

## ARTICLE

## Pictorial Modernity and the Armenian Women of Iran

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### Abstract

The essay explores the entangled relationship between modernization and women's visibility and representation through three pictorial spheres most redolent of that relationship: photo studio culture (1880s–1930s), satirical cartoons (1920–58), and costume exhibition (1972–76). The study prioritizes minoritarian politics formulated by women through their organizations and public activities, whether charitable in the late nineteenth century, educational in the early twentieth century, or “civilizational” from the mid-twentieth century on. By examining pictorial and textual sources, it proposes that the Armenian woman as a discursive phenomenon was central to Iran's mainstream modernization and foregrounds the complex working of a double marginality to the processes, strategies, and anxieties of late Qajar and Pahlavi modernization.

**Keywords:** Armenian women; *Bobokh*; exhibitions; Qajar photography; satirical journals; *Tsakhavel*; women's organizations

“I had dressed as a village girl,” recounted Marina Guevrekian, whose mother, an accountant, was a committed member of one of the six major Armenian women's organizations in Iran: the Armenian Woman Union (*Hay Kin Miut'iwn*, AWU, est. 1939).<sup>1</sup> The 1972 event had been planned by the Women's Organization of Iran (*sazeman-e zanan-e iran*, WOI, est. 1966) under the presidency of the monarch's sister, Ashraf Pahlavi. The WOI had invited Iranian minority groups to present two girls in “traditional dress” to embody their distinct culture, thus denoting an Iran that under the Pahlavis in the 1970s celebrated an anesthetized yet inclusive nationalism. Almost a half a century later, COVID-19-style masked and socially distanced in a living room in Los Angeles, Guevrekian excitedly recalled the first of two occasions when, as a model in Armenian costume, she came face-to-face with Empress Farah, who took an interest in the young “peasant” and inquired about her life pursuits. When Guevrekian responded, “I just got my BS in chemistry,” the empress rejoined, “Oh my, you are such an educated peasant!” This encounter between a young woman from an upper-middle class, ethno-religious minority family and the royal champion of Iranian art and women encapsulates layers of historical complexities and the many perils of a Third World brand of modernity. It also signals the complex working of a double marginality—a woman and an Armenian—contributing to the process of negotiating and shaping a secular nationhood as an ambivalent yet also ambitious project of cosmopolitanism.

<sup>1</sup> Marina Guevrekian (daughter of AWU leader Amalia Guevrekian and model for AWU exhibition) in an interview conducted by the authors, July 16, 2020, Pasadena, CA.

The larger book project that this article anticipates aims to explore the history of Iran's Armenian women from the beginning of Naser al-Din Shah's reign in 1848 to the 1979 fall of the Pahlavi dynasty. As the first scholarly study of its kind, it analyzes the shifting relationship between Iran's central nodes of power (absolute monarchy and patriarchy) and its Armenian female subjects (ethnic minorities and women) in the larger matrix of Qajar and Pahlavi Iran and modernization processes. With few exceptions, little scholarship exists on the lives of minority women in modern Iran. The book prioritizes minoritarian politics formulated by women themselves through their organizations and public activities, be they charitable in nature in the latter part of the nineteenth century, educational in the early twentieth century, or "civilizational" from the mid-twentieth century on. It focuses on those organizations that self-identified as both Armenian and women's associations to understand how they positioned themselves vis-à-vis the patrilocal structures of their own communities (e.g., the Armenian Apostolic Church and Armenian political parties), the mainstream Iranian women's organizations (e.g., WOI), the Iranian state and monarchy, and the wider women's movement internationally. It further offers a critical look at the dynamics of double marginality, that is, an ethno-religious and gender inclusion-exclusion within the larger context of modernization. The narrative is of a subaltern positionality in relation to local or communal and broader institutional, state, ideological, and global bodies that concerned themselves with women as a modernist subjecthood.

Until now, the topic has either been covered in the pages of Armenian-language non-scholarly biographical and encyclopedic-like accounts, where abbreviated biographies of women have been published, often alongside the achievements of men, or notable community-oriented anniversary collections by Armenian women's organizations, which document their activities.<sup>2</sup> Armenian women in Iran as a scholarly subject have been mostly absent, with the exception of Berberian's articles on early modern and modern Irano-Armenian women. Although we have witnessed important work emerging on Armenian women in the late Ottoman Empire, especially related to the Armenian Genocide, and post-genocide Turkey, that is not the case for Iran.<sup>3</sup> Although rich and diverse, studies on women in Iran have bypassed Armenian women, and those on minorities have hardly addressed Armenian women or gender. In this collaborative study, we integrate women's, minority, and visual culture studies to explore the workings of Iranian modernization. In doing so, we do not suggest that collaboration on its own necessarily yields richer results nor that tapping into multiple sources produces a broader, more complex picture of Iranian mainstream histories. Rather, we urge a reframing of the approach to Iranian modernization that considers its margins central to its processes instead of exceptional, as conventionally portrayed. Thus, we aim to provide a curative to existing narratives on Iran's histories of modernization.

We employ pictorial representations of Armenian women to demonstrate their impact on the processes, strategies, and anxieties of modernization in late Qajar and Pahlavi Iran. Like the European New Woman, herself a discursive category whose history is secured through texts and images, the reconstruction of Armenian women's history is equally dependent upon textual and visual mediations.<sup>4</sup> Our engagement with text and image is necessitated by the machinery of modernization that was conditioned by pictorial order—pictorial order that is central to its discursive and pragmatic workability. Furthermore, the question of inclusion and exclusion of minorities was a foundational issue that had to be reworked in the matrix of nationalism for the transition from the Qajar Shi'a empire to the secular Pahlavi nation-state. Because the visual representation of women has been key to the strategies of modernization—whether by the other, that is the state, foreigners, or community male leadership, or representations of the self by women themselves—the history of

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Lazarian, *Iranahayots'*; and Baghdasaryan, *Iranahay*.

<sup>3</sup> Most notable, see Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*.

<sup>4</sup> Collins, "Athletic Fashion," 309.

modernization in Iran cannot be fully explained without a minoritarian approach to modernism that is imbedded in visual as well as textual discourses. In this article, we explore the entangled relationship between modernization and women's visibility and representation through three pictorial spheres most redolent of that relationship: photo studio culture (1880s–1930s), satirical cartoons (1920–58), and costume exhibition (1972–76). Through our analysis, we provide evidence for the proposition that the Armenian woman as a discursive phenomenon was central to Iran's mainstream modernization.

### Silences in Photographs and Photography Studios, 1880s–1930s

The top-down women's movement of the 1930s and then again in the 1960s has been the focus of numerous excellent studies by scholars of both Iranian feminism and Iranian modernism precisely because these movements were seen as key instruments in rapid and state-imposed modernization agendas that relied heavily on shaping a new image of the modern woman. As several authors of women's history have argued, the dilemma for the women's movement was "what would they do with an education?" or, put differently, the dilemma of the disturbing modernist proposition that through secular education women would encroach on the male monopoly over the public domain.<sup>5</sup> Primary voices confirm this predicament. When asked during an oral history interview whether "diplomas or certificates" were presented to graduates and how these were "honored," the missionary and principal of the American Mission Iran Bethel Girls' School, Jane Doolittle, replied candidly, "There wasn't anybody to honor it; at that time, the girls never applied for any work or anything."<sup>6</sup> The exception was a fabulous photo opportunity at the fashionable Roussie-Khan photo studio (Photographie Russe or *akas-khaneh-ye monsieur rusi-khan*; Fig. 1) on Aalo ol-Doleh Street. Nevertheless, the diploma of these girls graduating from Iran Bethel (Nurbakhsh after 1940) paved the way for the physical presence of women-as-citizens in the public spheres of education, the workforce, and the modern city.

Among the forms of representation, photography played a pivotal role in Iran's modernizing processes, as Naser al-Din Shah adopted the camera to shape the image of his long reign. Iran's history of photography, and in particular that photographic patronage was a key Qajar practice and ownership of a camera a signifier of progress, reveals much about Iran's modernity, particularly in exploring the depiction of its liminal subjects.<sup>7</sup> In Qajar Iran, "one of the easiest ways to become modern," as Layla Diba sums up, "was to become a photographer."<sup>8</sup> In this section, we foreground the engagement of Iran's Armenian minority with photography that enabled the visibility of Armenian women's ambitions.<sup>9</sup> Through photography, these women entered the domain of public representation as modern subjects and citizens. Be it in global commerce or visual culture, Iran's Armenians had a solid local history on which to lean. As one of the most successful mercantile communities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Armenians of New Julfa in the Safavid capital of Isfahan traveled and traded widely; were fluent in multiple languages and manners; circulated people, objects, and information along their vast networks; commissioned and collected high art; and, like their European counterparts, curated cabinets of curiosities.<sup>10</sup> They also were "cultural mediators" who straddled several worldviews and lifestyles and acted as agents of visual exchange.<sup>11</sup> In the footsteps of their Safavid forerunners who had rapidly appropriated European navigation technology and expanded their trade globally,

<sup>5</sup> Berberian, "Armenian Women," 82. See also Ekmekçioglu, *Recovering Armenia*, 8–9; and Najmabadi, *Women*, 201–2.

<sup>6</sup> Doolittle interview, Foundation for Iranian Studies; "Jane Elizabeth Doolittle," Foreign Missionary Vertical File.

<sup>7</sup> Vorderstrasse, "To Be," and "What Can(Not)," 73, 107.

<sup>8</sup> Diba in Nodjoumi, *Of Kings and Paintings*, 36:44–49.

<sup>9</sup> On the history of photography in the Ottoman Empire and the central role of Armenians, see Eldem, "Powerful Images"; Kouymjian, "Profession photographe"; Low, "Photography"; and Woodward, "Between Orientalist Clichés."

<sup>10</sup> Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean*.

<sup>11</sup> Landau, "Workshops"; Georgian, *Amēnun Taregirk'ē*; Loosley, "Ladies"; Landau and van Lint, "Patronage."



**FIGURE 1.** Front and back of the graduating class of the American Girls' School, formally known Iran Bethel Girls' School. Photo studio of Photographie Russe Roussie-Khan, Tehran. The handwritten note states, "June 8th 1910. With the love of your teacher and friend, Cora Bartlett." Courtesy of Seda Darmanian Hovnanian Archives, Moneh and Greg Der Grigorian Private Collection, La Canada, California.

many nineteenth-century photographers embraced the modern promises of the camera and formed a new global photographic network.<sup>12</sup>

This "influential subgroup" inherited several attributes that guaranteed its success with the modern symbol-crazed clientele.<sup>13</sup> Like the New Julfan merchants, Irano-Armenian photographers too straddled multiple domestic sociocultural spheres—i.e., the Qajar court and nobility, the Western missionary and artistic circles, the local urban populations regardless of ethnic and religious boundaries, and the Armenian global diasporas—with similar implications for the influence of their cultural capital on Iranian society at large. Their epistemic positionality afforded these photographers Homi Bhabha's concept of "mimicry" through which to perform a "complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power."<sup>14</sup> Trailing Safavid trade routes, until as late as the 1940s New Julfans sent their boys to Bombay or Calcutta to get a British education. At the end of the nineteenth century, many returned home with a camera in hand. It was the latest New Julfan import even as early as 1849—the year that Jules Richard aborted his mission to photograph Persepolis under the order of Naser al-Din Shah.<sup>15</sup> Within several decades, from the 1880s to the 1930s, this Armenian photographic network stretched from Central Asia to Western Europe, often overlapping with the major urban centers and port cities where New

<sup>12</sup> Herzig, "Terminology"; Schwerda, "Photography."

<sup>13</sup> Schwerda, "Photography," 86.

<sup>14</sup> Bhabha, "Of Mimicry."

<sup>15</sup> Hovhannisian writes that in 1849, Ter Stepanos Baghramian imported a camera to New Julfa from India and that he has seen the back of a photograph in the Baghramian Collection marked "New Julfa 1849." See Hovhannisian, *Nor Jughayi*. See also Damandan, *Portrait*; and Tahmasbpour, "Photography."

Julfan merchants and their Ottoman Armenian counterparts had dominated in commerce and artistic patronage starting from the reign of Shah Abbas I to their ruin by Nader Shah's policies in the 1740s.<sup>16</sup> The struggle for constitutional rule and the modernization processes that it implied were seen by nondominant religious communities as opportunities for upward social mobility, and Irano-Armenians "contributed more than any other community to Iran's material modernization."<sup>17</sup>

In the mid-nineteenth century, "the earliest and most successful photography businesses belonged to Armenians," not only in Iran but in the Middle East and beyond.<sup>18</sup> With a significant influence on the history of photography, Armenian photographers with photo studios operated in a number of cities, including Ashgabat, Tehran, Isfahan and New Julfa, Tabriz, Shushi/Shusha, Baku, Yerevan, Alexandrapol/Gyumri, Tiflis/Tbilisi, Manglisi, Akhaltsikhe, Kutaisi, Batumi, Kars, Constantinople/Istanbul, Partizak/Izmit, Baghdad, Alexandria, Cairo, Damascus, Jerusalem, Athens, Burgas, Varna, Shumen, Paris, and London. In this extensive network, at least two studios were owned by women under their own names: Ashkhen Ivani Aristakova's studio, established in Baku in 1898, provided "all kinds of photographic services," including hand-colored photos and printing on silk and marble, and Satenik Gibrianosyan's studio, active in the 1900–1910s in Varna.<sup>19</sup>

Within Qajar Iran, aside from Antoin Sevruguin, several Westerners helped shape the photographic discourse on the image of the Irano-Armenian woman. Among others, Assyrian missionary Isaac Malek Yonan, Russian photographer Dmitri Yermakov, German telegraph engineer Ernst Hoeltzer, Dutch collector and trader Albert Hotz, the "mysterious and elusive" W. Ordén, and Anglican bishop Charles Stileman in various degrees and styles depicted and described women in the ethnographic type of "the Armenian."<sup>20</sup> Parallel to them labored the lesser-known local Armenian photographers. In Tehran, photo studios opened by Armenians, whom we recognize based on their use of the Armenian script in their backstamps, included Joseph Papaziantz, who opened a studio in 1875, followed by Mikon Aghayiantz Armeni and Osip Iosiphianz (most likely Hovsep Yusefianz).<sup>21</sup> In numbers, they were outdone by New Julfan Armenian photographers. Tuni Johannes (Hovhanesian) is credited with opening the first public commercial studio in Isfahan in 1880. Martin Manuk was a Calcutta-educated Armenian from New Julfa, who in 1924 became Agha's representative in Isfahan. When Manuk decided to move his studio to Tehran, he transferred Agha's agency to another New Julfan photographer, also educated in Calcutta, Minas (Mkrtchian) Patkerahanian (lit. image-maker).<sup>22</sup> Mateos Gharakanian and Trdat Tadevos Abgarian were among other New Julfans who worked as professional photographers in Isfahan.

In Tabriz, the commercial studio of Melik Voskalian (1901–49) provided a wide range of photographic services, including family and individual portraits and commercial advertisements, as well as capturing the royals, Reza Shah and Prince Mohammad Reza, on their visit to Tabriz.<sup>23</sup> Voskalian diversified his portfolio by creating customized advertisements for Western products in the early 1930s. His sitter for these works was his young daughter,

<sup>16</sup> Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean*, 96, 159, 163.

<sup>17</sup> Amanat, *Iran*.

<sup>18</sup> Navab, "To Be." See also Graham-Brown, *Images of Women*; and Vorderstrasse, "To Be."

<sup>19</sup> Galstyan, "Shooting," "Ivani Aristakova," and "Gibrianosyan."

<sup>20</sup> Pérez González, *Local Portraiture*. Sent to Iran by the British Indo-European Telegraph Department, Hoeltzer arrived in 1863, married Maryam Hagh Nazar (1850–1920) in 1870, an Armenian from Tehran, and settled in New Julfa with a home and a commercial photo studio. Until his burial in the Armenian cemetery of New Julfa in 1911, he produced a vast photographic collection. He had special access to the Armenian community that adopted him, as well as to Armenian women as photographic subjects.

<sup>21</sup> Vorderstrasse, "To Be," 71; Scheiwiller, "Sevruguin"; Pérez González, *Local Portraiture*, 36.

<sup>22</sup> Hovhannissyan, *Nor Jughayi*, 126–29, 141–42; Damandan, *Portrait*, 21, 37. Several authors misspell Patkerahanian's name as "Patkerkhanian," misinterpreting that the name includes the title of Khan. Patkerahanian is credited for introducing a photo enlarger to Isfahan. See Hovhannissyan, *Nor Jughayi*, 145–48; and Damandan, *Portrait*, 26.

<sup>23</sup> Alek Zarifian (son of Hasmik Voskalian Zarifian) in an interview conducted by the authors, November 29, 2019, Glendale, CA. In Tabriz, a certain H. Hovsepianz also is named; see Vorderstrasse, "To Be," 71.



**FIGURE 2.** Melik Voskanian's advertisement for the German Mimosa camera company. The child is the photographer's daughter, Hasmik Voskanian. Melik Photo Studio, Tabriz, ca. 1932. Courtesy of Alek Zarifian from the Hasmik Voskanian Archives, Zarifian Family Private Collection, Glendale, California

Hasmik Voskanian (1928–93), seen here performing for her father's camera in an advertisement for the German Mimosa AG camera company based in Dresden until WWII (Fig. 2). She is captured in two poses. In the first image, she holds a postcard in her right hand while pointing to it with her tiny left-hand index finger and a big smile. Six portrait postcards hover above her head, arranged like a hand fan. At the top, each card bears a letter: *m i m o s a*. In the second image, Hasmik is depicted throwing the same six cards in the air like a magician and fixing her gaze on the cards suspended over her head. The final

product—that is, the advertisement—is both unique and remarkable. The two photos are by-products of a careful photographic assemblage, which involved the creation of the principal photographs with Hasmik as well as, separately, the production of the smaller portrait photographs, which are staged in the studio and then photographed with the child-sitter. Hasmik, who could not have been more than five years old, seems fully at home in the photo studio. Seeking better commercial opportunities, Voskian moved his family to Tehran in 1938 and reopened the Photo Melik studio on the prime location at the crossing of Istanbul and Lalehzar Streets. Hasmik seems to have been raised in the studio; she merely moved from the front of the camera to the back of it in 1949, when, upon Melik's premature death, Hasmik undertook the running of the studio over her three younger brothers. At the tender age of twenty-one she was mentored by another member of the Armenian photographic network, Minas Hatamian, who was the founding owner of Photo Vida. By the 1960s, as what remains of her studio's collection attests, Voskian's clientele grew to include top Pahlavi generals and their spouses, as well as many members of the Iranian public and her own Armenian community. She closed the studio in 1975, becoming one of the longest practicing Iranian female studio owners. Nevertheless, her name does not appear in the historiography.

Starting in the seventeenth and into the nineteenth century, most Western observers who commented on Armenian women in Iran portrayed them as either largely homebound or covered.<sup>24</sup> They interpreted the public limitations of women to reflect a lack of any kind of autonomous activity. However, surviving archival documents point to women's active pursuit of property deals, inheritance claims, and other self-directed economic activities in the absence of traveling merchant male members of the household, particularly during the Safavid era, the legacy of which survived into the following centuries.<sup>25</sup> Photographs exact the broader picture. Owing to the global photographic network, Armenian women gained easy and extensive access to cameras. Their availability played a role in the politics of visibility. Armenian women, particularly in New Julfa (where photography spread rapidly), "lived a less segregated social life than their Persian sisters and could often be seen" in public.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, the majority of Iranian women had socioreligious restrictions in their access to the photo studio.<sup>27</sup>

Aside from the Qajar aristocratic women who had early access to court photography, Armenian women were among the first to step into commercial photo studios.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, it was in the studio of the best-examined and most prolific photographer of Iran's Armenian photographic network, Sevruguin, that women first posed as photographable subjects. As the century drew to a close, they took agency in their photographic reproducibility, often outside the patriarchal use of photo-culture in such conventional images as family, wedding, and funeral photographs. A growing number of photographs of Armenian women were taken in studio settings that captured solo portraits, educational milestones, female friendships, leisure snapshots, and later, women's organizational leadership and membership. In this wide-ranging genre of photographic documentation of women, stretching from the 1880s to the 1930s, the only man present (in his conspicuous absence in the actual photograph) was the one behind the camera, although the male gaze was negated by the unerotic posture, formal setting, or multitude of women present in a frame.

Indeed, in the industry of erotic photography through which "'famous' women, particularly prostitutes, *motrebs* (minstrels), and stolen images of elite women from the royal

<sup>24</sup> Tavernier, *Collections*, 160; Silva y Figueroa, *Comentarios*, 355; Chardin, *Voyages*, 11; Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 850; De Bruyn, *Travels*, 227.

<sup>25</sup> Berberian, "'Unequivocal.'"

<sup>26</sup> Scarce, *Isfahan*, 8; Loosley, "Ladies," 622.

<sup>27</sup> Chekhab-Abudaya, "Daily Life," 81; Amiri, "Comparative Analysis," 62. Discussing the Ali Khan Vali Qajar Album, for example, Sivan Balslev observes that "two out of more than 1,500 in the album, show a husband and wife as a couple, and only photographs of Armenian or European families include the mother of the family"; Balslev, *Masculinities*, 203.

<sup>28</sup> Nameghi and Pérez González, "Sitters," 69.

courts” circulated, no surviving photograph claims to depict an Armenian woman in an erotic pose, at least none that we could find.<sup>29</sup> Most Qajar photographers—Sevruguin, in particular—successfully produced the ethnic type of the Armenian woman, depicted in an unerotic and dignified genre. Even when Armenian models were used in erotic photographs, they were not identified as such and were captioned with the more generic label of “harem women.”<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, in at least one case, we have evidence of a sitter—described in another photograph as “Galim Mahdi-khani, a prostitute woman”—who posed as an Armenian wearing the traditional headgear of the elite called the *kot*, again in a nonerotic posture and formal setting.<sup>31</sup> Sevruguin’s most celebrated photograph, kept at the Smithsonian Institution and adorning the cover of Frederick Bohrer’s 1999 edited volume, one of the earliest studies of Qajar photography, is precisely such a “noble” Armenian woman, wearing an elaborate *kot*.<sup>32</sup>

The commercial and aesthetic decisions of this photographic collective produced a pictorial discourse about the modern image of Armenian women that in turn made a significant impact on their later activities and activism. A return to Roussie-Khan’s photograph of the three girls graduating from Iran Bethel exposes a network of photographic speech that facilitated the slow encroachment of women into the public domain (see Fig. 1). After receiving their diplomas in June 1910, although the three graduates could not and did not do much with their education (as Doolittle astutely remarked), they did go to a photo studio, probably at the encouragement or invitation of their missionary teachers. On the two sides of Mehdi Russi Khan Ivanov’s Cyrillic, French, and Persian backstamp, the black ink handwriting reads: “June 8th 1910. With the love of your teacher and friend, Cora Bartlett.”<sup>33</sup> Cora Cecilia Bartlett (1860–1939) served as a Presbyterian missionary in Iran between 1882 and 1912 and became the principal of Iran Bethel during a period when the pedagogical emphasis was to “persuade” students “to believe.” However, Bartlett, like Doolittle and Annie Stocking Boyce, often had a disparate impact, as the focus of her evangelism “became embedded in a project of training Iranian girls for modern womanhood.”<sup>34</sup>

In this photograph, the graduates are dressed in identical pristinely embroidered white dresses and white shoes, complete with white gloves and elaborate boutonnieres that match the ribbons on the diplomas in hand. All three were Armenians: Filomena Boghossian, Natalie Argumnian, and Varvara Khachaturian (ca. 1892–1958), who went on to form a large family and, as its matriarch, ran it like a missionary school.<sup>35</sup> We have photographic evidence that when Khachaturian was a student at Iran Bethel, every June at the end of the academic year, whether graduating or not, the students took a class photograph at the Roussie-Khan Studio.<sup>36</sup> In this photographic space, in these early years, again we witness an overlap of female solidarity, Western-style education, and photographic visibility. Even as one of the most fervent missionary mentors, Bartlett’s gift of a photograph to the graduating class of 1910 signals her tactical emancipation of the photograph’s performative power to generate meaning. To be photographed in this way was to defer the patriarchal emptiness of the unheeded diploma. Photographic authority, in fact, sanctioned the legitimacy of the diploma. A century later, it is the photograph, not the diploma, that confirms the granting of the degree, which more often than not remained interred in the darkness of the

<sup>29</sup> Scheiwiller, *Liminalities*, 115.

<sup>30</sup> Vorderstrasse, “What Can(Not),” 107.

<sup>31</sup> Scheiwiller, *Liminalities*, 109–10.

<sup>32</sup> Sevruguin, *Studio Portrait*; Bohrer and Sackler Gallery, *Sevruguin*, cover page.

<sup>33</sup> Based on this photograph, Tahmasbpour’s claim that in “1907 Rusi Khan follows the king into exile” must have happened later; see Tahmasbpour, “Photography,” 12.

<sup>34</sup> “Cora C. Bartlett,” Foreign Missionary Vertical File; “Report of Iran Bethel, Tehran, Persia, Sept. 89 to Sept. 90,” Presbyterian Historical Society, RG 91-20-12, cited in Rostam-Kolayi, “Evangelizing,” 221. See also Zirinsky, “Harbingers.”

<sup>35</sup> Moneh Hovnanian Der Grigorian (granddaughter of Varvareh Khachaturian) in an interview conducted by the authors, August 11, 2020, La Canada, CA.

<sup>36</sup> Darmanian Hovnanian, Archives.



storage box. In turn, that these three young women were allowed and willing to be photographed spoke to this special relation between minoritarian modernism and its visual schemes and devices. Urban Armenian women, despite their small numbers, not only were the photographic subjects of both Western and local photographers, but at times took into their hands this apparatus of modernity.<sup>37</sup> This increased visibility of Armenian women in the photographic space coincided, not so accidentally, with the founding of women's organizations to support girls' education. These patterns of modernity—posing for a photograph in a studio, cultivating female solidarity across class boundaries, and struggling for secular education—were interrelated.

Owing to the artistic decisions of various photographers, including Armenians and Muslim Iranians, as well as Western travelers and missionaries, by the turn of the century a pictorial discourse had emerged that depicted Iran's Armenian women as noble, urban, and progressive. In our larger project, the reading of nineteenth-century missionary accounts and European travelogues alongside photographic representations of Armenian women as a dignified ethnic type reveals an ideal image of the "Armenian woman," ready to be appropriated by patriotic tropes and challenged by the women themselves throughout the twentieth century.<sup>38</sup> This constructed image of Armenian women also had its nuanced implication for the women's movement in Iran in the decades to come. To the interviewer's question in 1984, for instance, as to "the freedom you enjoyed and did whatever you wanted to do," the Iranian women's rights advocate, Safiyyeh Firuz, noted in her response that "well, my husband was very contemporary (*mo'aser*) and he liked it . . . when I went out unveiled, rumor spread that 'he has an Armenian wife' . . . that 'he has an Iranian wife but an Armenian lover (*rafigh-e armani*).'"<sup>39</sup> This early pictorial discourse also had an impact on the caricatural images of Armenian women on the pages of Armenian-language satirical newspapers, but as we shall see, these papers operated under different assumptions or, more appropriately, anxieties. The strategies of photographic documentation were a pivotal aspect of Irano-Armenian women's organizational efforts to be visible, self-represented, and agents of knowledge production.<sup>40</sup>

What was noted by others more than fifteen years ago—that the role of ethno-religious minorities has been sidelined both in feminist and modernist histories of Iranian women—is still the case today.<sup>41</sup> Women's emphasis on parental support of education is especially vital, as these parents were often Armenian women from affluent and well-educated families with exposure to progressive ideas through print and personal encounters with others from urban centers in the South Caucasus, Ottoman Empire, or Europe, or alternatively had been themselves raised on missionary education within Iran. New textual and visual evidence discloses that during the period between the 1870s and 1980 Armenian women of late Qajar and Pahlavi Iran organized themselves in the charitable, educational, cultural, and intellectual realms, each represented by one or multiple organizational or institutional entities: the most active among them located in New Julfa, Tabriz, and Tehran. Like other ethno-religious minority communities in Iran, such as Jews, Zoroastrians, and Baha'is, they sought secular Western-style education and opened their own schools for girls to offset missionary influence. Through charitable work targeting women and girls, they oversaw a substantial increase in girls' education and vocational training.<sup>42</sup> Between the 1870s and 1910,

<sup>37</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, in Tehran and its surrounding villages, there were 410 families and 2,200 Armenians; Frangian, *Atrpatakan*, 175. For 1927, the numbers for Tehran were 600 to 650 families and 3,000 according to Garagash, *Parskahay Tarets'oyts'*, vol. 1, 109.

<sup>38</sup> Malek Yonan, *Persian Women*.

<sup>39</sup> Firuz interview, Foundation for Iranian Studies, 25:53–26:20.

<sup>40</sup> For an example of such Irano-Armenian female self-representation, see the case of Heripsimeh Abrahamian (1884–1957) in Vorderstrasse, "What Can(Not)," 108–12.

<sup>41</sup> McElrone, "Qajar Women," 307; Rostam-Kolayi, "Girls' Schools"; Zabihi-Moghaddam, "Advancement"; Chehabi, "Diversity."

<sup>42</sup> For a full discussion, see Berberian, "Armenian Women."

missionary education, photographic networks, and women's charity intersected and penetrated Irano-Armenian women's lives as forms of modern agency and representation. This historical conjunction bestowed a unique social image and positionality to the Armenian women of Iran. The origin of these first informal and later formal groupings were tied to the anxiety of nondominant communities—Armenian as well as Assyrian or Nestorian, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and Baha'i—associated with the success of nineteenth-century Presbyterian missionary work in Iran, which began as early as 1834. American Presbyterian missionaries had established as many as 117 boys' and girls' schools in Urmia alone by 1895, "enrolling 2410 students, predominantly Nestorians and Armenians."<sup>43</sup> By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, they had extended their educational activities to Tabriz, Tehran, Rasht, and Hamadan. Their schools attracted Armenian students largely because of the free Western-style education they offered, along with Armenian language instruction for both boys and girls.<sup>44</sup> Doolittle attests to the importance of Presbyterian missionary schools in educating Armenian girls. She notes, "Established by the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, back in 1872," Iran Bethel School, "at that time . . . was a boarding school with only Armenian girls," adding,

the first graduates were graduated in 1891. . . and that was just. . . two Armenian girls. . . In '93, there were again two girls, again Armenian. The first year that there were any non-Armenians graduating was 1915. It took all those years before there were any Moslem or Jewish girls to be graduated. They were all Armenians.<sup>45</sup>

The Armenian women's struggle to establish an organization with the distinct aim of supporting secular, Western-style Armenian schools for girls faced many challenges, and several bodies were initiated but rapidly dissolved.<sup>46</sup> During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all major urban centers with an Armenian population saw the formation of women's charitable organizations. Tabriz, with its geopolitical and historical ties to the Caucasus, witnessed the launching of the first two Armenian women's benevolent societies in the early 1890s, the first in 1891, uniting with the second in 1901 to form the Tabriz's Armenian Women's United Benevolent Society (*Tavrizi Hayuheats' Baregortsakan Miats'eal Ėnkerut'iwn*).<sup>47</sup> Their benevolent purpose was tied to the agenda of educating girls "a decade and a half before the first Muslim women's *anjuman* [society]."<sup>48</sup> They were closely followed by New Julfa, with its illustrious Safavid legacy, when in 1892 Hovsep Barseghian, a male teacher at Saint Katarinian girls' school, founded a woman's organization (New Julfa's Armenian Women's Benevolent Society/*Nor Jughayi Hayuheats' Baregortsakan Ėnkerut'iwn*) whose membership comprised Saint Katarinian's older students.<sup>49</sup> Tehran's Armenian Women's Benevolent Society (*Tehrani Hay Kanants' Baregortsakan Ėnkerut'iwn*, AWBS), began activities in 1905. Several other charitable and benevolent organizations followed throughout the twentieth century in places such as New Julfa, Hamadan, Abadan, Tehran, and others under varied titles that included a sundry combination of Union, Society, Benevolent, Charitable (*aghk'atakhnam*), or Compassion, (*qt'ut'iwn*), but all bore the

<sup>43</sup> Zirinsky, "Harbingers," 174.

<sup>44</sup> Berberian, "Armenian Women," 78.

<sup>45</sup> Doolittle interview, Foundation for Iranian Studies, vol. 1, 8–9.

<sup>46</sup> On the prehistory of Tehran's Armenian Women's Benevolent Society, see Tehrani Hay Kanants', "Tehrani Hay Kanants'," 4–9. Also, Annett Der Grigorian Ayvazian (former president of AWBS) in an interview conducted by the authors, November 29, 2019, Tujunga, CA.

<sup>47</sup> For a full discussion of these organizations, see Berberian, "Armenian Women," 84–85. See also Frangian, *Atrpatakan*, 137.

<sup>48</sup> McElrone, "Qajar Women," 309.

<sup>49</sup> Minasian, *Nor Jughayi*, 5. This seems to be the only case in which an Irano-Armenian women's organization is founded initially by a man.

terms Armenian and Women, sometimes in the Armenian compound form.<sup>50</sup> These women's organizations not only became visible in the public space through their activities, but the women's leadership also performed visibility and represented themselves by sitting for photographs and publishing those photographs in dozens of anniversary publications commemorating organizational history and accomplishments and honoring leaders and donors.

Like Muslim women's early activism, most socio-communal engagement of the Armenian women's benevolent societies centered on conventionally gendered charitable and educational work. A shift, however, did begin to take shape at the turn of the twentieth century. Starting in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Armenian communities in Iran as well as the neighboring Ottoman and Russian Empires, where most Armenians lived, experienced increased access to education, a journalistic and literary revival, and a changing political landscape, which brought Caucasian Armenian teachers and political activists to Iran. The Azerbaijan province in northwestern Iran, in particular, served as a point of passage or lay-over for militants, arms, and print crossing imperial frontiers during the connected revolutions of the early twentieth century.<sup>51</sup> Armenian women's activism, first within charitable and educational spheres and later in the women's movement in an attempt to bring women's issues to the attention of women themselves and to raise their consciousness, occurred within this broader turn-of-the-century context, as women's organizations tried to educate women in politics and in Ottoman and Iranian constitutionalism, as well as inheritance rights, hygiene, and so forth. During the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905-11), one of the benevolent organizations even spoke of changing its program to emphasize the woman's question.<sup>52</sup> However, the benevolent mission of most of these organizations, which focused on girls' education and the care of orphans and the elderly, took on an existential significance in the aftermath of the 1915 Armenian Genocide when enfeebled survivors besieged major Iranian cities such as Tabriz and Tehran. They reengaged and channeled their energies and activism not toward "the woman question" but to the chaotic and horrific consequences of genocide, which rippled across the southern border of the Ottoman Empire. The demand for women's volunteer "care" work was such that in that same catastrophic year, the dominant political party, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), formed New Julfa's Armenian Women's Compassion Union (*Nor Jughayi Hay Kanants' Gt'ut'ean Miut'iwn*, est. 1915) initially modeled and named after the Red Cross.<sup>53</sup>

Following an official appeal by the Catholicos of All Armenians in Ejmiatsin, the women of the Tehran AWBS took custody of the refugees and administered to their needs. Although Armenian women's political activism waned with the end of the Constitutional Revolution, AWBS continued along its path and survives to this day, likely because it faithfully maintained its apolitical and entirely charitable objectives. In 2020, the society celebrated its one hundred-fifteenth anniversary as the oldest functioning women's organization in Iran, despite attempts by the Armenian Church in Iran in 1921 to eliminate all independent women's organizations and create in its place the Armenian Church-Loving Women's Union (*Hay Kanants' Yekeghets'asēr Miut'iwn*, ACWU, est. 1928) in Tehran, with the express aim of keeping women's activities under its supervision. However, unable to run the community's affairs without the women's uncompensated labor, decades-old experience, organizational skills, and plain know-how, the church was forced to accept the return of women's organizations in the 1930s. Financed by the church, ACWU amplified the ideal image of the Armenian woman as mother and wife and continued to function parallel to independent Armenian women's organizations. The closing by Reza Shah of foreign, ethnic,

<sup>50</sup> Georgian, *Amēnun Taregirk'ē*, 485, 495, 507, 509; Amirkhanian, *Nayiri Taregirk'*, 459; Pahlevanyan, *Iranahay hamaynkē*, 132, 141, 143.

<sup>51</sup> Berberian, *Roving Revolutionaries*.

<sup>52</sup> Berberian, "Armenian Women," 91.

<sup>53</sup> Georgian, *Amēnun Taregirk'ē*, 427. This is not to be confused with the branch of the Red Cross founded earlier in 1909; Berberian, "Armenian Women," 91.

and non-Muslim schools in the 1930s as well as his suppression of independent civil society entities, however, provoked intracommunal agitation among Armenians and contested that conservative image.<sup>54</sup> Shut down by the nation's royal patriarch as well as their own church fathers overnight, benevolence and charity began to ring hollow to some Irano-Armenian women. A new generation of Armenian girls, raised on a missionary brand of modern womanhood, followed by the state-initiated Women's Awakening Project (1936–41), birthed a new organization. They joined the other organizations, however, in the struggle to self-represent and produce images of themselves that contested the disseminated narrative. Whereas self-representation strove to honor, satirical representation attempted the reverse.

### **Bogeymen and Birch Brooms Take on Women, 1920–1958**

Unlike, for example, Hayganush Mark's *Hay Gin/Kin* (Armenian Woman, Istanbul, 1919–33) in the neighboring Ottoman territories or Mari Beylerian's shorter-lived *Ardemis/Artemis* (1902–4), appearing much earlier in Cairo and Alexandria, Armenian-language periodicals devoted to women's issues never saw light in Iran.<sup>55</sup> Contemporary newspapers of a political, social, cultural, and literary variety, including satirical ones, instead are instrumental in providing a glimpse into a community's views about women and women's issues, especially themes of patriarchy, modernization, and nationalism, exposing the gender dimensions of the politics around these issues.

Although we have some evidence of the stirrings of Armenian women independently and with fellow Muslim women around the woman's question during the Constitutional Revolution, it was not until 1939 that an Irano-Armenian feminist-leaning organization was established and woman-centered activity took shape in the immediate aftermath of Reza Shah's exile in 1941, when many organizations were launched and became active players in shaping Iran's second phase of modernization, especially through the declaration of the 1963 White Revolution by Mohammad Reza Shah. This era of nagging modernity witnessed a public contestation between conservative patriarchal institutions, such as the dominant Armenian Apostolic Church and Armenian political parties (e.g., ARF and the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party), and the embryonic and independent women's movement. During this period, in the absence of women's journals, satirical journals such as *Bobokh* (Bogeyman, 1920–42) and *Tsakhavel* (Birch Broom, 1943–44, 1950–58) took the lead in attempting to shape the community's views on women vis-à-vis patriarchy, modernization, and nationalism.<sup>56</sup> Through their biweekly and monthly masculinist antagonism toward women and critique of Armenian women's lifestyles, male editors attempted to control the narrative about the proper modernization of women, often through “hyperbolic, oversimplified, and repetitive” representation, similar to European satirical journals like *Punch*.<sup>57</sup> Whereas *Bobokh* made women the brunt of offensive jokes, thus betraying the highly patriarchal community's gender bias, other satirical commentaries and illustrations critiqued multiple issues, from the evolution of fashion to community politics, through women's bodies.

*Bobokh* was Iran's first Armenian-language biweekly satirical (*yergitsakan*) periodical.<sup>58</sup> On page after page, women appear in both rich text and black-and-white graphics as impressions of a changing society. *Bobokh*'s longtime editor and later owner, Hayk Garagash (1893–1960), was born in Tabriz.<sup>59</sup> At around age five, his family moved to Ghazvin and

<sup>54</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran*, 135–65.

<sup>55</sup> Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*; Ekmekçioğlu, “Ardemis”; Bilal and Ekmekçioğlu, *Feminism in Armenian*.

<sup>56</sup> *Bobokh* took a three-year pause from 1926 to 1929 for financial reasons and “individual circumstances,” according to an editorial; see *Bobokh* 38 (January 15, 1929): 1. Pahlevanyan (*Iranahay hamaynkè*) gives the end as 1938; the National Library of Armenia states 1942 but stops at 1937.

<sup>57</sup> Collins regarding *Punch*; see Collins, “Athletic Fashion,” 314.

<sup>58</sup> A version of *Bobokh* devoted to children also appeared between 1933 and 1936.

<sup>59</sup> Garagash's name also appears frenchified as Haig Karakache. Armenak Aghasian was the first owner of *Bobokh*. On Hayk Garagash, see Garagash, *Parskahay Tarets'oyts'*, vol. 2, 403–5, and Lazarian, *Iranahayots'*, 169–70.

then to Tehran. He attended the French Catholic Saint Louis School through high school, where French and Persian were the languages of instruction and from where some of Iran's intellectual elite, such as contemporaries Nima Yooshij and Sadeq Hedayat, graduated. Soon after graduation, Garagash worked for the Royal Bank, the Ottoman Bank, and eventually the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) while simultaneously editing *Bobokh*. According to an online biography, APOC's ultimatum that he resign from his editorial post at *Bobokh* or lose his lucrative position led Garagash to leave APOC and commit himself to satire and theater.<sup>60</sup> He devoted his editorial time to *Bobokh*, and later the cultural and literary weekly *Veratsnund* (Rebirth, 1930–53). Amid the chaos of Iran's Allied invasion, *Veratsnund* became a daily, essential in circulating information to Armenian-speaking communities during World War II. In the late 1920s, Garagash also authored three large volumes of the *Perso-Armenian Yearbook* (*Parskahay Tarets'oyts'*, 1927, 1929, and 1930). Under his own biographical entry, he noted that "a good majority of the theatrical performances that he organized and staged were for [Muslim] Iranian women."<sup>61</sup> It may very well be that not only did he not see any contradiction to mocking women in print while staging performances for them but that he also believed, like many of his contemporaries, in theater's role in promoting self-examination, civilization, and progress.

Satire appeared in the pages of *Bobokh* via caricaturists such as Darvish, the pseudonym of Andre Sevruguin (1896–1997), son of Antoin Sevruguin.<sup>62</sup> Although not as well-known globally as his photographer father, Darvish was an influential artist in his own right and part of Tehran's avant-garde intellectual circles in the 1930s with Hedayat and Bozorg Alavi.<sup>63</sup> He must have known Garagash from their school days at Saint Louis. Darvish's first caricature appeared in the third issue of *Bobokh* (although the cover illustration of the bogeyman on the first issue also is likely his).<sup>64</sup> After his departure, the biweekly journal's principal caricaturist from August 1924 to at least 1936 was Margar Gharabegian (1901–76), who went by the pen name Dev (devil or demon).<sup>65</sup> Described by those who remember him as "khosh tip" (good looking), "well-groomed," and "a Don Juan," Dev had an artist's studio on Sevom Esfand Street and produced caricatures of Armenian women for *Bobokh* and later *Tsakhavel* that mirrored his public persona. Although the image of the woman was heavily deployed as a visual trope in the pages of *Bobokh* in the first decade of its publication, the 1920s, it completely disappears in the next (and last) seven years of the paper. It was instead largely replaced in spring 1930 by a fictive character: a provincial old woman whose drawn image in traditional dress adorns the front page and whose speeches in archaic Tehrani Armenian dialect mixed with Persian and some Turkish serve as editorial commentary.<sup>66</sup> Susan (*Süssân*) Baji becomes Garagash's mouthpiece, superseding many of the caricatures and jokes and continuing the relentless censure of modernity's effect on social relations. This shift is accompanied by a gradual deterioration in the visual, textual, and thematic richness of the paper, perhaps because of a lack of financial resources, Reza Shah's censorship policies, or Garagash's dwindling interest in the paper, as he recast his focus on *Veratsnund* at this time.

Although national and global politics were largely untouched, *Bobokh* targeted two arenas with particular zeal: first, the Irano-Armenian community and intracommunal affairs and,

<sup>60</sup> Khanents, "Hayk Garagash."

<sup>61</sup> Garagash, *Parskahay Tarets'oyts'*, vol. 2, 405.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 378–79.

<sup>63</sup> Tajarian and Sevrugian, "Art," 69.

<sup>64</sup> *Bobokh* 3 (February 1, 1920): 21.

<sup>65</sup> His first illustration appears in *Bobokh* 20 (August 7, 1924): 155. We had no access to issues after *Bobokh* 268 (August 1, 1936). Rima Serebrakian and Baghdasar Der Grigorian, in a discussion with the authors, January 31, 2021, Pasadena, CA.

<sup>66</sup> Because of missing issues, we are unable to ascertain exactly when Susan Baji appears in modern dress (but it is sometime between 1932 and 1936), or when she first appears in *Bobokh* (although it is certainly sometime between March and June 1930).

second, women. For the paper, nothing in these two arenas seemed sacred; everything was fair game and open to criticism. Whatever form it took, whether doled out lightly or in outright mockery and ridicule, the criticism unreservedly reflected and reinforced readers' and society's sexism, its gendered fears and anxieties, and what it perceived to be the perils of modernity, which the satirical paper viewed as threatening to the Irano-Armenian community's traditional and patriarchal gender relations and culture. Especially in the 1920s, *Bobokh's* anxieties regarding modernity manifested in biting criticism, drawn in black-and-white illustrations and caricatures or written into jokes and short snippets that targeted women's fashion and lifestyle choices, such as shortened skirts and hair, décolleté tops, makeup, and modern dance, like the foxtrot, all clearly informed by or modeled upon practices in Europe or the US.<sup>67</sup> In the case of dance, men also were implicated in an illustration depicting a jumble of intertwined men's and women's legs covered in the center with a scream bubble: "Modernism!! Fox-trot, the latest fashion!"<sup>68</sup> In most cases, however, the targets were clearly women; one cartoon commenting on the inverse relationship between long tongues and short skirts appears twice, in 1921 and 1929.<sup>69</sup>

*Bobokh's* projections for the future of women's fashion seemed grim if its readers were to judge by its line drawing of six women spanning the years 1875 to 1940 under the heading "Fashion's past, present and future." Typical of its exaggerated manner parodying women's vogue, the paper predicted that given the increasingly minimalist trend, women would barely be clothed by 1940. The figure representing 1940 wears an oversized hat, large earrings, high heels; a sash runs between her bare breasts and covers her pelvic area; she carries a purse in her right hand and a fan in her left. The caption reads, "Very little aptitude is required to foretell the 'fashion' of 1950."<sup>70</sup> A popular graphic trope of Western caricature, the stripping modern woman also made appearances in Persian-language journals such as Tehran's *Tofiq* (1923–71).<sup>71</sup> Although beginning in the 1920s some circles of upper-middle class men and women began socializing and the latest European and American styles in fashion and beauty made it to the pages of the pro-Reza Shah *Alam-e Nesvan* (Women's World, 1920–34), *Bobokh's* depiction of women's short skirts or décolleté tops had little to do with the reality of the public space, the streets of Tehran. Although it may have been reacting to some degree to the introduction of the newest trends, whether in the real world or Women's World, the paper's caricatures rather accurately revealed male anxiety about the desire to maintain control of the female body with the onset of rapid modernization.<sup>72</sup>

*Bobokh* also ran a five-year series in the 1920s called "Great Men and Women," featuring negative, critical comments by known European authors about women. But for the most part the paper did not rely on European men to speak for the Irano-Armenian community. It articulated its own misgivings and social critique when it questioned women's loyalty and trustworthiness in love and marriage, insinuated sexual transgressions, and even likened women to money that "changed hands," in this case illustrated starkly as a scantily clad short-haired woman being passed from one man's hand to another's.<sup>73</sup> Although the satirical paper also leveled some of its criticism at men's hypocrisy or fashion, its anxieties revolved largely around the impact of modernity on women precisely because they were perceived as

<sup>67</sup> For a discussion on "the conflation of modernization and Westernization" and "health and beauty for Iranian women" in the Iranian press, see Amin, "Importing."

<sup>68</sup> *Bobokh* 9, no. 55–56 (January 3, 1930): 4. For other examples of interlocked bodies in dance, see *Bobokh* 26 (March 20, 1925): 206.

<sup>69</sup> *Bobokh* 13 (February 1, 1921): 3; *Bobokh* 48 (August 10, 1929): 3.

<sup>70</sup> *Bobokh* 32 (August 23, 1925): 250.

<sup>71</sup> For example, *Tofiq*, cover.

<sup>72</sup> Rostam-Kolayi, "Expanding Agendas," 180.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, *Bobokh* 37 (January 1, 1926): 297; *Bobokh* 34 (September 14, 1925): 270; and *Bobokh* 32 (August 23, 1925): 254.

preservers and carriers of culture and tradition.<sup>74</sup> Modernity was seen to simultaneously effeminize men and masculinize women, thus perhaps lessening gender differences and equalizing men and women. Echoing an article that had appeared a few years prior on short hair and a cartoon on short skirts, a 1929 illustration reflects growing anxieties about women's femininity as skirts and hair not only became shorter, but women in Tehran chose to go bald, mimicking Parisian fashion.<sup>75</sup> In his discussion of the Iranian press of the 1920s and 1930s, Camron Amin shows how Persian-language newspapers "dismissed cosmetics and 'fashion worship' (*mod parasti*) as corrupting threats to women's and the nation's progress."<sup>76</sup> As we shall see, in the Armenian case, the nation often takes the form of the community.

The emphasis *Bobokh* paid to dress is not surprising given its importance as "both an indicator and a producer of gender."<sup>77</sup> However, to *Bobokh* and its readers, the danger lay not only in fashion but also in what must have seemed even more menacing—sexuality. The trope of the scheming, conniving, untrustworthy woman was not new to the 1920s or 1930s; however, the anxiety of equalizing sexuality or sexual behavior brought on by modernity so well represented in the illustration titled "Contemporary Understandings" certainly was (Fig. 3). The illustration shows two panes: on the left is a woman seated watching a man place a naked woman's upright body on a bookcase next to other similar women's bodies much like one would with a book; on the right is a man seated watching a woman carrying out exactly the same action but, in her case, placing a naked man's upright body among a sea of other similar bodies. All the women in the illustration have short hair, yet the two who are dressed are modestly so, and almost all the men lack facial hair—all these are markers of the modern woman and man. The caption encapsulates the message: "Just as for certain men women, for certain women men, resemble books; after reading them, they arrange them in the library."<sup>78</sup>

Whether a woman was likened to money changing hands or depicted arranging naked men on a bookshelf, the image of the woman, in particular her body, in the hands of *Bobokh*'s male editors and caricaturists was malleable. For most of its existence, the paper oscillated between parody and derision in its representation and imagining of women. In only two cases do we come across a substantially different portrayal—one that seeks to evoke empathy or engagement rather than ridicule. Both illustrations appear in 1925, in almost consecutive issues. One is of a goddess-like woman with long hair and eyelashes in what resembles a toga labeled with the words "Armenian public" (*hay hasarakut'iwn*) lying unconscious with arms outstretched as two large seemingly fierce but grinning bulls representing different political currents in Tehran's Armenian community menacingly loom over her, ready to kill for the sake of interparty solidarity.<sup>79</sup> The other is a black-and-white reprint of a color original by caricaturist Aleksandr Sarukhan that appeared in Cairo's satirical journal *Haykakan Sinema* (Armenian Cinema, 1925–26).<sup>80</sup> Titled "The Force of Saving the Nation," the illustration depicts a struggle among contemporary Armenian political parties (the portly R.A., the tall H.H.D., and the tiny S.D.H.) over the "Armenian nation" (*hay azg*), which is branded on the chest of an emaciated woman whose bare arms

<sup>74</sup> For an example of modernity as an effeminizing process, see *Bobokh* 34 (September 14, 1925): 266, where men are depicted in athletic fashion with tight-fitting, short-sleeved, low-cut tops, shorts, and heeled shoes.

<sup>75</sup> *Bobokh* 43 (May 20, 1929): 7. See also *Bobokh* 36 (October 22, 1925): 3.

<sup>76</sup> Amin, "Importing," 82.

<sup>77</sup> Barnes and Eicher refer to Howard Morphy's remarks in their introduction to *Dress and Gender*, 7.

<sup>78</sup> *Bobokh* 34 (September 14, 1925): 273.

<sup>79</sup> *Bobokh* 35 (September 28, 1925): 277.

<sup>80</sup> Aleksandr Hakobi Sarukhan (1898–1977) also served as the paper's manager, with Yervant Odian (Yervand Otian, 1869–1926) as its editor. Odian is one of the most well-known Armenian satirists and most famously the author of *Ēnger Panjumi* (Comrade Clueless), which mocks Armenian political parties through the character of Marxist Comrade Clueless, sent to propagandize among peasants in the Armenian provinces of the eastern Ottoman Empire.



FIGURE 3. Three caricatures in the Armenian-language satirical periodical, *Bobokh* (Bogeyman) September 14, 1925, page 7. From the archives of the National Library of Armenia, Yerevan, Republic of Armenia.



seem on the verge of being wrenched by the forces of the parties “saving” her. The exception is the less powerful S.D.H., standing on a rock and clinging to her exposed legs, although like his counterparts he too proclaims himself the savior of the nation.<sup>81</sup> The caption reads, “In order to pluck the privilege of savior, they pull apart the poor nation, without reflecting on what the nation endures in their hands” (Fig. 4).

How are we to interpret these contrasting renderings of the female body—whether as a frail and exposed figure or a healthy beautiful goddess—as nation or public, or the Armenian nation or public? In a sense, it is in these two cases that *Bobokh*’s two main targets—intracommunal politics and women—come front and center: but here the latter becomes the very tool by which the former receives the harshest rebuke. It seems Tehran’s and Cairo’s Armenian communities had much in common, judging by *Bobokh*’s appropriation of “The Force of Saving the Nation” illustration, among other similar illustrations by Sarukhan.<sup>82</sup> The paper did not engage with or even pay much attention to women as part of the community politics they critiqued. In both illustrations, their bodies merely serve as a vehicle to drive home a point about party politics in a highly patriarchal society. Unlike its successor *Tsakhavel*, for example, *Bobokh* for the most part ignored women’s organizations and simultaneously portrayed an image of Armenian women that starkly contrasted with that represented by women’s organizations themselves. We could attribute this shift of engagement largely to a new arrival on the scene—one that was distinctly dissimilar in every way from the benevolent, charitable organizations that had dominated the women’s world.

The AWU, founded in 1939, was composed of young women with feminist leanings and intellectual interests who, although also involved with charitable work, sought self-enlightenment as a primary goal. Even *Tsakhavel*, however, must not have taken AWU seriously in its early years, perhaps dismissing the youthfulness or inexperience of its female activists. This is evidenced by the paper’s first issue in September 1943. An illustration of a judicial court adorns the cover. A birch broom (*tsakhavel*) at a podium of judgment, flanked by two other birch brooms, one on each side, presides over the “sinful,” that is, community organizations, including women’s groups—church-loving, benevolent, charitable groups, and even women writers—but AWU remains absent. The caption reads, “Woe to the sinners (*meghavornerin*). Glory to the sinless (innocents, *anmeghnerin*).”<sup>83</sup> *Tsakhavel*’s unease with women’s increased public visibility and activity intensified with the surge of Armenian women’s undertakings but also more broadly with the growth of Iranian women’s organizations in the 1950s. For example, the daughter of the Zoroastrian representative to the parliament, Farangis Shahrokh Yeganegi, later Assistant Secretary General of WOI, founded the Zoroastrian Women’s Organization (est. 1950); Mehrangiz Dowlatshahi founded the New Path (est. 1955, *Rah-e now*); and Safiyyeh Firuz launched the Women’s League of Supporters of the Declaration of Human Rights (est. 1956).

*Tsakhavel*, which was the Irano-Armenian community’s second satirical monthly, ran equally as long as *Bobokh*, although with a several-year hiatus. Owned and edited by Yervand Bazen (born Mirzaian, 1899–1966), it appeared from 1943 to 1944 and then again from 1950 to 1958. Bazen, like Garagash, was born in Tabriz and received his education in Armenian and French schools. He worked for a number of journals in and outside of Iran and published several books of poetry throughout his lifetime.<sup>84</sup> *Tsakhavel*’s acerbic style and content shared much with *Bobokh*’s, even if *Tsakhavel* relied less on visual

<sup>81</sup> R.A. is the Ramkavar Azatakan Kusakts’ut’iwn (Democratic Liberal Party); H.H.D. is the Hay Heghap’okhakan Dashnakts’ut’iwn (Armenian Revolutionary Federation); and S.D.H. is the Sots’ial-Demokrat Hnch’akean Kusakts’t’iwn (Social-Democratic Hnch’akean Party).

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, *Bobokh* 32 (August 23, 1925): 254, where the editor points to the appropriateness of another Sarukhan illustration to the Tehran Armenian community. On Sarukhan, see Temimi, “From Intellectual to Professional”; and Ryzova, “I Am a Whore.”

<sup>83</sup> *Tsakhavel* 1 (September 1943): 1.

<sup>84</sup> Armant et al., *Iranahay*, 77.



**FIGURE 4.** Cover page of the Armenian-language satirical periodical, *Bobokh* (*Bogeyman*), August 31, 1925. From the archives of the National Library of Armenia, Yerevan, Republic of Armenia.

representations than its predecessor. Similar themes were expressed in the paper's pages in the 1940s and 1950s, two decades after the appearance of the first satirical paper. Its critique of women, however, was often more aggressive, offensive, and disparaging; it even pursued women critics of the paper in its pages.<sup>85</sup> *Tsakhavel* also distinguished itself from *Bobokh* with didactic pieces and illustrations that juxtaposed good and bad archetypes of womanly conduct, promoting an ideal woman who combined attributes of both modernity and modesty. By the 1950s, although *Tsakhavel* had come to terms with at least some of modernity's encroachment and acknowledged the new, modern woman, it was still driven by an anxiety. This anxiety boomed within the context of a growing women's movement, with organized activity, public presence, and visibility, all of which directly and indirectly challenged patriarchal norms and gender relations. Thus, *Tsakhavel* sought to shape and contain the modern woman by advocating for her modesty, with all that implied for behavior, dress, character, morality, and reconfirming her place in the patriarchal order.

The community's anxiety about Armenian women's increased public visibility and activism through independent women's organizations was again plainly expressed as *Tsakhavel* seemed to take sides with the most conservative of these groupings. Conspicuously eye-catching, the unsigned cover of the June 1, 1951 issue was entitled "Collective and Unanimous the Church-Loving Women's Union is Building the Prelacy" (Fig. 5).<sup>86</sup> It depicts the caricature of five middle-aged women, actual personalities and leaders of ACWU. Unlike the dominant Armenian women's organizations in Tabriz, Tehran, and Isfahan (that is, the various AWBSs and the AWU), from the outset the ACWU was subservient to the priorities of the Armenian prelacy, having been created under its authority. The third and fourth points of its regulations stated: "The Union is accountable morally and financially to Tehran's National Prelacy," and "The Union's honorary president is the Prelate of Tehran's Armenian Diocese."<sup>87</sup> Quite telling was the very language of its bylaws. The primary stated goal was "to assist the Armenian churches in their beautification"; women were to play an ornamental role for the structure that was the church while organizing lectures on religion and ethics, "inspir[ing] the worship of national . . . traditions among Tehran's community." Tending to needy students or the burial of the poor took on secondary importance.<sup>88</sup>

Unlike other Armenian women's organizations, the independent self-representation of ACWU in the form of either text or image seems never to have been profuse, self-initiated, or scholarly. In its self-presentation since 1928, the women of ACWU seem dwarfed by the authority and image of the church fathers. In effect, this cover of *Tsakhavel* is one of the few times ACWU was deployed on the communal stage to steer a conservative campaign on Armenian women. The five caricatures are depicted hard at work doing what was traditionally a man's job: physically erecting the new building of the prelacy. Longtime president of the ACWU, Satenik Petrosian Aserian (front left, 1902–85), in her pristinely white dress, stands in a pile of mud, proudly holding two mud balls in her hands; Hasmik Simonian Vartanian (front right) stands in the shared mud pile holding a shovel on which her right leg rests; the oldest among them, Gayaneh Melikian Yahinian (back right, 1897–1979), wears a bright red dress and moves out of the pictorial frame carrying the front end of a handbarrow, while Arax Petrossian Makarian (back center, 1907–2010) holds its back end,

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, *Tsakhavel* 10 (May 1950): 7, for an illustration of woman with a snake as her tongue; and *Tsakhavel* 2 (October 1943): 5, 14; *Tsakhavel* 4 (December 1943): 7 for the pursuit of critics.

<sup>86</sup> *Tsakhavel* 4, no. 36 (July 1, 1951): cover.

<sup>87</sup> Tehrani Hay Kanants' Yekeghets'asēr Miut'iwn, *Kanonagrut'iwn*, 3. Although this is a 1964 printing of the ACWU's regulations, there is no evidence that the regulations had gone through any substantive changes since their inception. From 1928 to the present, ACWU seems to have produced two small brochures on regulation and a brief history; see also Tehrani Hay Kanants' Yekeghets'asēr Miut'iwn, *80-ameak*.

<sup>88</sup> Tehrani Hay Kanants' Yekeghets'asēr Miut'iwn, *Kanonagrut'iwn*, 4. ACWU's establishment requires more research, as it may have been a concerted effort to bring women's activism into the fold and service of the Armenian Prelacy.



**FIGURE 5.** Cover of the Armenian-language satirical periodical *Tsakhavel* (Birch Broom), June 1, 1951. It depicts the members of the Armenian Church-Loving Women’s Union erecting the new building of the Armenian prelacy in Tehran. From the archives of the National Library of Armenia, Yerevan, Republic of Armenia.

looking away.<sup>89</sup> Behind a half-constructed wall, a not-yet identified figure with gray hair lays the bricks. The long caption is as enigmatic as the image, simultaneously praising and belittling both men and women in a mix of lowbrow Tehrani Armenian and Persian.

Brava women, in these days even man would not have this courage; even if in the past you slipped slightly, this work of yours wiped out all that. Money is a vile thing; it could bring calamity upon one's head, but the home will always remain.

Brava women, perhaps if Tehran's women's union sees your work and musters the courage, it too would build a theater and then a cultural house; evil tongues say that they too have money.<sup>90</sup>

In their Sunday best, with diverse dress styles and colors of bloomy blue, fluoridated red and white, and austere black and white, the women are depicted as if in the church courtyard at an Easter celebration. Yet at least three of them are stripped from thigh to toe and stand barefoot. A highly nuanced but certainly uncomfortable tension is created by this contrast, and still another: women taking on construction, which otherwise they would not be allowed to do, and for which, if they dared it, they would be ostracized. What are Bazen and his caricaturist alluding to here?

*Tsakhavel*, like *Bobokh*, was a satirical paper that sought or at least claimed to place all of society under a microscope and mock it; therefore, although women were special targets, men were not spared. With this depiction, *Tsakhavel* is leveling its scorn not only at the church-loving women by portraying them barefoot and calling them *knik*, but also at men, implicitly questioning their masculinity by depicting women doing men's jobs. As in most of its caricatures, *Tsakhavel* was sending an intentionally mixed and complex intracomunal message. Although at first glance the cover image and its caption seem to praise ACWU's work for the prelaty, the article that follows foregrounds the paper's real intentions: an attack on women's activism and an explicit attempt to hold a monopoly over the narrative about the New Woman at large. As readers move from the front page to the related article on the second page, they discover that the initial praise of ACWU is, in effect, a narrative strategy for criticizing the efforts of these women as they propose to construct—with “sums managed and saved during centuries”—a building to serve church or national needs, as well as making a jab at the prelaty, which had not only accepted the proposal but had promised additional financial assistance.<sup>91</sup> *Tsakhavel's* disapproval of ACWU is then juxtaposed with

<sup>89</sup> Ruzan Hovanessian (niece of the president of ACWU, Satenik Petrossian Aserian, and daughter of her sister and active member, Arax Petrossian Makarian) in an interview conducted by the authors, August 13, 2020, Glendale, CA; Ina and Alenush Aslanian (granddaughters of ACWU cofounder Gayaneh Melikian Yahinian) in an interview conducted by the authors, July 12, 2020, Paris, France, and July 14, 2020, Glendale, CA. See also Makarian, *Mokhrats'ats*.

<sup>90</sup> The Armenian script of the Armenian and Persian original follows:

Աֆարիմ կնիկներ, էս օրերում տղամարդը էդ դէրաթը չէր կարող ունենալ. եթէ անցեալներում մէ թալաքա սայթաքում էլ ունեցել էք, ձեր էս գործը ամէն բան բաթել արաւ: Փողը անպիտան բան ա, մարդու գլխին բալա կը բերի, ամա տունը միշտ կը մնայ:

Բարաքալա կնիկներ, բարքի ձեր էդ գործը Թեհրանի կանանց միութիւնը տեսնի դէրաթ գալ ինքն էլ մէ թատրոն էս մշակոյթի տուն շինի. չար լեզուները ասում են ընդոնք էլ փող ունեն. See *Tsakhavel* 4, no. 36, July 1, 1951 (cover).

Several Persian words appear. Two variants of “brava” are used: Աֆարիմ /*afarim*, slang for *afarīn* (افرين), and Բարաքալա /*barakalla* (بارك الله). Դէրաթ /*gheyrat* (غیرت) is used twice, once to mean courage and another time in combination with the Armenian verb “to come” (*gal*) to imply “to muster the courage.” The Persian բալքի /*balkeh* (بلكه) appears for “perhaps” and թալաքա /*talakeh* in combination with the Armenian “to slip” (*saytakel*) indicates taking money or something else through trickery. The Armeno-Persian slang usage of the word in this particular sentence can be interpreted as “small” or “slight.” The choice for “women” is the Armenian կնիկներ /*knikner*, the plural of *knik*, synonym for a married woman, although it also may be used pejoratively either to denote the low status of the woman or to betray the low status of the speaker.

<sup>91</sup> Emphasis added as a reminder that the ACWU was founded in 1928. *Tsakhavel* 4, no. 36 (July 1, 1951): 2.

a call to AWBS to rise to the occasion and divert the money from providing breakfast once a week to poor pupils, whom the paper charged with “shamelessness” and being “sinecure,” “spoiled,” and “demanding,” to the construction of a house of “Armenian Culture”—a “laudable and historic and valuable” undertaking.

Here, *Tsakhavel* was toeing the middle line—much like the modern yet modest—by privileging the AWBS in this community-building effort. Yet again, what seems like a reasonable solution to larger communal concerns is, in fact, a transfer of responsibility that guarantees failure. AWBS, even if involved in “praiseworthy” activity for “twenty years,” never committed to a mission for the intellectual and cultural betterment of either women or the community. From its inception in the late nineteenth century, AWBS has remained an exclusively and robustly charitable organization: to feed the poor, to care for the elderly, to school the dispossessed, and so forth. Erecting a house of theater or culture was neither a priority nor in its toolbox. Intriguingly, the one self-proclaimed intellectual and cultural women’s organization, AWU, is absent from both the illustration and the article. Although active and highly visible since 1939, AWU is neither named nor represented. *Tsakhavel*’s intentional silence, the very refusal to name the organization, is the real assault on AWU. At the end, *Tsakhavel* pokes fun at ACWU, calls on AWBS to chase failure, and summarily disregards AWU by denying it representation. Unlike the five heads of ACWU in their fifties shown in conventional outfits, the board of AWU in 1951 consisted of women with an average age of twenty-nine. Rebelling against their own mothers’ membership in ACWU, the women of AWU had refused the role of “beautifiers” of patriarchy; theirs was a project of community and self-enlightenment. Despite the tensions of the image and the text, *Tsakhavel* picked sides; the New Woman, neither in her generational outlook and ideological priorities nor her modernist appearance, was *Tsakhavel*’s choice—but neither necessarily was the traditional church-loving or benevolent one. *Tsakhavel* preferred to conceive and sculpt its own new woman.

The cover page of *Tsakhavel*’s May 15, 1950 issue is perhaps its most revealing and representative piece of such an effort (Fig. 6). The illustration, which promotes the proper fashion for the modern-yet-modest Armenian woman by contrasting it with the “unacceptable” fashion of another, lays bare the paper’s attempt to monopolize the discourse of modernity about women and to decide their proper place. The artist’s pen name, Khaytuni—“stinger” or “the one who has a sting” in Armenian—appears throughout the pages of the paper in the 1950s under several illustrations and verse (where his first name appears as Zambur; Armenian *zambur*, or hornet; Persian, *zanbur* or bee).<sup>92</sup> *Bobokh*’s commentaries on women’s behavior and fashion are outdone here with the introduction of a rich backdrop: Reza Shah’s modern and sanitized urban fabric. The radical urban reforms of the mid-1930s that affected spatial organization and urban life and the dress code changes coincided with and, at least in the case of urban modernization, continued under Mohammad Reza Shah.<sup>93</sup> By the late 1950s, Tehran had seen a complete urban makeover, with wide boulevards, streetlights, multistory buildings, and imported cars. In this illustration, we see the dress code and urban makeovers begun in the 1930s come together. The cartoon depicts a crossing of two streets, where on one corner stands the Armenian newspaper press house and on another a bar. The modern architecture with minimalist square windows, the Parisian streetlamp, and the clearly marked street and sidewalks are all incorporated into the caricature as indicators of the already fulfilled promise of Iranian modernity.<sup>94</sup> The long caption on the left appeals to the reader, “Here is a woman in front of you; paint (*nerk*) and make-up (*shpar*), latest fashion; there is no shame on her face; what else should I write about her?” The caption continues on the right side of the image where the modern-yet-modest woman is depicted: “In her natural exquisite appearance;

<sup>92</sup> See, for example, Khaytuni, “Orvay hratap pahanjnerits,” 2.

<sup>93</sup> On Tehran’s urbanism, see Adle and Hourcade, *Teheran*; Ehlers and Floor, “Urban Change”; and Mazumdar, “Autocratic Control.”

<sup>94</sup> On Pahlavi architecture, see Grigor, *Building Iran*.



FIGURE 6. Cover of the Armenian-language satirical periodical, *Tsakhavel* (Birch Broom), May 15, 1950. From the archives of the National Library of Armenia, Yerevan, Republic of Armenia.

with a virtuous (*parkesht*) posture and modest face; she is the embodiment of a model woman; respect and admiration to you, woman.”<sup>95</sup>

The binary structure of the double column of the caption is faithfully echoed in the compositional arrangement of the drawing itself. They join to convey the equally binary ethical message of the good and the bad, the graced and the demeaned, the cultured and the commercial. Above this caption, modern Tehran is framed by two women, one portrayed as inappropriately dressed and the other, on the right of the image, appropriately clothed. The latter is presented here as the prototype of the “modern yet modest”; she is the New Armenian Woman.<sup>96</sup> Her skirt covering knees dressed in stockings, her long-sleeved buttoned-up collar shirt elegantly accessorized by a scarf—she is a far cry from *Bobokh*’s projection of fashion’s future. In her left hand she carries her purse, and in her right hand a rolled-up copy of *Tsakhavel*. The image hints at the fact that she has just left the press building, thus inferring to her intellectual worth. Whereas the proper woman is leaving the *Tsakhavel* headquarters, her moral-pictorial reverse is heading to a bar. Like the cinema, bars were modernist spaces opened to women with great contentions and implications.<sup>97</sup> The modest woman’s judgmental gaze is directed toward the woman flanking the opposite side of the frame who, with her buttocks confronting the reader, protruding oversized breasts, short skirt with a long slit exposing stocking-less legs and high heels on newly paved sidewalks, is meant to give the impression of at the very least impropriety, and perhaps even lasciviousness. And because of “no shame on her face,” it is she who seeks and meets the gaze of the inferred male audience as men behind her stop and stare.

In the back of the picture plane, a large Orwellian head—indeed, the head of *Tsakhavel*’s chief editor and owner, Bazen—hovers over not just the “good” and the “bad” New Women, but the public space, where the Iranian women have now arrived. The introduction of women-as-citizens into the public domain, the street, was, as Najmabadi notes, “underwritten by policing of women’s public presence through men’s street actions,” even the “regulatory harassment” by men.<sup>98</sup> Here, Foucault’s notion of the modernist gaze originates on the press building, in the very eyes of the editor; then it traverses to the modest woman whose eyes point to the immodest woman and, through her, is returned to the viewer or reader. The gaze of the Orwellian Big Brother comes full circle. Despite this rigid binary, however, the depiction of the modern woman in both Armenian- and Persian-language periodicals was highly versatile in the discursive space of satire and caricature, ranging from the noble mother of the nation to the publicly available woman.<sup>99</sup> On this *Tsakhavel* cover, it is precisely this kind of discursive policing by the editor of the paper that we witness. His moral binary of the ideal Armenian woman versus the undignified is mirrored in the graphic binary of the illustration.

Although satire more likely pokes, prods, and provokes rather than proclaims, pronounces, and pontificates and may often seem impenetrable or obscure, some satirists nevertheless had unmistakable aims that they pursued through the medium of graphic representation.<sup>100</sup> For example, the editors and illustrators of both our satirical papers, like other satirical and graphic periodicals globally, deployed the conventions of the medium itself to instrumentalize and recast the image of Armenian women as “modern” and, as a result, Euro-American-looking. They were working within the visual conventions of graphic caricature, with its long-established codes of representation. In a similar vein, in his discussion of the impact of the adoption of Euro-American images of femininity into Iranian culture during the “women’s awakening,” Amin draws attention to the way that images appearing in Persian-language satirical papers “became fodder for sensational and graphic political expressions in the 1940s.” In his analysis of two independent weeklies, *Mard-e*

<sup>95</sup> *Tsakhavel* 11 (May 15, 1950).

<sup>96</sup> Najmabadi, “Hazards.”

<sup>97</sup> On cinema as a “volatile public space,” see Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, ch. 12. On Pahlavi-era cinema, see Naficy, *Social History*.

<sup>98</sup> Najmabadi, *Women*, 154.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Griffin, *Satire*, 5, 95. See also Grant, “Satire,” 13.



*Emruz* (Today's Man) and *Atash* (Fire), he argues that both photographs and satire's medium of cartoons "can serve as a guide to gender relationships precisely because they 'standardize, exaggerate, simplify everyday life even more dramatically than everyday rituals.'"<sup>101</sup> An analogous development takes place with the illustrations sketched on the pages of *Bobokh* even earlier in the 1920s and *Tsakhavel* in the 1940s, but especially in the 1950s, as such depictions both reflect and direct views about women and gender.

Both *Bobokh* and *Tsakhavel* had fairly long runs of about nineteen years, only to be outdone by the Tehran-published papers *Veratsnund* (1930–53), *Jahagir* much later (1966–87), and, of course, *Alik'*, which began in 1931 and still exists today. This is quite telling, as most other Armenian-language papers—not counting those geared toward children—in Iran have had an average life of about two to three years, with some notable exceptions, including literary journals *Arp'i* and *Armenuhi* (both Tehran, 1949–55) and the organ of the Social-Democratic Hnchak Party in Iran, *Zang* (Bell, Tabriz, 1910–22). *Bobokh's* and *Tsakhavel's* success may have had to do with a variety of factors, especially their ability to reach a broad reading and viewing public with varying levels of literacy and their appeal to the community's views on women and notions of gender.<sup>102</sup> Although the construct of the New Woman was being shaped by these two papers, increasingly Armenian women became active and sovereign agents of their self-representation. In the mid-1970s, this development exhibited its full manifestation.

### Displaying Costumes, Exhibiting a *Mission Civilisatrice*, 1972–76

The depictions of Armenian women by *Bobokh* and *Tsakhavel* betray the gender dimensions of the politics around women's issues during the turbulent years buttressed by 1921 and 1953; by the same token, they hint at the fact that women themselves, through organizations, were doing much more than conventional charity work. The establishment of AWU in 1939 by nine 17-year-old Armenian girls from Iran Bethel School was a game changer. Witnesses to the closing of Armenian schools, Emma (1922–2013) and Marta Abrahamian, Seda Darmanian (1923–2010), Lili Espero, Hubi Khachaturian, Eleonore "Elo" Mazlumian (1925–2019), Hasmik Carapetian, Vrejik Saghatelian, and Tagush Ohanian were galvanized by youthful anti-Reza Shah sentiment as well as their missionary mentors, with whom they had direct contact through either multigenerational schooling or private tutoring.<sup>103</sup> Unlike their mothers in the AWBS and ACWU, their devotion to equality was not quiescent. During its first four years, between 1939 and 1943, AWU ran an underground network of classes geared toward teaching Armenian language and literature to elementary students who had been assigned to all-Persian-curriculum state schools.<sup>104</sup> During this early illicit stage, AWU also planned regular outings for its few members in the outskirts of Tehran, exercising their healthy bodies and minds in the fresh air of the Alborz mountains. During these excursions, the girls took numerous group photographs of themselves—often with a book or a notebook in hand—and later, on the back of the photographs they carefully recorded: "1938 camp," "camp 1938 Emam Zade Ghasem," and "1940 camp Ap. 18–21."<sup>105</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Amin, "Selling," 351. Here, Amin engages with and cites Goffman, *Gender*, 84.

<sup>102</sup> Shiva Balaghi makes a similar point about illiteracy. See "Print Culture," 169.

<sup>103</sup> Hay Kin Miut'iwn, *60-aneak*, 1. Also, Moneh Hovnanian Der Grigorian (daughter of AWU cofounder and president Seda Darmanian Hovnanian) in two interviews conducted by the authors, June 3, 2019, and August 11, 2020, La Canada, CA; and Peggy Hovanessian Ghazarian (niece of AWU cofounder, Emma Abrahamian) in an interview conducted by the authors, November 21, 2020, Lexington, MA. Lazarian provides 1919 as Emma Abrahamian's birth year; see *Iranahayots'*, 121, 325.

<sup>104</sup> Darmanian Hovnanian wrote in her diary that AWU changed the location of the lessons to her house as "Hubi's house had been noticed"; Darmanian Hovnanian, *Diary*, August 4, 1939.

<sup>105</sup> Mazlumian Aslanian, *Archives*; Dena and Iren Aslanian (daughters of AWU cofounder Elo Mazlumian Aslanian) in an interview conducted by the authors, August 5, 2020, San Francisco, CA; Darmanian Hovnanian, *Diary*.

AWU was among the many organizations that were legalized after Reza Shah's exile. Its first formal executive board served in the year 1943–44, with Seda Darmanian Hovnanian as president, Alice Goyumjian Martirosian as secretary, and Herminé Mkrtchian Hanesian as treasurer.<sup>106</sup> Its very first act was to secure photography's bureaucratic power by documenting this formation in a photo studio; a practice that was repeated with subsequent boards, captured as an official executive unit.<sup>107</sup> Rejecting authoritarianism imposed either by the state or the community, these young women appealed to independence, intellectualism, and high culture. Their first stated mission was clear-cut: "To elevate the intellectual level of the Armenian woman," followed by, "2. To keep alive the patriotic spirit in the Armenian woman; 3. To aid the new generation in its Armenian education and instruction;" and "4. To participate in national life and to contribute to the realization of its goals."<sup>108</sup> The linking of the woman question and nationalism so common in women's movements and activism across the Middle East is evident in AWU's mission and activities as well.<sup>109</sup>

From the late 1940s through the 1960s, as AWU expanded and diversified its activities, it maintained the same goals and outlook and attracted wider membership and community status, especially as it rose to meet the next community crisis. Between 1946 and 1949, some 100,000 Irano-Armenians, many from the province of Isfahan, had answered Stalin's call to return "home." They were encouraged and assisted by local Irano-Armenians such as Garagash.<sup>110</sup> For customs papers, families were photographed by New Julfan Armenian photographers, including Patkerahanian, and left their villages en masse.<sup>111</sup> When the Iranian government halted "repatriation" in 1947, many found themselves stranded in Tehran.<sup>112</sup> The majority of those who arrived at their destination in Yerevan were men, whereas those left behind, the majority women, first lived in the slums of Behjatabad, awaiting permanent settlement in the neighborhoods of Narmak, Zarkesh, and Majidieh.<sup>113</sup> In the early 1950s, AWU, seeking "to render" these impoverished and displaced "Armenian women literate," began to offer classes, organize "useful lectures," and "tried to familiarize them with everyday issues."<sup>114</sup> While tending to the women of the shantytowns, AWU also organized weekly literary-cultural gatherings.<sup>115</sup>

After this refugee crisis, AWU moved on to more intellectual and cultural programming. In 1960, it hosted Armenian feminist Ellen Buzand during her lecture tour of Iran and then helped publish her book, *Nor Kinë* (The New Woman, 1960).<sup>116</sup> This was followed by AWU's daring publication of Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist play *Huis clos* (1944) in 1963, which featured two female protagonists and was translated into Armenian by one of the AWU's board members, Knarik Avagian (president 1952–53).<sup>117</sup> AWU also hosted the French armenologist and Armenian chair at l'École des Langues Orientales de Paris, Frédéric-Armand Feydit, in 1967. Through the decades, AWU subsidized students who went to study abroad and supported graduate students who enrolled in the Armenian studies program at Isfahan University. Despite its many undertakings, what most impressed its members, however, were AWU's weekly lectures on diverse topics, ranging from flower arranging to hygiene to women's rights, organized on Tuesday afternoons from three to five o'clock at the

<sup>106</sup> Hay Kin Miut'iwñ, 60-ameak, 21.

<sup>107</sup> Photographs of AWU's 1943 and 1946 board of trustees; Darmanian Hovnanian, Archives.

<sup>108</sup> Hay Kin Miut'iwñ, *Tsragir-Kanonagir*, 3.

<sup>109</sup> For a discussion of the evolution of the women's movement, see Fleischmann, "Other 'Awakening.'"

<sup>110</sup> Pahlevanyan, *Iranahay*, 181.

<sup>111</sup> Damandan, *Portrait*, 53.

<sup>112</sup> Pahlevanyan, *Iranahay*, 185.

<sup>113</sup> Malekian, "Mass Repatriation," 295–96.

<sup>114</sup> Hay Kin Miut'iwñ, 60-ameak, 4.

<sup>115</sup> Darmanian Hovnanian, *Diary*, multiple entries.

<sup>116</sup> Buzand, *Nor Kin-ë* and *Yerkeri Zhoghovadzu*. During her trip, she lectured at each of the major Armenian women's organizations in Tehran and Isfahan, as recorded by their publications.

<sup>117</sup> Sartre, *Ծրոյակ*.



**FIGURE 7.** The identification card issued by the Women's Organization of Iran for Huri Yahinian Aslanian as a member of Tehran's Armenian Women's Benevolent Society, October 23, 1966. Courtesy of Huri Aslanian Archives, Ina and Alenush Aslanian Private Collection, Paris, France.

Armenian Club, located at the intersections of Hafez and Naderi Avenues. Feminism, neither explicitly articulated nor entirely absent, was nevertheless practiced and thus acted as an epistemic variable with which the Armenian women of Iran grappled in the 1940s and 1950s.

Rebellious in the 1940s to the 1960s, the leadership of AWU began to be perceived by many Armenian young women as ossified during the 1970s, a period of both significant reforms in family law and increased centralization and state control over all associations, including women's organizations, as exemplified by the creation of WOI. Given their long history with women's organizations, many Armenian women immediately joined WOI, as evidenced by the identification card of Huri Yahinian Aslanian (1925–2000; Fig. 7). Issued by WOI to her as a member of Tehran's AWBS (*anjoman-e khayriye-ye aramane-ye tehran*), it is dated 1 Aban 1345 (October 23, 1966). Most scholars attribute the origin of WOI to the general meeting of the High Council on 28 Aban 1345 (November 19, 1966).<sup>118</sup> Yet, this card was issued twenty-seven days earlier, between Princess Ashraf's "command on 29 Mordad 1345 (20 August 1966)," to review "the High Council and its shortcomings" and the formation of WOI in November.<sup>119</sup> WOI's 1976 annual report listed thirty-three "member organizations" in Tehran.<sup>120</sup> Among the religious minorities, the Armenian organizations of the ACWU, the AWU, and the Cairo-created Armenian General Benevolent Union were followed by the Iranian Jewish Women Organization (est. 1949) and the Zoroastrian Women's Organization. Individual Armenian women also were active on WOI's various committees, including Margarette Grigorian on the Social Welfare Committee (*commission-e rafa-ye ejte-mai*) and Nvart Masumian on the Handicraft Committee (*commission-e sanay-e dasti*).<sup>121</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Afkhami, "Iran"; Najmabadi, "Hazards."

<sup>119</sup> Sazeman-e zanan-e iran, *Salnameh*, 41.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 100–101.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 105, 107. On Masumian, see Lazarian, *Iranahayots'*, 111.

In the centralized context of Mohammad Reza Shah's reign in the 1970s, the AWU was at its economic and organizational zenith, which led to the success of its most publicly visible undertaking in 1974. Its original mission was now wholly aligned with late Pahlavi modernist plans and its brand of women's rights. During this period, Armenian women's organizations, especially the AWU, resolutely engaged the Iranian state, the WOI, and other cultural entities as sovereign modern citizens with a shared stake in the modernist agenda of late Pahlavism. The fully cultivated stages of aesthetics and athletics were their playground. They injected the "modern-yet-modest" Armenian women into larger Pahlavi discourses on cosmopolitanism and women's rights through athletic, cultural, intellectual, and artistic undertakings. The state, in turn, did not hesitate to appropriate the healthy and hygienic bodies of its Armenian minority women to project the image of a progressive king at the vanguard of both ethnic and women's rights. When in 1968, for instance, the women's basketball team of Tehran's Ararat Cultural Organization won the national championship, the leading daily *Kayhan* applauded "Armenian girls" on their accomplishment while flaunting the photographs of their agile bodies in action on its hefty sports pages.<sup>122</sup> In the final decade of Pahlavi rule, AWU's *mission civilisatrice* "of educating and raising the cultural level of Armenian women," as stated in its bylaws, became especially manifest as it began to engage with larger state plans, including Mohammad Reza Shah's march toward the "Great Civilization" (*tamadon-e bozorg*).

Tehran was abuzz in May 1974. By the invitation of the Red Lion and Sun Society, the delegates of the Thai Muslim Women's Foundation had arrived on a ten-day visit of Iran, while the American Women's Club was convening its meeting on May 14.<sup>123</sup> The Ice Palace was screening *Monte Walsh* (1970), the Cinema Goldis *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971), and the Iran American Society Richard C. Sarafian's *Run Wild, Run Free* (1969).<sup>124</sup> The government was gearing up to host the Seventh Asian Games the following September at the massive Aryamehr Sport Complex. On the other side of the city, between May 13 and 16, from six to nine o'clock in the evening, forty-four Irano-Armenian women also took part as models displaying the history of Armenian costumes for the public in the Armenian Club, now relocated to the north, from the corner of Naderi and Hafez Avenues to France Avenue. On opening night, they all posed in their heavy dresses—thoroughly researched and tailored to the last historical detail—for a special viewing by Empress Farah and her official entourage, which included Minister of Culture Mehrdad Pahlbod, the long-term Armenian representative to the Iranian Parliament, Sevak Saginian, and his wife, Nella Saginian (Fig. 8). Following royal protocol, the exhibition opening was secured by SAVAK and limited to the official dignitaries and special invitees, which included the family members of the models as well as the tailors and women artists who had created the costumes.<sup>125</sup> The four days of the exhibition were the conclusion of several years of research, planning, and production. From 1972 to 1976, AWU poured its expertise into completing the steps ordinarily undertaken by a museum: the art history research on women's costumes, selection of specific artifacts as originals to be reproduced, choosing of models, creation of costumes, assembly of costume accessories, construction of a stage set, choreographing of exhibit models, printing of the exhibition catalog, photographing of models in costume, composition and translations of the academic text, public relations for the costume book, and final publication of two exhibition catalogs. The entirety of the project, with its various moving parts, was driven by modernist systematization and visual primacy, now honed to perfection by the AWU.

Under the presidency of Armik Tumanian Necessiantz (president 1972–76), an executive board was formed in fall 1972. It was led by Emma Abrahamian, one of the 17-year-old cofounders of AWU, a graduate of l'École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, among the twenty-seven

<sup>122</sup> "Afarin bar dokhtaran-e Aramaneh."

<sup>123</sup> "Armenian Costumes."

<sup>124</sup> Lazarian, "Splendid."

<sup>125</sup> Hovanessian Ghazarian interview.



**FIGURE 8.** The opening of the *Exhibition of Armenian Women's History Costumes* organized by the Armenian Woman Union and inaugurated by Empress Farah Pahlavi on May 13, 1974, at the Armenian Club in Tehran. Courtesy of Marina and Simeone Guevrekian Private Collection, Pasadena, California.

female artists in the Fourth Tehran Biennial (1964) with a bronze sculpture entitled *Woman*, and by 1972 a professor of sculpture with Tehran University's Faculty of Fine Arts.<sup>126</sup> The Research Committee under her direction consisted of devoted AWU members: Manush Gevorgian, Haverjik Hovanessian Bernardi (secretary, 1946–47), Amalia Galstian, Amalia Guevrekian (secretary, 1955–56), and Lida Lianazof (auditor, 1966–67).<sup>127</sup> Whereas the initial art history research and the selection of images of specific artifacts (i.e., coins and seals; illustrated manuscripts; miniature paintings—including a few by the famed Toros Roslin, ca. 1210–70 CE; church mural paintings; oil paintings; architectural reliefs; and photographs) were done collectively, each of the five committee members was assigned the supervision of eight artifacts and, in due process, the transformation of each into a live model. This was followed by a period of purposeful recruitment of girls and women with specific facial and physical features, matching the carefully selected historical artifacts. Older models were primarily drawn from AWU's ranks. Younger models were sought out in the community. Alice Khatchikian recalls being approached by Nercessiantz at the Armenian Club. In a similar manner, while sipping a café glacé at the historical Café Naderi on Naderi Avenue, Marie Louise Grigorian was “discovered” by a stranger—who turned out to be Abrahamian—because of her “Isfahani face.”<sup>128</sup> Each model's physique was adapted to precisely duplicate the historical evidence.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.; Abrahamian, Archives. On Tehran biennials, see Daftari and Diba, *Iran*.

<sup>127</sup> Hay Kin Miut'iwn, *Ts'uts'ahandēs*, 1; Hay Kin Miut'iwn, *60-ameak*, 21–27, 32.

<sup>128</sup> Alice Khatchikian (model 20 for AWU costume exhibition) in an interview conducted by the authors, July 29, 2020, Toronto, Canada; Marie Louise Grigorian (model 12 for AWU costume exhibition) in an interview conducted by the authors, July 16, 2020, Sherman Oaks, CA.

Volunteer work dominated and fueled the project, including the arduous production of the dresses at the end of 1973 and during the first half of 1974. However, a great deal of flexibility in individual investment and involvement was built into the project. Young women were actively recruited into the organization, and lifelong members were given key roles, occasioning opportunities for camaraderie and mentorship. For some, it was a “life-changing” moment; others barely remember their contribution.<sup>129</sup> Both the labor and the material acquisition were planned flexibly. Many models purchased the fabric at their own expense and tailored their own dresses. Three AWU members volunteered as both model and dressmaker, and seven members, including several committee members, called upon daughters or nieces for whom they made the dresses. Twenty-two professional tailors offered their labor at no cost to produce a total of twenty-eight costumes, including one for a six-year-old girl. The crowns, hats, and embroideries were crafted separately by both professionals and amateurs. “All the costumes, hats, veils and aprons,” the exhibition brochure explained, “have been cut, sewn and handcrafted by Armenian women in a labour in which skill and enthusiasm have gone hand in hand.”<sup>130</sup> Those who could afford it acquired their own fabrics; for others, AWU supplied the materials. The dress representing the region of Karin/Erzurum, for instance, was made of an Indian fabric purchased in London, a regular leisure or education destination for well-to-do Irano-Armenians in the 1970s.<sup>131</sup>

At least two of the costumes in their entirety were nineteenth-century dresses, including the thick purple velvet outfit from Konia borrowed from the Rusmanian family collection, which required insurance for its use in the exhibition.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, the models whom we interviewed confirmed that the committee persistently sought out “antique” accessories to complement the costumes.<sup>133</sup> Abrahamian, the lead on the project, was intimately familiar with this practice—of scavenging the alleyways of southern Tehran’s bazaar in search of Qajar-era belt buckles, keys, locks, jewelry, coins, and other riches. As a member of Tehran University’s Faculty of Fine Arts—alongside well-known artists Parviz Tanavoli and Marco Grigorian—she knew how to seduce the past to birth the modern. The incorporation of rare, antique, and inexpensive secular and in-use religious artifacts with the dresses significantly contributed to the interjection of this Armenian women’s narrative into the wider Pahlavi promotion of folklore as an expression of modernism, often sponsored by Empress Farah’s office and the “folklorists” of the Iranian elite.<sup>134</sup>

To effectively stage the exhibition, AWU enlisted professionals from within the Irano-Armenian community as members of the Coordinating Committee. The committee comprised Pistos Marugg (choreographer), Aramais Aghamalian (stage director), Arby Ovanessian (artistic advisor), Lida Berberian and Henri Yeganian (musical directors), Serj Avakian (graphic designer), and Razmik Arzooian (photographer).<sup>135</sup> Elongated but low wooden platforms were erected along the brick walls of the basement hall of the Armenian Club to render the exhibition as a chronologically evolving experience for the viewer; a “historical sequence,” as remarked in the exhibition brochure, that “expresse[d]

<sup>129</sup> Seda Khodadadian (lifetime member and model 27 for AWU costume exhibition) in an interview conducted by the authors, July 18, 2020, La Canada, CA.

<sup>130</sup> Hay Kin Miut’iwn, *Ts’uts’ahandēs*, 6.

<sup>131</sup> Ida and Arlette Der Hovanissian (models 32 and 16 for AWU costume exhibition) in an interview conducted by the authors, August 3, 2020, Glendale, CA.

<sup>132</sup> Hay Kin Miut’iwn et al., *Hayuhin*, models 21, 41; Lida Berberian (musical director and model 21 for AWU costume exhibition), in an interview conducted by the authors, August 8, 2020, Tehran, Iran; Guevrekian interview.

<sup>133</sup> Alenush Davidian (model 28 for AWU costume exhibition) in an interview conducted by the authors, July 11, 2020, La Canada, CA; Emilia Nercissians (model 25 for AWU costume exhibition) in an interview conducted by the authors, June 24, 2020, Tehran, Iran; Alvard Amirian Hacopian (model 24 for AWU costume exhibition) in an interview conducted by the authors, August 11, 2020, Yerevan, Armenia.

<sup>134</sup> On folklorists, see Frye interview, Iranian Oral History Project, tape 2, 22–23.

<sup>135</sup> Berberian interview; Arby Ovanessian (artistic adviser for AWU costume exhibition) in an interview conducted by the authors, August 6, 2020, Paris, France. On Berberian, Aghamalian, and Ovanessian, see Lazarian, *Iranahayots’*, 341, 352, 368.

both continuity of traditions and cultural evolution,” starting from Urartian and Parthian figures and extending to nineteenth-century Constantinople and Tbilisi urbanites.<sup>136</sup> The models were coached by Marugg—a professional ballerina and ballet teacher—in a certain set of arm and torso movements performed while standing in situ. An electrical wire system was devised to enable Berberian, who had composed and arranged the music program but also served as model 21, to access the on-and-off button under her foot. At certain intervals, the models performed their movements as the music came on; in the absence of music, they froze as if statues in a museum. The systematized details of the performance and display were matched by the modernist venue, the new hall of the Armenian Club, designed by Rostom Voskanian, a l'École des Beaux-Arts graduate and one of the heads of the architectural ateliers at Tehran University's Faculty of Fine Arts.<sup>137</sup>

The trilingual brochure of the exhibition (1974; see Fig. 8, the brochure is visible in Empress Farah's hand), opened with an homage to the cultural head of the Pahlavi state and her policies of pluralist inclusion through the valorizing of folklore: “Her Imperial Majesty, Shahbanu Farah Pahlavi's Gracious interest in the arts of various communities of this country is an immense source of inspiration towards further enrichment of cultural entities with mutual understanding and respect among people living in this land through the ages.”<sup>138</sup> This fourteen-page brochure, printed in Armenian, Persian, and English detailed the historical facts about each character in brief paragraphs under the model's number in the brochure. The introduction draws the reader's attention to the academic underpinning of the exhibition by noting that illustrated manuscripts were consulted at “the British Museum, the Berlin Museum, the Vatican Museum, and the Yerevan Museum, as well as the Armenian library-museums in Paris, Vienna, Venice, Jerusalem and New Julfa, Isfahan.”<sup>139</sup> It was noted that the work of such “distinguished scholars” as German Orientalist and Urartian expert Carl Ferdinand Friedrich Lehmann-Haupt, French historian of Cilicia Victor Langlois, Soviet archaeologist of the South Caucasus Boris Piotrovsky, and others buttressed the exhibition. The narrative of the text and its graphic tropes also displayed AWU's engagement with mainstream Pahlavi narratives about modernity and civilization. The once marginal in Iranian society was now helping shape the center.

Guiding the empress through the exhibition, Abrahamian explained the qualities and characters of each dress on live display: the goddess of Urartu from the ninth century BCE, Queens Satenik and Ashkhen from the Arsacid dynasty (12–428 CE), Queen Gurandukht of the Bagratid dynasty (ca. 885–1045 CE), Queen Keran and Princesses Keran and Zabel of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia (1080–1375 CE), and generic figures such as nuns, peasants, “gozals” (beauties), and “aristocrats” from various periods and regions, including the Safavid and Ottoman Empires, a prosperous New Julfan merchant's wife from the seventeenth century, two villagers from Chahar-Mahal and Feridan (dresses in use at the time of the exhibition), and two seventeenth- and nineteenth-century aristocrats from Tbilisi, among others.<sup>140</sup> While approaching and inspecting each, Farah engaged her ethnically Armenian subjects with interest in the exquisite artifacts. To two models, she teased, “Aren't you hot in that?” and “Aren't you getting tired?” At a third, she inquired about the golden lacework, whereas at another she observed that nylon stockings had not yet been invented in the sixth century. The empress also reassured another model that she had not taken offense when the nervous teenager addressed her as “his majesty”

<sup>136</sup> Hay Kin Miut'iwn, *Ts'uts'ahandēs*, 5; Hay Kin Miut'iwn et al., *Hayuhin*, models 1–3, 41, 42.

<sup>137</sup> Rostom Voskanian (1932–2013) was the oldest son of Minas Voskanian, the Tabriz photographer whose studio was passed on to his daughter, Hasmik, freeing Rostom to pursue a career in architecture. On Voskanian, see Grigor, “Rostom Voskanian,” 12–14.

<sup>138</sup> Hay Kin Miut'iwn, *Ts'uts'ahandēs*, 1. On Shahbanu's promotion of cultural inclusion and preservation, often dubbed “folklorist,” see Grigor, *Building Iran*, 182–86.

<sup>139</sup> Hay Kin Miut'iwn, *Ts'uts'ahandēs*, 5.

<sup>140</sup> Hay Kin Miut'iwn et al., *Hayuhin*, various pages.

(*a'lā hazrat*) instead of “her majesty” (*olyā hazrat*).<sup>141</sup> The linguistic slippage of this young woman as well as the sovereign’s benevolence speaks volumes about minoritarian modernity and the solidarity of women. Despite the upward mobility and growing integration of Iran’s religious minorities into mainstream society in the late Pahlavi era, the scene also reflected to some degree the enduring (self-)marginality of Armenians even in the performance of inclusion through the exhibition. Farah, who “always encouraged [her] office to sponsor many private cultural and social events,” was visibly impressed by the exhibition, as the committee had hoped.<sup>142</sup> Yet, to prevent any royal conundrum, an executive decision had been made in advance by the hosting members to refrain from using the Persian expression *pishkesh*, in case the empress took up the offer.<sup>143</sup> After all, AWU intended to donate the costumes to the museum of the once powerful All Saviour’s Cathedral (Vank, est. 1606, building 1655–64) in New Julfa, Isfahan, although most are now part of the collection of the Ardak Manoukian Museum, adjacent to Saint Mary Armenian Church in Tehran.

The exhibition of “historical dresses” made a splash in the national and international mass media and led to the production of a film that was shown on national television and at the Shiraz Festival of Arts.<sup>144</sup> The day before the opening, Tehran’s popular daily, *Ayandegan*, showcased four of the models, including the little girl, with an article entitled “Something More Than a Fashion Show.”<sup>145</sup> On the evening of the opening, *Kayhan International* published a photograph of the empress viewing four of the models; two days later, so did *The Tehran Journal* and *Alik*.<sup>146</sup> Since the 1930s, the Pahlavi media had depicted the royals inspecting monuments, cutting ribbons, visiting exhibitions, and in this way narrating the secular nation.<sup>147</sup> *Kayhan International*’s caption read, “Empress Farah inspects an exhibition of Iranian Armenian women’s dresses at the Armenian Club yesterday,” further adding, “the exhibition featured styles from various eras of Iranian history.” This was an inaccurate representation of what was intended by AWU and displayed, as of the forty-four costumes only eight—from New Julfa (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, models 12–15), Tabriz (eighteenth century, model 16), Karabakh (nineteenth century, model 20), and Syunik (eighteenth century, models 23–24)—could be deemed as part of an “Iranian” historical era. However, what is telling here is how the exhibition and its rituals of display, viewing, and media hype reflected the state’s wider discourse on inclusive cultural plurality under one monarchy. The cumulative sum of these events and their reverberation in the public domain embodied in multiple ways the women’s movement in the last decade of the Pahlavi era. Farah’s visit to the exhibition was a performance of deep sociopolitical and ideological patterns in late Pahlavism. Photography’s performative mandate to produce sociopolitical meaning was now reclaimed through an erudite exhibition that was performed on the stage of both art and diplomacy. It occasioned a moment in which a form of modernism and feminism met on the grounds of high art and cultural regionalism. The double marginality of being a woman and a Christian Armenian was diluted in the discourses of Pahlavi cosmopolitanism and civil society formation and at the same time emboldened by the visual strategies of museum culture, artistic display, and valorization of folklore.

<sup>141</sup> Khatchikian, Nercissians, Marie Louise Grigorian, and Davidian interviews.

<sup>142</sup> Farah Pahlavi in a brief correspondence with the authors, November 9, 2020.

<sup>143</sup> Hovanessian Ghazarian interview. The sociocultural meaning of *pishkesh* is nuanced: when someone expresses a liking for another’s item, the owner says *pishkesh* and then proceeds to offer the item as a gift. Usually, the offer is rejected as an act of politeness, but there also is a possibility that the gift will be accepted.

<sup>144</sup> Berberian and Hovanessian Ghazarian interviews.

<sup>145</sup> “Chizi Bish az Yek Namayesh-e Mod.”

<sup>146</sup> “Armenian Costumes”; Photograph, *Tehran Journal*, front page; “Hay kanants”; “N. K. M. Farah”; Zh. Gh., “Hay kanants”; Zh. Gh., “Kartsik’ner”; Masumian, “Yerku khosk”; Georgian, “Irani zhoghovrdanvēr”; Blanc, “L’Armenie,” 5. *Kayhan International* and the *Tehran Journal* began advertising the exhibition as early as May 2 and May 7 with a photograph of the dress rehearsals; “Members of the Armenian Women’s Society,” photograph with caption; Lazarian, “Splendid.”

<sup>147</sup> On royal ribbon cutting, see Grigor, *Building Iran*, 71, 110, 163, 175.



Both national and international mass media reported on the exhibition, and WOI included it in its 1975 annual report.<sup>148</sup> Farah's endorsement of the event gave the AWU added clout to translate the exhibition into a richly illustrated exhibition catalog in the format of a book, entitled *Hayuhin ew ir taraznerë* [The Armenian Woman and Her Costumes, 1976]. In the immediate aftermath of the exhibition, a new Publication Committee was added to the Costumes Committee. In addition to Gevorgian, Bernardi, and Necessiantz, two veteran AWU members joined: Adelina Petrosian Stepanian (board member, 1944–45) and Leontine Masumian (vice-president, 1958–59), who noted in the catalog that the “visit and attention of Iran's devoted and art-loving Empress . . . the encouragement of Armenian and other artists, and the urging of the very many people who attended the show, gave us the courage to publish an album of the costumes exhibited.”<sup>149</sup> For the production of the catalog, as with the staging of the exhibition, three high-profile professionals were added to the Publication Committee. The London-based, “award-winning” fashion photographer, Peter Carapetian took a break from *British Vogue* and *Brides Magazine* and arrived in his native Tehran to photograph each of the models.<sup>150</sup> For the printing of the book, AWU approached Gregory Lima, a New York journalist who had come to Tehran in 1958 to head the launching of *Kayhan International*. His interest in AWU's proposition was multiple: his Armenian wife and two sons, his draw to writing, and perhaps that his mother had been a “seamstress and a shop steward” for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, one of the earliest and largest majority female labor unions in the United States.<sup>151</sup>

The decisions surrounding the location and aesthetics of the photo sessions followed the same logic of “the authentic” implemented in the design, production, and display of the costumes. AWU organized several sessions at specific sites throughout Iran that would reinforce the authenticity of the costumes. Arrangements were made for Carapetian, his photography team, and groups of three to five models to travel as far north as the monasteries of Saint Thaddeus and Saint Stepanos (seventh to the seventeenth centuries) in Azerbaijan Province, and as far south as the All Saviour's Cathedral in New Julfa and the Armenian villages of Isfahan Province. In and around Tehran, the skirt of Ab'ali mountain, the gardens of Niavaran Palace, the interiors of Saint Sarkis Cathedral (1971) and Saint Mary Church (1945), and as well the interior and exterior of Galstian's neoclassic home served as diverse environments for the photo sessions. The high-quality photographs of the forty-four models appeared in color on full pages, alternating between verso and recto, facing the line-drawing of the historical artifact (described previously) based on which the costume had been produced. The attention paid to the quality and the authenticity of the final works were rendered mobile and permanent with the publication of the catalog book. The side-by-side, comparative reproduction of the historical evidence (the artifacts) and the copies (the dresses) created a modernist veracity. With a few years of delay due to color separation in London and printing in Hong Kong, the book was published and “sold out instantly”; the much-demanded reprint “never happened.”<sup>152</sup> Following the media hype about the exhibition, several board members sought out organizational partners in Paris, Boston, Washington, DC, and Los Angeles to coordinate an international tour of the costumes.<sup>153</sup> Lack of financing followed by the onset of the Iranian Revolution put an abrupt end to AWU's aesthetic, cosmopolitan, and feminist ambitions.

<sup>148</sup> Sazeman-e zanan-e iran, *Gozaresh*, 52.

<sup>149</sup> Hay Kin Miut'iwn et al., *Hayuhin*, “Forward”; Petrosian Stepanian, Archives.

<sup>150</sup> Hay Kin Miut'iwn et al., *Hayuhin*, “Credits.” A certain Stephen Kibble was hired as the “designer,” about whom the authors have yet to find information; Demer, “Peter Carapetian's ‘IRAN’”; Khachatourian, “Acclaimed Photographer.”

<sup>151</sup> “Obituary: Gregory Lima.”

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.; Hay Kin Miut'iwn, Brochure; Vincent Lima (son of publisher of AWU costume book, Gregory Lima), correspondence with the authors, June 6, 2020, New York.

<sup>153</sup> Hovanessian Ghazarian and Guevrekian interviews.

The century-long pictorial journey of Irano-Armenian women from the 1880s to 1976 traced here reveals the Irano-Armenian brand of the New Woman as she became idealized, satirized, belittled, and admired. She was first captured by male photographers in the modern space of the photographic studio as dignified and austere, as she struggled to secure proper education for girls or succor for refugees; she was then mocked by male editors and caricaturists while being sidelined by king, prelate, and party boss. From the outset, be it in photo studios, schoolyards, charity work, or historical writing, women insisted on their own textual and visual self-representation, itself a modernist discourse that came full circle in 1974, when they showcased their presence not only in the tropes of history, fine arts, and folklore but also in the rituals of nationhood and kingship. As herstory remained muted, these women struggled to be agents of visual and textual representations as women, Iranians, Armenians, Christians, artists, tailors, grassroots volunteers, and modern citizens of Iran and the world. As such, despite their double marginality, their activism came to help shape Iran's unique experience of modernity during the course of a turbulent twentieth century.

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