to be a lively and elite space with multiple forms of social relations, cultural activities, and both pious and secular practices. Nasir al-Din was described as a loving head of this household, who spent ample time cultivating familial bonds and intimate relations between and amongst his many wives and children. For example, he stated: “On nights when the Shah was in particularly good spirits, he would gather all the women around him and tell them sweet stories.” He described nightly visits to the harem by the Shah, where he would make his rounds of visiting each household, followed by a collective dinner, during which the Shah, along with his many wives and children, would enjoy

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580 Mehran Kamrava has argued that 19th century Persian domestic elites saw greater social contact with Europe as a means to the modernization of Iran. He argues that this association happened in parallel with increased economic and diplomatic ties that were central means for the rapid colonial expansion of the European post-industrial revolution into the region. See Mehran Kamrava, The Political History of Modern Iran: From Tribalism to Theocracy (Westport: Praeger Publisher, 1992), 22-24.


582 Perhaps the only other account that matches Mu‘ayyir al-Mamlık’s nostalgic tone is the diaries of Malijak.

various musical and theatrical performances.\textsuperscript{584} While, much like I’timad al-Saltanah, Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik complained about the power of and rivalry and animosity between harem women, unlike I’timad al-Saltanah, in this account, the Shah was represented as the benevolent arbitrator who maintained peace within his elaborate family structure. For example, Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik told the story of a night when, over dinner, Anis al-Dawlah, speaking of one of the Shah’s daughters Fakhr al-Maluk, offered the following insult:

My dear king, I have wondered in amazement why, amongst all your children, it is only this girl who has been deprived of inheriting your beauty. Now it is clear that, since at the time of her birth there was such a strong belief in ghosts and goblins, she was born in their image.\textsuperscript{585}

While everyone at the gathering laughed at the slight, upsetting Fakhr al-Maluk, who was also present, Nasir al-Din was described as a loving and kind father who put his daughter at ease by stating that it was a well-known fact amongst all who were present that Anis al-Dawlah was a joker, and one must not be bothered by her silly assertions.\textsuperscript{586} The rest of the evening was described as a regular familial and collective evening of leisure activities.

Furthermore the harem in Mu’ayyir al-Mamlik’s description, was not the site of backward traditions but an epicenter of modernity with frequent contact with foreign ideas, peoples, and cultures. He described the Shah as a pious leader, who, nevertheless, selectively embraced European influence through regular contact with foreign diplomats and scholars. He credited the Shah for bringing scholars from Austria, France, and

\textsuperscript{584}Ibid., 22.  
\textsuperscript{585}Ibid., 25.  
\textsuperscript{586}Ibid.
Germany to teach at Dar al-Fanun. He also offered many accounts of the Shah meeting with European and Ottoman officials in the court, stating, “When he did not feel like leaving the harem, these men were ordered to come to the andarun, but keep their eyes closed.” This maintenance of piety in the face of European contact was also echoed in his description of Amin Aqdas’s visit to Vienna for her eye operation. In her embrace of modern European medicine, she still maintained Islamic tradition: “She never took off her veil [in her time in Europe] and it was said that during her time there, she lived her life as though she was still in the Shah’s andarun.” Yet he also spoke of harem women being very influenced by European fashion and design, which was increasingly being imported first to the harem and then distributed amongst elite women throughout the city. This description of the harem as an Islamic institution which was simultaneously the epicenter of cosmopolitanism and elite piety was a consistent feature of the text and one which functioned to foster a progressive image of the Qajar family.

In contrast to Mu’ayyir al-Mamlık’s nostalgic reading of Nasir al-Din’s reign, the writing of Taj al-Saltanah (1884-1936), one of the Shah’s favored daughters, who also spent her childhood years in the Gulistan haram, was marked by a far more dystopic ideological tone in relation to life under Qajar rule. As the only memoir from a royal woman in Nasir al-Din’s court, some scholars have contested the authenticity of the work. However, given that the premise of this chapter is to ideologically position different representations

587 Ibid., 38.
588 Ibid., 33.
589 Ibid., 120.
590 Ibid., 35.
of the harem, and given that Taj’s account is one of the most widely-circulated accounts from inside Nasir al-Din’s harem written by a woman (and the only Iranian account which has been translated into English), it deserves an investigative engagement.

Taj al-Saltanah was the daughter of the princess Maryam Turan al-Saltanah and was raised in the andarun of Nasir al-Din Shah’s court by a motley crew of harem women and servants. She was only twelve when Nasir al-Din Shah was assassinated and therefore much of her impressions, which she recorded at the age of thirty, were filtered through her feminist awakening during the Constitutional Period (1905-1911). The memoir was written in 1914, in the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution, and five years into the reign of the last Qajar ruler, Ahmad Shah (1909-1925). According to her, the text was an attempt to tell her life story to her teacher, who she also referred to as a young male cousin, Sulayman.

Taj al-Saltanah’s text was marked both by her strong grasp of language and prose as well as by a consistent and contradictory tension in the representation of her past which, in her own words, “excites both wonder and anguish.” While she described a life lived in the lap of luxury amongst an elite and extended Qajar family, and with a loving father figure, she simultaneously rejected the Islamic domestic culture of the harem and painted a picture of Nasir al-Din as a foolish king whose obsession with trivial matters prevented

592 Afsaneh Najmabadi and Parvin Paidar are amongst the many scholars who have argued persuasively that considerations of gender and the role of women in society shifted during this period and emerged as a central focus of nationalistic discourses of the Constitutional Period. See: Najmabadi, Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards, 207-231; Parvin Paidar, Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 50-70.
593 Taj al-Saltana, Crowning Anguish, 77.
594 Ibid.
him from being an enlightened leader. For example, in describing the lives of harem women in one instance, she stated: “It is impossible for man to conjure up in the realm of his imagination a sweeter, easier life. In the course of the year they were not visited by any grief, difficulty, pain, or bitterness.” Yet throughout the work, she also looked down on Nasir al-Din’s obsession with both his cat Babri Khan and the young Malijak, as well as his many young concubines and his frivolous leisure activities such as horse racing and hunting. This tension in the text, was the result of a revisiting of her past through the lens of European liberal ideology. While her memories of actual events painted an image of a predominantly well-lived life in the harem, her ideological gaze back countered these memories with moralistic condescension. For example, she was extremely critical of arranged marriage and polygamy, the bedrock of the harem structure in which she grew up:

Truly, what greater misfortune could one suffer than to have to take a husband in childhood . . . Of mankind’s great misfortunes one is this, that one must take a wife or husband according to the wishes of one’s parents. This bizarre custom does not stand reason and is contrary to law. Here the Europeans are right—but they surpass us in all areas of learning and progress.

And yet, her descriptions of social relations within the harem did not point to this misfortune. She described strong homosocial bonds amongst harem women who “often band together in friendship,” and enjoyed both each other and the Shah’s company. For example, in describing a harem gathering upon the Shah’s return from a trip, she stated:

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595 Ibid., 94.
596 Ibid., 90.
597 Ibid., 92.
598 Ibid., 134.
599 Ibid., 94.
600 Ibid., 108.
601 Ibid., 94.
All the ladies were happy, laughing, and strolling about the grounds. The orchestra was playing. Joy and vitalityemanated from the very walls, and everyone was united in happiness.\textsuperscript{602}

In contrast to such descriptions of everyday life throughout the memoir, Taj al-Saltanah simultaneously and harshly criticized the place that women occupied within late 19\textsuperscript{th} century Iranian society:

I reproach the traditions and ethos of a nation that barred the way towards happiness to all women and held them wretched and unenlightened, in a world of utmost ignorance. All moral defects or evils in this country have originated and spread from the absence of the education of women.\textsuperscript{603}

She also spent a great deal of time promoting a certain vision of motherhood, which was in line with European liberal ideals of womanhood. In fact, she referenced several European thinkers and extensively quoted their thoughts on the subject, including Jules Simon, a 19\textsuperscript{th} century French colonialist and reformist writer.\textsuperscript{604} Quoting him, she wrote:

The roots of noble conduct, which can be linked to a young tree, grow in two places . . . at school and at home . . . Who is [the] gentle gardener in the home? The mother. And what is her responsibility towards her children? The imparting of education, information, knowledge . . . obviously education at home begins before school. In fact, the former is the basis of progress in the latter. And this is one of the special gifts and favors God has bestowed upon women. Hence, a nation’s social betterment . . . and its admission in the caravan of contemporary civilization are contingent on the betterment of the status and education of its women.\textsuperscript{605}

This feminine ideal also went hand-in-hand with monogamous marriage and a nuclear family where the mother is responsible for nurturing the body and mind of her child.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{602}Ibid., 122.
\item \textsuperscript{603}Ibid., 78.
\item \textsuperscript{604}Jules was a firm believer that the prosperity of the French in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century depended on an expansionist vision its colonies. See : “Simon, Jules François,” \textit{Encyclopedia Britannica}, 11\textsuperscript{th} edition, Cambridge University Press, 125.
\item \textsuperscript{605}Ibid., 84.
\end{itemize}
Such an ideological position was in line with European liberal discourses where modern maternal roles were recast as the patriotic and national duty of women.

Taj al-Saltanah described both herself and her mother as falling short of such feminine ideals, and instead being immersed in a self-indulgent lifestyle that did not allow for the proper nurturing of their minds and, by extension that of their children.606 Her own life was characterized as being limited by a failed marriage and a lack of proper maternal instinct, which she blamed on her backward upbringing in the Qajar harem.607 The rhetorical promotion of European liberalism led Taj to bemoan the role of women in Qajar society more generally:

It disheartens and grieves me to think that my fellows—that is, the women of Persia—are ignorant of their rights and make no efforts to fulfill their obligations as human beings.608

And yet, in contrast to this ideological positioning, throughout the text Taj al-Saltanah boasted of her own education and knowledge. She gave a detailed account of her schooling, which began at the age of seven, and told of both her classroom environment and the private tutor who was appointed to her.609 She spoke highly of the knowledge and wisdom of the many harem women who made an appearance in her memoir. Anis al-Dawlah was described as “intelligent and upstanding . . . she held the first rank in character and respectability.”610 In another instance, the overseer of the harem, Aqul Bagha Khanum, was described as “competent, distinguished, well-educated, and

606Ibid., 82.
607Ibid.
608Ibid.
609Ibid., 96.
610Ibid., 102.
benevolent.611 Nowhere was this tension more legible than in her attitude towards her teacher, reflected in the condescending tone with which she addressed him throughout the text. She clearly saw herself as more enlightened, and the entire text was structured around her schooling of him.

This tension between descriptive accounts of everyday life and an ideologically-motivated revision of that life was perhaps an even more pronounced feature of the writings of Munis al-Dawlah, a servant and confidant of Anis al-Dawlah. In 1966, at the height of the Pahlavi era’s White Revolution612 and its attempt at the national enfranchisement of women, she published her memoirs as a four-part essay series in Zan-i Ruz (Today’s Woman). Zan-i Ruz was a popular women's weekly magazine published in Tehran beginning in 1964, during a period of increased participation by women in the national press as part of the White Revolution’s agenda.613 The magazine was widely considered to be a mouth-piece directed at Iranian women by the Pahlavi regime, and its views and politics often echoed that of the reigning Iranian state, the Pahlavi monarchy.614

Munis al-Dawlah penned these essays towards the end of her life, while in in her mid-90’s, and she situated herself within the early state-sponsored feminist movement of which Zan-i Ruz was a part.615 As such, much like Taj al-Saltanah, liberal feminist

611Ibid., 98.
613Zan-i Ruz (Today’s Woman) was a women's weekly magazine published in Tehran beginning in 1964.
615Munis al-Dawlah, Khaterat-i Munis al-Dawlah, 5.
ideology provided the overriding moral tone of her writings and she was highly critical of women’s role in Qajar social order. In fact, addressing her young female readers, she stated early in the text that the work was a cautionary tale “so that you will know the dark conditions faced by Iranian women in those years.” She stated:

Yes, the lights of my eyes. A hundred years ago, this was the condition of women: love and partnership for them was a curse. Your grandmothers were treated like domesticated animals. Without taking their opinions or desires into consideration, they would negotiate a price for their heads, just as they would over servants and maids. Yes, the women of the past were no more than mere servants.

Yet, despite this moralistic overtone which was reminiscent of that of orientalist writers such as Fraser, her descriptive accounts of daily life presented the harem and its constituents as leading both socially and culturally enriched lives.

Throughout this text, the move between discursive morality and everyday experience created a complex and often contradictory narrative about royal Qajar women’s lives. Much like other writers who spent time as residents of Nasir al-Din Shah’s andarun, Munis al-Dawlah offered an image of an elite homosocial world full of luxury, entertainment, and affective and familial bonds. Within her descriptive accounts of daily life, the harem was far from a prison house, and instead, the life inside its walls was one which was coveted by women of all classes. She, for example, recounted an annual public event wherein a ta’ziyah play was performed in the andarun, hosted by Munir al-Saltanah, one of Nasir al-Din’s wives. She approximated that every year an audience of two thousand women from all walks of life attended this event, in the hope that they would catch the attention of either Nasir al-Din or his sons, who were also usually in

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616 Ibid., 17.
617 Ibid., 42.
attendance. These royal men would often select a few of the women from the audience to enter the harem as *sighah*, a coveted position, according to Munis al-Dawlah, amongst the local women.618 In another instant, she offered an account of bathhouse culture, which described women’s bathing rituals as a form of participation in a female public sphere, wherein women gathered, socialized, and discussed everything from fashion and hygiene to politics.619

Throughout her work, Munis al-Dawlah described the many wives of Nasir al-Din as being far from “mere servants,” and instead characterized them as “smart and cunning… women who made a comfortable position for themselves in the court.”620 Furthermore, the very fact that she herself was a servant, with close ties to Anis al-Dawlah, and yet was very well-educated, was indicative of the complex social and class dynamics within the harem hierarchy for which I have been arguing throughout this dissertation. Thus, the contradictions in her work, much like those present in Taj al-Saltanah’s diaries, were only made legible through the positioning of both authors’ works in the context of the post-Constitutional Revolution period and the shifts in Iran’s engagement with the modernization project which took form in the first half of the 20th century.

**Conclusion**

During the second half of the 19th century, and in part as a result of increased cultural contact between Iran and the world, the role of women in society became a site of public

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618 Ibid., 107.
619 Ibid., 237.
620 Ibid., 164.
discourse within both European and local accounts. In particular, both European and Iranian writers from the period made significant efforts to give descriptive accounts of women’s daily lives within the Qajar court as a way to speak to broader social issues and changing gender dynamics in the region. These textual representations, some of which were written in the earlier part of the 20th century, were in their own unique way a product of cross-cultural encounters which produced narratives that were never neutrally positioned. I take up the works examined in this chapter as contested and dialogical texts, which can be read both along and against the grain of their intention, in order to offer multiple perspectives on this singular space of the Qajar harem and its many constituents.

In order to get a clear picture of the complexity of these women’s lives, which took shape at the crux of Iran’s modernization efforts, we must not only examine the diversity of sources within which they appear, we must also critically examine the ideological positioning, what Stoler refers to as the tone and temper of a source, that mediates their appearance. Such bias cannot only be reduced to the orientalist or masculinist gaze of European travelers, as they were equally present within the Persain sources. Since harem women were among a minority of elite women during the Qajar period who had access to education and literacy, they were among the few women from the period who have left behind a literary record. However, as my critical reading of sources like Taj al-Saltanah and Munis al-Dawlah suggests, their writings also cannot simply be read as accurate self-representation, or as counter-narratives to male orientalist and imperialist writers. These women’s narrativizations of the Qajar harem were also informed by the political and ideological shifts which were endemic to the time in the production of their texts.
This chapter takes Hayden White’s assertion that all historical narratives are embedded in a politics as its foundational premise. Through a close reading of several different narratives about the Qajar harem, this chapter reveals the various investments that multiple narrators made in the space. I do so with full awareness that my own work is also another instance of an ideologically-motivated take on the time, space, and people of the Qajar past.
Conclusion

On May 1st, 1896, on the eve of the 15th anniversary of his reign, Nasir al-Din Shah was assassinated by Mirza Riza Kirmani, an anti-monarch agitator and follower of pan-Islamist ideology, in the Shah ‘Abdal ‘Azim shrine.621 Within one month, on June 8th, 1896, his son Muzaffar al-Din Shah ascended the throne and began an intensive reform program, which cleared the path for the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911). The historiography of modern Iran has characterized Muzaffar al-Din Shah’s reign as a period of rapid opening up to the West and simultaneous monarchical decline, which culminated in the Constitutional Revolution—the true pinnacle of Iran’s secular modernization project—with the advent of a parliamentary system, increased emphasis on Western style and education, and a shift in gender roles and family formation as its key characteristics.622

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, the Gulistan andarun was an epicenter of Iranian engagements with the modernization project, and so it is not surprising that this severe shift in Iranian political culture, which took place in the wake of Nasir al-Din Shah’s assassination was also reflected, if not initiated, in the domestic sphere of the Gulistan harem. Within days of taking the throne, Muzaffar al-Din Shah issued an edict demanding the expulsion of the population of Gulistan’s andarun. As ‘Ayn al-Saltanah reported on June 17th, 1896, “all his [Nasir al-Din’s] wives were forced to leave Muzaffar

621 Amanat, Pivot of the Universe, 440.
Taj al-Saltanah described the time she spent in Sarvestan, after her forced eviction from Gulistan, as amongst the most painful episodes of her life:

The courtyard of Sarvestan was divided into sections, and we were housed there like captives and prisoners. My sisters and I would join together every day in weeping, importuning our mothers, and asking for our father.625

While the women who had children were offered a modest stipend, the majority of the wives, who had no children, were simply thrown out on the street with little recourse. Court records showed that even those few women lucky enough to be eligible for a stipend, had difficulty collecting their pay for the remainder of their lives.626 For example, on December 24, 1913, in a group letter written by some of Nasir al-Din’s wives to the Finance Minister, they wrote:

We, insignificant people, after the eviction of Nasir al-Din’s harem, were eligible for a stipend, which we used to live our modest lives... We are now desperate. We ask from you, who are the bearer of God’s grace, to bring us this modest fund which is our salary, so that, with your help, the few remaining days of our lives shall not be spent in such misery.627

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623. Ayn al-Saltaneh, Ruznami khatirat, vol. II, 1037
624. Taj al-Saltana, Crowning Anguish, 158
625. Ibid.
627. Ibid., 10.
This was one of several letters written by women of Nassir al-Din’s harem to various Qajar officials and finance ministers over the course of the two decades after the Shah’s assassination. They asked, often begged, for meager salaries, stipends, or any form of financial assistance to cover their basic sustenance. In another letter, the author wrote:

If you examine the files of the Finance Minister, you will see that in pursuit of these meager salaries, we have reached out and begged these ministers many times. Each of them agreed to help, but none of this resulted in us getting paid. It has been several months that we unfortunate creatures have not received a salary. Now, because of the dire situation we face, we ask that you pay attention to us poor women, who keep begging for your help.628

Many of these women spent their remaining years sick, isolated, and living in dire poverty. Taj al-Saltanah herself died in impoverished circumstances in Tehran in 1936.629

The eviction of Gulistan’s constituents was not limited to the wives and children of Nasir al-Din Shah. Taj noted that the servant class was also not spared as the new Shah dismissed all the servants and attendants that had served during her father’s rule.630 In all, an estimated 500 people were evacuated from the andarun within the first two weeks of the new monarch’s reign, and most with little to no compensation.

Interestingly enough, some key court servants and performers fared better outside the court than the Shah’s wives and children. During Nasir al-Din’s reign, most harem performers lived in the andarun, received salaries from their mistresses, and could not perform outside Gulistan without their permission. As such, although they lived moderately comfortable lives, they were limited in their ability to assert any sense of

628Ibid., 12.
629Taj al-Saltana, Crowning Anguish, 217.
630Ibid., 157.
autonomy, move freely, or generate independent incomes. However, after the assassination and disbanding of the Gulistan andarun, harem entertainers were amongst the most skilled individuals who were evicted, and many were able to use the training they had acquired in the harem to make comfortable lives for themselves on the outside. Haji Qadamshad, for example, was a tall African woman who was a servant in Nasir al-Din’s court. She was in charge of supervising a group of female entertainers in the harem, which included musicians, singers, and dancers. After Nasir al-Din’s assassination, she formed an alliance with Isma’il Bazzaz, the head of a court minstrel band, and they opened a theatre outside Gulistan where many of the former singers, dancers, and court and harem musicians who served under Nasir al-Din Shah were brought together. The theatre became increasingly popular in the following years and was frequented by various elite sectors of Tehran society.

Munis al-Dawlah also told the story of Za’faran Baji, a servant who was a nanny in Nasir al-Din Shah’s harem at the time of his death. According to Munis al-Dawlah, soon after the harem was disbanded she formed a women’s troupe that performed mourning rituals (ruzih khuni), which also became popular in Tehran during the years leading up to the Constitutional Revolution. She was able to make a good living from these activities, and by the time of her death she was a successful business and property owner. A small bazaar to the south of Gulistan was named after her. Such stories were further

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631 Munis al-Dawlah, Khaterat-i Munis al-Dawlah, 175.
632 Ibid. 175-178.
634 Munis al-Dawlah also tells the story of the daughter of an African slave woman, a performer by the name of Zahra Siyah, who in the years leading up to the Constitutional Revolution emerged as one of the most famous singers in Tehran. See Ibid., 173
testament to the resourcefulness and resilience of the servant class of Gulistan Palace, which I documented in Chapter IV, and which carried some of them through the chaotic years after the disbanding of the harem.

During his reign, Muzaffar al-Din Shah maintained his own much smaller and more modest harem. As Taj al-Saltanah noted, Muzaffar al-Din Shah’s family was “limited to seven wives.” Despite the continued presence of this institution under Muzaffar al-Din Shah, Nasir al-Din’s assassination marked the beginning of the rapid reduction and eventual termination of the royal harem as a significant component of Iranian monarchical rule. The following decades witnessed a complete disbanding of the institution and a full-force embrace of monogamous marriage within elite Iranian society.

The disbanding of the Gulistan harem then was a significant instance that reflected shifting views on gender roles and marriage practices amongst the most elite sector of Iranian society, from polygamy to monogamy. In practice, royal marriages were social contracts, which reflected Nasir al-Din’s linkage with different regions and classes within the empire, alongside his often strange and affectionate bond for various low-ranking servant women. These relations were now replaced by the new models of matrimony which represented a heterosexual romantic companionate unions between two adults, often from the same social class, as the preferred expression of modern family formation.

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636 Mohamad Shah Qajar, whose short reign lasted from 1907-1909, had only two wives, and Ahamad Shah, the last Qajar ruler from 1909-1925, married a total of five women during his life.
In a sense, at the turn of the century the Gulistan harem represented a space of accelerated modernization—a place that displayed in plain sight the sharp contrast between imported social customs associated with Western modernity and local conventions which were increasingly deemed to be the symptoms of Iranian backwardness. As Afsaneh Najmabadi has pointed out, by the end of the century the rampant homosocial culture, which was part and parcel of the gender-segregated cultural practices that defined 19th century Iranian private and public domains, were in rapid decline. Thus, the move to end the practice of polygamy within elite Iranian society was part of a larger social reconfiguration which called for the heterosocialization of both public and private life. Najmabadi shows the ways in which many European observers in the previous century had conflated homosociality with homosexual and deviant behaviors, and this was in part responsible for their categorical rejection of Islamic gender segregation. As many historians have noted, among the most important social changes during the years leading up to the Consitutional Revolution, and certainly in its aftermath, was a major shift in gender relations, the institution of marriage, and what constituted family formation, which became more aligned with European bourgeois ideals. By the turn of the century, the triumph of monogamous heterosexual marriage as the only acceptable form of modern matrimony demanded that women place love and

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638 Ibid., 38.
639 While, throughout her work, Najmabadi offers a detailed account of representations of homoerotic desire amongst men in the period leading up to the end of 19th century, including the Shah’s relationship with Malijak, the question of whether or not homosocial relationships amongst women also involved same-sex desire and practice goes unanswered, in part as a result of the lack of archival documentation of women’s sexual practices from the period. See: Ibid., 39.
640 See Ameli-Rezaei, *Safar-i Dan-i Bah Gul*, 97
loyalty to their husband and children over more complex homosocial and familial bonds.\(^{641}\)

The quick contraction and eventual termination of the harem as a monarchical establishment was thus an important marker of these broader social changes.\(^{642}\) Within modernist and reformist narratives, large-scale royal harems were reimagined along orientalist lines as sites of Islamic decadence and Qajar backwardness, exemplified by gender segregation and the presumed mistreatment of women.\(^{643}\) The royal family formation thus acted as a symbolic yardstick for measuring the progress of the empire along European moral registers. However, for the majority of the women who had actually lived in Nasir al-Din Shah’s harem, this notion of progress did not align with the actual life conditions they faced once the harem was dismantled. Instead, their homosocial bonds, affective service relationships, and various other stratified familial and kin connections, on which they had relied, and which I have documented throughout my dissertation, were both literally and figuratively evicted from the heart of the empire, and by extension, the elite Iranian social imagination. They were replaced by a nuclear family model which functioned to alienate them both socially and economically from the center of power they had once occupied.

I began this project by asserting that the royal Qajar harem under Nasir al-Din Shah was an ideal site for studying both the possibilities and limits of an alternative social

\(^{641}\)According to Najmabadi, this also led to a rejection of same-sex social and sexual relations. See: Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards*, 7.

\(^{642}\)Kashani-Sabet, *Conceiving Citizens*, 59.

\(^{643}\)Ameli-Rezaei, *Safar-i Dan-i Bah Gul*, 76-77.
formation that stood in opposition to the nuclear family and which has so often been the target of feminist critiques. Through looking at this institution, and the various traces supplied by those who recalled a lived experience of everyday life within it, this work offers a cultural history that holds the promise of alterative social formations recovered from a historical context that has thus far existed on the periphery, if not all together outside, the Western feminist imagination. My goal here was not to present the Gulistan haram as a utopic space of feminist homosociality. As I have shown throughout this work, while affection, kinship, and relationships of proximity across racial, class, and gender lines were in part responsible for the composition and power arrangements within the royal andarun, bondage, captivity, and hierarchies of power are equally central components of such an institution. My dissertation is thus more specifically interested in investigating the ways intimacy and dependency were created and maintained within this large-scale, multilayered household, and how power circulated through differing channels and across various social categories.

For me, this is what makes the examination of the Qajar harem under Nasir al-Din shah’s rule a history of the present—a politically-driven history that intervenes in the dominant narratives which offer critiques of the nuclear family model through reflecting on the promise of alternative social formations transmitted and recovered from non-Western centers of power. As I have shown throughout this study, the Gulistan harem stood at the crux of Iran’s engagements with Western modernity, and in the heart of a developing urban metropolis. While this institution was indeed highly elite and hierarchically organized, the kinds of social, affective, and political power that circulated within its
boundaries marked it as a historically specific and unique liminal social space that deserves further attention and investigation.
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Fig. 1. “Group of women, marble stairs,” Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran. ID 210-2-4.

Fig. 2. Lehnert & Landrock, *In the harem*, 1900-1910, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lehnert_%26_Landrock_-_204_-_Harem.jpg (accessed November 9, 2017).

Fig. 3. “This group photograph was taken on the rooftop of Saltanatabad andarun,” Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran. ID 210-9-5.


Fig. 5. “Group of my wives, and Anis al-Dawlah’s guests for Eid celebrations, with servants and children. Madame Paula (?) with her child is in the middle,” Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center Tehran, Iran. ID 210-7-1.

Fig. 6. Excerpt from “Report of Visitors entering and leaving the harem,” 1309/1891, document 296-11781, National Archives of Iran.

Fig. 7. Baghban Bashi, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran, ID 210-22-3.


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Fig. 13. “Shah and Malijak, bed chamber (khabgah) stairs,” 1887, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran. ID 285-8.

Fig. 14. Nasir al-Din and ‘Aziz al-Sultan, Malijak Sani, Ruznamah-yi khatirat, 85.


Fig. 16. Amin Aqdas (standing in front holding between Agha Sarvar Khan’Itimad al-Haram and Agha Muhamad Khan, who’s hand she is holding) and her entourage including Baghban Bashi (directly behind her), Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran. ID 210-23.

Fig. 17. Anis al-Dawlah and piano, 1864-1881, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran, ID 289-7-1.

Fig. 18. Group of harem women in Gulistan courtyard, 1864-1881, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran. ID 289-5-2.


Fig. 20. Eugène Flandin, Illustration of Divan Khanah with marble throne located on its talar, 1839-1841, Voyage en Perse, avec Flandin, edited by Gide et Baudry, 1851, Vol 2.


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Fig. 30. Imarat-i Badgir and Takkiyah-’i Dawlat, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran, ID 209-6.


Fig. 32. Ta’ziyah play at Takkiyah-’i Dawlat, oil painting Kamal-al-Mulk, Gulistan Palace Museum.


Fig. 34. Jean-Baptiste Feuvrier, Tehran Plan de L’Ark, 1889-1892, Trois ans à cour de Perse.

Fig. 35. New andarun under construction. Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran, ID 343-4.

Fig. 36. Exterior view of Sardar-i Almas with guards, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran, ID 209-12.

Fig. 37. View of harem women posing on the talars of new andarun buildings, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran, ID 682-16.
Fig. 38. “Imarat-i Khabgah oriented towards Ka‘bah,” with court eunuchs standing guard, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran, ID 209-2.

Fig. 39. “Our women’s party at Anis al-Dawlah’s home,” Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran, ID 2010-2-3.

Fig 40. “Group of women,” Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran ID 210-4-4.

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Fig. 43. “Women’s congregational prayer led by the blind Shaykh Assad Allah Qari,” 1864-1881, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran, ID 289-10-2.

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Fig. 56. Group of court servants, with Malijak seated in the middle front row on Jujuq Khanum’s lap, Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran, ID 210-25-4.

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