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Camron Michael Amin. *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman: Gender, State Policy, and Popular Culture, 1865-1946.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002. xii + 320 pp. $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-2471-4.

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Male Guardians and Female Protegees in the Struggle for Modern IranianIdentity

This is definitely one of the best books that have been written on gender and identity in modern Iran. Camron Amin's historical study is original, well-researched, and relevant not only for scholars of Iran but also for anyone interested in the problematic constellation of nineteenth- and twentieth-century developing-world nationalisms, gender, and Western-identified modernity more generally. Amin's work is particularly strong because, unlike much of the scholarship being published on Iranian women (Afsaneh Najmabadi's work being an exception), his whole study is informed by an original theoretical argument. Amin uses the concept of "male guardianship" to structure his analysis of nearly one hundred years of state policy and cultural change concerning Iranian women. He argues that despite changes in the state itself (regime and dynastic upheaval) as well as in state policies and their critiques, Iranian male elites shared an understanding of themselves as the guardians of Iranian women. As the symbol of national identity, Iranian women needed to fulfill the destinies that best served the national interest, as Iranian men defined it. The argument was over the vision of national interest: was it best embodied in traditional culture or in an embrace of the new? In the replication of current institutions, or in their transformation? Men (and a few women) argued vehemently over women's proper role in modern Iranian society. But they were united in their failure even to consider the prospect of women's political or social independence. Although some mid-century women managed to carve out remarkable lives for themselves (the first Iranian woman pilot; the first generation of trained female doctors and medical administrators), even they tended to see themselves as the responsive feminine beneficiaries of a system of appropriate masculine mentoring. Amin makes clear that throughout the period of his study, the Woman Question in Iran was not a question of women's freedom or equality, but of the competition between different male guardians and their own conceptions of appropriate national development.

This is not to say that Amin slights female agency. The book is full of examples of women's resistance and argument against overt male control. Rather, I would most closely compare Amin's study to Partha Chatterjee's double chapter discussion of nationalist/national arguments about Indian women's appropriate role in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories.*[1] Like Chatterjee, Amin tracks the development of woman as symbol within a national discourse of competing modern identities, and attends to the tensions that symbolism created in actual women's lives. Oddly, although rather typically, Chatterjee is not cited in the bibliography. I suspect this is not an intentional omission on Amin's part, but instead a reflection of the tendency among Iranian scholars to contextualize their work entirely within the Islamic identity of the MENA region, rather than to consider links with non-Islamic colonial and postcolonial situations. (Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi's recent *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography*, at least, makes excellent use of the extensive Persian-language archives in some Indian libraries.[2]) Even if the similarity of Amin's project to Chatterjee's analysis is accidental, it is a happy accident, and may be a sign that gender scholarship on Iran is finally gaining a broader theoretical and historical relevance than its usual preoccupation with national exceptionalism.

Amin's utilization of the conceptual framework of male guardianship allows him to refigure the usual historical periodization of modern Iranian history by regime: Qajar; Pahlavi; Islamist. Instead, he is able to trace continuities across dynasties, and despite radical changes in policies. In particular, he focuses on the "Women's Awakening," the period from 1936-41 when Reza Shah Pahlavi instituted a project of state-sponsored

feminism that attempted to create the modern Iranian woman: educated, professionally employed, unveiled. Arguments over the "Women's Awakening" have usually revolved around the question of whether it emancipated women from the bonds of social and religious tradition, or dictated women's behavior under the justification of a superficial modernization. Amin effectively argues that both interpretations are valid. The key is his recognition that the "Women's Awakening" was not attempting to create an equal or independent modern Iranian woman, but rather a woman who could be an appropriate complement to her modern Iranian husband (and a good modern mother to his children), both of whom were fulfilling their national roles in the modernizing Pahlavi state.

Interestingly, Amin makes clear that much of the resistance to the reforms of the "Women's Awakening" occurred because ordinary Iranian men realized that their own personal guardianship of their women was increasingly being superceded by the paternalistic national guardianship of the state and Reza Shah. There was popular backlash against state-sponsored reforms, particularly against unveiled women and women working in offices, although girls' education and women's work as doctors, nurses, and teachers continued to be accepted. But by the 1940s, the tension between the norm of male guardianship and new possibilities for women's self-defined emancipation had pushed beyond the consensus of the past eighty years. At the same time that the "Women's Awakening" was fading as a state project, Iranian women (with some men) initiated the first efforts to define a new role for themselves that was not primarily domestic-based (as wives and mothers) or complementary to male citizenship (the first serious demands for women's suffrage occurred in 1946).

It is not surprising that the tension between male guardianship and women's emancipation has not yet been resolved in Iranian society, given that the most fundamental political problem in contemporary Iran is the tension between clerical guardianship and popular democracy. But this lack of resolution of the Woman Question is a further indication of the deep significance of Camron Amin's book. From its emergence in the eighteenth century, modern feminism has always been part of the struggle to define women's citizenship within the national context. The arguments over women's national role are always shaped by the other political issues of a given historical period. By framing developments in modern Iranian women's history within the concept of (male) guardianship, Amin has provided a superb focused study that also illuminates the underlying political tension in the wider national context. The relations of women to men, the relations of citizens to the state, and the relations of citizens to each other are still primary political issues for Iranian social actors. This book provides an insightful contribution not only to the scholarship on modern Iranian women, but also to the discourse on modern Iranian politics more generally.

Notes

[1]. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), chapter 6, "The Nation and Its Women," pp. 116-134, and chapter 7, "Women and the Nation," pp. 135-157.

[2]. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

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