

1 *The Press and the Legacy of the Past*

On May 13, 1957, a flashy event was held at Tehran's Moulin Rouge Cinema to celebrate the debut of the weekly magazine *Ettela'at-e Banuwan*, which began publication seven weeks earlier. In the presence of 1,100 of the magazine's readers the keynote speaker and proprietor, Abbas Mas'udi, emphasized: "This publication is meant to fill a dearth in our country's press, and it is necessary for Iranian women to have a special magazine of their own. It will allow them to discuss issues pertaining to their lives and express their thoughts, opinions and aspirations."¹ In his inaugural speech, Mas'udi linked the new venture of Ettela'at Publishing Group with the broader history of the Iranian press and women's awakening, while conveying the impression that *Ettela'at-e Banuwan* was the first journal aimed at women in Iran. Yet, pioneer women's periodicals had already been introduced in Iran in the 1910s.² According to some estimates, at least 10 other women's journals were published in Iran between 1953 and 1967, simultaneously with *Ettela'at-e Banuwan*.³ Why would a prominent politician and leading media tycoon, who was more familiar with the local newspaper market than many of his contemporaries, refer to a dearth in the Iranian press?

Seeking an answer to this straightforward question, this chapter explores Iranian women's entry into journalism at the turn of the century. Women's press emerged in the early twentieth century, at approximately the same time that new perceptions about the nature and function of the press, anti-imperialist nationalism, and the idea of

¹ *Ettela'at-e Banuwan*, 8, May 20, 1957.

² For purposes of convenience, throughout the book, the term "periodical journals" (or "periodicals" for short) is used when referring to publications for and by Iranian women published during the first half of the twentieth century, and the term "magazines" for those published in the second half of the century.

³ Vatandoust, "The Status of Iranian Women during the Pahlavi Regime," 111.

“the modern woman” were consolidating. The regular provision of news by newspapers, people’s growing interest in them, and their absorption by emergent westernized, urban, middle- and upper-middle classes were a sign of novelty, development, and change no less than some of the progressive ideas these publications discussed. Publishing women’s writings and the circulation of their ideas, represented a serious infringement of longstanding sociocultural taboos, and therefore encountered occasionally fierce objections. The appearance of women’s periodicals was not just a sign of some form of social change; it was, as this chapter cares to establish, implicated in the very process of change itself and hence an important component in the definition of “the modern woman” in Iran.

The emergence of an Iranian women’s press has not been studied systematically as a topic in its own right, probably because the history of the press in Iran, and in the Middle East generally, is not easy to write.⁴ Many newspapers and periodical journals were ephemeral, appearing briefly and disappearing after a few issues; from some, only a few copies survived, and there are cases of several publications bearing the same title. In the absence of complete collections of early copies, recording and collecting information about the Iranian women’s press gained importance as much as the actual publication of periodical journals, and even more in comparison to their development over time. Consequently, for the most part, several volumes concerned with the emergence of the Iranian press either include women’s periodicals from the early twentieth century in their list of publications arranged according to alphabetical order, providing brief historical background, or offer limited explanation about their content and production.⁵ For our discussion on *Ettela’at-e Banuvan* and *Zan-e Ruz*, reviewing women’s early journalistic initiatives alerts us to the intricate and dynamic connections between the press, women, and the state in the ensuing decades. It also provides a vital basis for assessing the development of the press in Iran and tracking the challenges, trends, and shifts of women’s periodicals over time.

As a popular print format, the first women’s periodicals in Iran were not an isolated phenomenon. By the early twentieth century,

⁴ Lewis, *The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2,000 Years*, 11.

⁵ Two examples are Esfandiari et al., *Matbu’at-e Iran* and Hashemi, *Tarikh-e jarayed va majallat-e iran*.

journalistic ventures for and by women were already advanced throughout urban centers of the Middle East. Several women's supplements and journals were published in major cities, including *Sukufezar* (Bloomed Garden, 1883–1884) and *Hanimlara Mahsus Gazete* (Ladies' Own Journal, 1895–1908) in Istanbul; *Al-Fatat* (the Young Lady, 1892–1893) in Alexandria; and *Al-Ferdows* (Paradise, 1896) and *Mir'at al-Hasna'* (Mirror of the Beautiful, 1896) in Cairo. Late-comers in adjacent countries were the early women's journal in Afghanistan, *Ershad-e Nesvan* (Ladies' Guidance), which began publication in 1921, and *Leila*, which appeared in 1923 in Iraq. Each of these earlier ventures has its own particular experience, historical context, and cultural inputs; nonetheless, taken together they share several broad features that apply to the Iranian case as well. The earliest initiatives by female pioneers in the Middle Eastern print media emerged against a backdrop of rising notions of modern nationalism and indigenous movements for reform led by male bureaucrats and intellectuals. They were motivated by the ideas and activities of the women's suffrage movement in western countries, and often inspired by western women's magazines in layout, style, structure, and content. Despite heavy borrowing from their western counterparts; contrary to common assumptions, western liberal notions were not simply mimicked by the Eastern periodical press: Issues concerning morality were especially contested and women's restrictive conditions were locally contextualized. Conveying the thoughts and feelings of literate and educated women, predominantly from the affluent echelons of society, early journals by and for women of the region were primarily concerned with education or more precisely with women's right to acquire modern knowledge.⁶ Hence, the primary feature to characterize the modern woman entailed access to wider sources of updated and practical information.

In 1912, one of the earliest periodicals of women in Iran, *Shekufeh*, stressed, "No kingdom can enter the circle of civilization and progress without the mediation of a newspaper. It is the newspaper that induces ideas, eloquence and speech, and introduces us to ways of life and a wealth of educational properties . . . We, Iranian women, wish to step

⁶ Representative studies are Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt*; Demirdirek, "In Pursuit of the Ottoman Women's Movement," 65–82; and Karakaya-Stump, "Debating Progress in a 'Serious Newspaper for Muslim Women,'" 155–181.

into the circle of progress...⁷ This early perception of newspapers as an impetus for progress and recognition of their instrumentality for didactic purposes marked the gradual acceptance of women into the community of readers and writers in Iran, which included two main stages: First, correspondence with editors, and having letters and petitions published in general newspapers, and second, setting up the first periodicals by women. Motivated to participate in the progress of their kingdom, individuals and groups of women forged a new medium of communication to discuss their plight, grievances, and to express their patriotism. They were also redefining the contours demarcating the private and public spheres of their time and paved the way for a niche other women could enter in the ensuing decades.

The Emergence of an Independent Press

Iranian women's early initiatives in journalism were conceived and born out of the turbulent years of the popular movement for reform that reached its climax in the Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911). Print was in use in Iran since at least the seventeenth century and the earliest newspaper, *Kaghaz-e Akhbar* (1837),⁸ and the first official gazette, *Vaghaye'e Ettefaghiyeh* (1851), began publication under the rule of the Qajar dynasty (1786–1925).⁹ However, most scholars agree it was only in the late nineteenth century “that print culture became significant component of Iran's intellectual and political landscape.”¹⁰ In the early 1910s, the British orientalist Edward Granville Browne was among the first to lay the foundation for the historiography of the Iranian press in his series of monumental books on the Constitutional Revolution. Conveying the prevailing notions at the time, he maintained that “the most important effect of the press in every country is

⁷ As quoted in Kayhani, “Nakhostine-ha dar matbu'at-e zanan,” *Hamshahri*, August 31, 2006.

⁸ *Kaghad-e Akhbar* (Newspaper) was published by Saleh Shirazi, one of the first Iranian students sent to England to learn new sciences and technology. For further reading, see: Bashir, *The Iranian Press and Modernization under the Qajars*, 120–126, 193.

⁹ In 1851, Amir Kabir launched the Qajar court's longest-running publication, oftentimes known as *Vaghaye'e Ettefaghiyeh* (“Journal of Events,” the title was changed at least five times before the Constitutional Revolution).

¹⁰ Balaghi, “Print Culture in Late Qajar Iran: The Cartoons of *Kashkul*,” 165.

the awakening of political and literary opinion amongst the people.”¹¹ The perception of newspapers as organs of enlightenment supported Browne’s earlier assertion that prior to the promulgation of the Iranian constitution in 1906, “there existed in Persia no press worthy of the name,” but only a few lithographed sheets appearing at irregular intervals, which contained no news or observations of any interest. Official or semiofficial papers were, according to Browne, abounding with adulation of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (1848–1896) and praise of his regal activities, covering his hunting expeditions and describing the gifts presented to him by the people.¹²

Inexplicitly contesting Browne’s dismissal of the official periodicals, Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi mentions that these sheets also contained brief items about foreign news, articles of literary and educational nature, announcements of governmental appointments and policies, discussions of public health, reports on crime, commodities prices, occasional critical letters, and essays by individuals. Considering the variety of their content, Tavakoli-Targhi points to two objectives carried out by preconstitutional periodicals. The official gazette meant to support the Shah’s undertaking to educate and discipline his subjects by fostering “the intelligence and perception of the residents of the sublime state.” In addition, royal advisors expected that increasing the number of nonofficial newspapers would promote the ruler’s image as an enlightened monarch.¹³ Certain vestiges of these notions about the function of the press as an adjunct to the royal court and instruments of the government were inherited by the Pahlavi dynasty and further shaped state’s policy toward the media in twentieth century Iran, as we shall see later in the book.

The steady increase in the number of nonofficial papers in the capital and provinces was accompanied by the nascence of direct state censorship in modern Iran. Beginning in the early 1880s, the order of Naser al-Din Shah required newspapers to be approved by the official printing house, prior to publication.¹⁴ Consequently, at the turn of the century, numerous independent papers, both supporting and opposing the absolutist Qajar rule, were established abroad by Iranian

¹¹ Browne, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia*, 154.

¹² Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905–1909*, 242.

¹³ Tavakoli-Targhi, “Going Public: Patriotic and Matriotic Homeland in Iranian Nationalist Discourses,” 179–180.

¹⁴ On the Ministry of Publication, see: Kohan, *Taarikh-e sansur*, 112–113.

expatriates. Despite occasional restrictions on their import, newspapers published in exile were smuggled into Iran enclosed in books or envelopes and circulated throughout the country, often by traveling merchants.¹⁵ Published in London, Berlin, Istanbul, Cairo, and Calcutta, Persian newspapers in exile were instrumental in shaping liberal notions of constitutionalism. Along with endorsing the establishment of a legislature or parliament to stamp out the corrupt Qajar administration, they evoked the idea that the autocratic power of the Shah should be limited by the rule of law. Inspired by western, mostly European, liberal thought and affected by the poor sociopolitical climate at home, some articles and columns in *Ghanun* (London, 1890), *Habl al-Matin* (Calcutta, 1893), and other newspapers questioned the backward social status of women in Iran. More precisely, they criticized those cultural conventions that perpetuated women's illiteracy, seclusion and exclusion from realms of knowledge in the East.¹⁶ For example, an article published in *Akhtar* (Istanbul, 1875) commented, “[while] western women are closing the gap with men in science and art, women of the Orient know nothing of the world, except for the four walls of their own homes.”¹⁷

In the years prior to the Constitutional Revolution, intellectuals such as Mirza Agha Khan Kermani and Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh also expressed leanings toward proto-feminist notions in their writings, by discussing greater social freedom for women.¹⁸ Most of these early male writers considered the pursuit of knowledge as means for moving Iran closer to the community of humanism. Kashani-Sabet explains that in the Qajar era political discourse, the term “humanism” (*adamīyat, ensānīyat*) was usually used “in an attempt to increase national sentiment and patriotic loyalty toward the homeland,” and in turn as a catchphrase for “pursuing progressive reforms aimed at restoring what was seen as Iran’s pride and former grandeur.”¹⁹

Iranian national revivalism of the turn of the century, whose buds can be found in the 1891 popular revolt against the tobacco

¹⁵ Browne, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia*, 17.

¹⁶ Mansour, “Chehre-ye zan dar jarayed-e mashrutīyat,” 15–16.

¹⁷ Quoted in Hazrati and Roshan, “Tahavulat-e ejtema’i-ye zanan dar ruznameh-ye Irani az aghaz ta payan-e mashruteh-e dovum,” 52.

¹⁸ See also the historical reviews in *Zan-e Ruz*, 148, January 6, 1968.

¹⁹ Kashani-Sabet, “Hallmarks of Humanism,” 1174–1175.

concession granted to foreign entrepreneurs, stirred the revolutionary winds of the early twentieth century.²⁰ Ongoing public unrest eventually forced Mozaffar al-Din Shah (1896–1907) to consent to the formation of the National Consultative Assembly (*Majles-e Shura-ye Melli*, hereafter, “Majles”). The elected Majles convened for its first session on October 7, 1906. Following approval of the first constitution, substantial attention was given to legislative measures for regulating the press.²¹ The Supplementary Fundamental Laws of October 1907, approved by the first elected Majles, formulated the earliest constitutional provisions for the activity of the press in Iran, against a backdrop of “publicist fever” for nonofficial newspapers. Writing shortly after or during his eight months residence in Iran as treasurer-general in 1911, William Morgan Shuster observed, “a remarkable free press sprang up overnight, and fearless writers came forward to denounce injustice and tyranny whether from within their country or without.”²² In 1907 alone, 84 new newspapers and periodicals were published,²³ but the following year the *Times* reported that “the free press of Persia . . . proved to be as mischievous and as dangerous as it has proved to be on other Oriental lands.”²⁴

Not unlike the *Times*, the new, anti-constitutionalist monarch Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar (1907–1909) and his royalist supporters were aware of “the dangers” of a free press. Shuster further notes that as nonofficial newspapers spread, “the Tehran press attacked the Shah in articles whose bitterness, scorn and lightly-veiled threats almost surpass belief.”²⁵ After royalist forces, backed by large-scale Russian intervention, dissolved the first Majles in the coup of June 23, 1908, the editor of *Sur-e Esrafil* and proprietor of *Ruh al-Qudus* were executed by orders of the Shah.²⁶ The ensuing civil war eventually

²⁰ On March 8, 1890 Naser al-Din Shah granted the tobacco franchise to a British entrepreneur, which prompted a cleric-led popular ban on all tobacco crops. Consequently, the Shah was forced to cancel the concession.

²¹ Article 20 stipulated that “All publications, except heretical books and matters hurtful to the perspicuous religion [of Islam] are free, and are exempt from censorship.” Saidi-Sirjani, “Constitutional Revolution: vi. The Press,” 201–212.

²² Shuster, *The Strangling of Persia*, 245.

²³ Browne, *The Press and Poetry*, 27–153.

²⁴ Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, 128.

²⁵ Shuster, *The Strangling of Persia*, xxxiii.

²⁶ Hashemi, *Tarikh-e jarayed*, 24.

led constitutionalist forces to depose Mohammad Ali Shah, who was exiled to Russia, and install his 12-year-old son Soltan Ahmad Mirza (1909–1925) on the throne. Reinstatement of the Majles in November 1909, following the second parliamentary election, was marked by the emergence of political parties and the first period of the Iranian partisan press.²⁷

Like a tidal wave, the constitutional movement swept over many sectors of Iranian society, including intellectuals, merchants, craftsmen, clerics, tribal leaders, and women. Existing literature elaborates on the various ways in which women, who were stratified and divided among themselves into the warring factions of royalists, constitutionalists, or nationalists with fickle political alliances, became politically active during these turbulent years. Parvin Paidar suggests that women from lower classes were more inclined to support the royalists and anti-constitutionalist clergy, while affluent women tended to side with constitutionalists, complaining about the clergy's hand in centuries of female subjugation.²⁸ Janet Afary notes that women protested in street demonstrations, gave refuge to persecuted deputies, carried pistols under their veils, and supported leading clerics from rival camps. They were also involved with raising funds to establish a national bank; participated in the boycott of European textile; formed semisecret societies (*anjomanha*) and associations (*ejtema'at*); distributed leaflets (*shabnamehha*); and addressed letters and petitions to local and foreign dignitaries and newspapers.²⁹ However, when the primary goal of the revolution was achieved, women were denied participation in the new parliament. Although the gates of the Majles were closed to female delegates until the White Revolution of 1963, some erudite women were able to use the press as an alternative to traditionally male-dominated public platforms such as the mosque and the bazaar.

New Language, New Public Space

In a society that was concerned for centuries with keeping the worlds of men and women apart, as Farzaneh Milani emphasizes, the public

²⁷ Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, 128.

²⁸ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 73.

²⁹ Afary, *Grassroots Democracy and Social Democracy in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911*, 219–230; Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 58.

feminine ideal “as silent, immobile, and invisible,” was prescribed by cultural conventions and endorsed by Islamic precepts.³⁰ Though pre-modern women belonging to noble, established merchants, and progressive clerical families often received some education and learned to memorize religious texts, writing was discouraged for fear they might write love letters to strange men, and thereby compromise their family’s honor.³¹ Najmabadi further adds that the premodern female voice was largely an oral voice, to be heard, but rarely written. Women’s voices were almost exclusively limited to social and familial gatherings, directed at audiences of other women, relatives, and acquaintances who were “lawful” (*naharam*) through blood ties or marriage.³² Hence, the emergence of nonofficial newspapers enabled Iranian women to participate in the public discourse, and openly articulate their thoughts and feelings concerning current affairs, replacing the absence with presence. Considered in this context, publishing and circulating writings voicing women’s specific grievances in public were no less subversive than the general struggle for the establishment of the Majles.

Women’s early participation in the press took the form of open letters and petitions that they sent to editors and publishers of constitutionalist newspapers.³³ There is also evidence that some telegrams sent by local societies to fellow suffragists abroad and policy-makers found their way to the pages of foreign newspapers.³⁴ Written in the seclusion of women’s homes, the genre of “letters to the editor” was a private and solitary activity, a convenient literary outlet for erudite Iranian women to express themselves publicly and communicate their messages openly. The development of a telegraph network in the late 1860s and the foundation of a modern postal service in 1874 not only facilitated communications between Tehran and almost all major provincial urban centers, but also made mailing letters and sending telegrams more common practices.³⁵ Mailing a letter was not very

³⁰ Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*, 2.

³¹ Afary, *Grassroots Democracy*, 205.

³² Najmabadi, “Veiled Discourse-Unveiled Bodies,” 488.

³³ See, for instance, Taireh, “Nameh-ha va-neveshteh-ha va-ash’ar hamrah ba barghayi zandegi-e ow,” 146–195.

³⁴ Bayat-Philipp, “Women and Revolution in Iran, 1905–1911,” 299.

³⁵ Gilbar, “The Opening Up of Qajar Iran: Some Economic and Social Aspects,” 82.

expensive and, even more importantly, it allowed women to voice their opinions in print anonymously or under pseudonyms.

Indeed, many of the letters attributed to women in the constitutionalist press were anonymous, and occasionally included a sprinkling of poems with patriotic flavor. Although anonymous articles and poems were not uncommon in early Persian newspapers, their publication is especially intriguing because of questions of authorship.³⁶ It is difficult to determine whether all earliest letters attributed to female authors were indeed written by women. It is also unclear whether authors withheld their signature from the letters in order to write freely, or editors deliberately expunged women's names as a precautionary measure, to either protect their sources or avoid compromising the writers' reputation by mentioning their name in public. Anonymity did not vanish completely in later decades. Readers continued to send letters and comments to women's magazines of the late Pahlavi era, signing them with their initials or using only their first name and place of residence. The Constitutional Revolution temporarily provided a congenial atmosphere for self-expression in Iran, but giving women a foothold in the press was not trivial or free of concerns, even for male advocates of their emancipation. Progressive constitutionalists (intellectuals, journalists, poets, delegates to the Majles) wrote articles on behalf of universal education and greater social freedom for women and also expressed support for their participation in the movement for reform. Within the framework of national discourse and in the spirit of solidarity, they underscored women's roles as educators of children, carriers of national traditions and customs, and pillars of the nation. However, at that time, they (and their contemporaneous female cohorts) neither sought nor advocated an unequivocal reformulation of gender roles. Even in later years, people who had the means to influence public opinion about women were still ambivalent toward publicizing women's writings. In the early 1920s the first poems of the noted poet Parvin E'tesami appeared in *Bahar*, a literary journal edited by her father. However, fearing that publicity might compromise her marital prospects, he discontinued the publication of her works.³⁷

³⁶ Nabavi, "Readership, the Press and the Public Sphere in the First Constitutional Era," 221.

³⁷ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 104.

What, then, motivated editors in these revolutionary years to publish women's letters? One could argue that in their attempt to steer and shape public opinion, newspapers competed to increase circulation by winning a larger audience of readers and listeners.³⁸ During the revolutionary turmoil, as the demand for news increased both among the literate and illiterate public, the phenomenon of reading newspapers aloud publicly in mosques, markets, and tea houses became more widespread.³⁹ The most common methods of gathering and disseminating information continued to rely on oral exchange based upon personal contact. Prior to 1906 no paper could claim circulation of more 1,000, but some newspapers of the constitutional period are said to have reached 7,000–10,000.⁴⁰ In this period, when newspapers sprang up like mushrooms and dropped like flies, publishing women's letters was not only new, but shocking and provocative. In other words, it was sensational. Negin Nabavi also notes the occasionally blunt and belligerent nature of the letters published, and claims that women's letters were among the most forthright published. Undeterred, they complained about the inaction of public officials and delegates and other issues, thereby their letters provided "editors with an added pretext of publishing material that might otherwise have been considered too risky."⁴¹

Thus, a handful of published letters attributed to women authors set a precedent for female public exposure, encouraged others to intrepidly raise their voices in print, and provided a crucial intersection of public domain (*andrūni*) and private domain (*birūni*). In their correspondence, female writers voiced their opinions on public issues as private individuals, representative of a group or on behalf of their gender. Whether genuine or not, it seems that many of the earliest anonymous letters by women were designed to awaken and mobilize men by drawing them to the constitutional cause. In a letter published by *Sur-e Esrafil* in July 1907, a female writer lamented: "Why am I not a man, to say things I know, to do what I want, and spill the last drop

³⁸ Peter Avery points out that the Qajar government gazette *Vaghaye'e Ettefaghieh* occasionally referred not only to readers (*khanandeh-gan*), but also to listeners (*shenavandeh-gan*). See: Avery, "Printing, the Press and Literature," 829.

³⁹ Banani, "The Role of the Mass Media," 323; Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 51.

⁴⁰ Browne, *The Press and Poetry*, 25.

⁴¹ Nabavi, "Readership, the Press and the Public Sphere," 220–221.

of blood for the sake of the homeland . . . Ah, I don't know what men are afraid of and what causes their trepidation."⁴² Not long after, demands for the expansion of the sociopolitical arena and educational reform began to occupy more space in women's published letters.

In this new developing public platform, women could arouse public opinion about their national concerns and protest alongside their patriotic brothers. A consensus among scholars of the early Iranian women's movement suggests the link between nationalism and feminism created the framework for the definition of women's emancipation, grounded in the need for national progress.⁴³ Most of the women who sent letters to the press were inculcated with strong national sentiments and feminist awareness, yet unlike their male supporters, they encountered and had to surmount gender preconceptions and prevailing superstitions. The widespread notion that a woman's mind is as feeble (*zaifeh*) as her body forced women writers to prove they were no less articulated, opinionated, polemical, and patriotic than their male compatriots. Using arguments within a framework of universal values, such as enlightenment, progress, justice, and equality, which are supposedly detached from gender identity, proved to be a valuable "entry ticket" into the dominant nationalist discourse. Their mere participation in this public discourse crossed the boundaries that diametrically separated the private and public space, and redefined them. By 1921, the biweekly magazine *Jahan-e Zanan* (Women's World) established in Mashhad, vigorously promoted not only universal education, but also reform of the dress code for women and prohibition of polygamy.⁴⁴

Referring to women's publications in general, Najmabadi explains that by having their writings printed and circulated, woman's texts could acquire a heterosocial audience. Through the process of acquiring a public, female/male audience, women's language itself, Najmabadi continues, "became significantly, if not radically, transformed. The transition was gradual and even in the 1920s, remains of a more traditional female language, oral in tone with everyday street smart (home smart!) allusions," is traced in women's writings.⁴⁵ This

⁴² Quoted in Bonakdaria, "A World Born through the Chamber of a Revolver: Revolutionary Violence, Culture, and Modernity in Iran, 1906," 335.

⁴³ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 75.

⁴⁴ Mowlana, *Journalism in Iran: A History and Interpretation*, 462.

⁴⁵ Najmabadi, "Veiled Discourse," 503.

transition from colloquial to written idiom corresponded with general changes occurring in the Persian language. Efforts to close the gap between the written language of the elite and the spoken language of the masses coincided with a nascent nationalist attempt to “sanitize” it from foreign, mostly from Arabic, vocabulary.⁴⁶

Efforts by intellectuals such as Akhundzadeh and later Malkom Khan to reform the language that was written in Arabic script did not strike a chord in Iran as it did in Turkey. However, to express new ideas contemporary writers had to abandon the classic style of Persian prose, and adjust the language to the exigencies of the present. The Iranian press had a major role in the process through which idioms and adages of colloquial speech were becoming part of the accepted written language.⁴⁷ This transition also involved the adoption of technical terms from foreign languages, and adaptation to the telegraphic informational style of journalism, although some still favored colorful commentary. Articles had to be written in an easy and succinct style in order for the content to be more comprehensible for the general public.

This process continued in the ensuing decades, and is best exemplified in the 1950s by Farrokhzad, who wrote: “I looked into the world around me, the things and the people who surrounded me . . . I discovered them, and when I wanted to give them expression, I realized that I needed words, fresh words which corresponded to my newly discovered world.”⁴⁸ For women writers, the transition from spoken to written language involved two distinct but overlapping phases. On the one hand, women writers had to adopt the dominant language of the public sphere, the symbolic male language, which was also in midst of transformation. On the other hand, they participated in the development of what Najmabadi calls “female modern language” and Paidar calls “female political language.” Both authors detect divergences in the filial language used in the constitutionalist and post-constitutionalist press. Whereas progressive male-writers tended to recommend their patriotic brothers to rise up and protect “women of the nation” who were under their tutelage, correspondence

⁴⁶ Tavakoli-Targhi, “Historiography and Crafting Iranian National Identity,” 17.

⁴⁷ Elwell-Sutton, *Modern Iran*, 130.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Yar-Shater, “The Modern Literary Idiom,” 291.

written by women tended to emphasize their compatriotism and represent themselves as integral part of the nation.⁴⁹

Tavakoli-Targhi also suggests that the coming of the press facilitated “the hybridization of male and female spaces” and the formation of a women-inclusive public sphere “made possible the formation of an imagined national sphere that sanctioned the mixing of ‘national sisters and brothers.’”⁵⁰ Frequently, salutations of women’s letters in the constitutional press and articles in the early women’s periodicals of the post-constitutional period echoed disparity between the messages oriented toward male readers and those addressed to female readers.⁵¹ While male journalists addressed a universal audience assuming their readers were men, women writers often appealed separately to audiences of both sexes in their letters. The use of opening greetings in the form of “our dear patriotic brothers” (*ham-vatanan, barodaran-e vatani*) and “our dear sisters” (*khaharan-e ma, khaharan-e aziz*), marked the mapping of gender segregation in the written text of many women’s letters to the press.

Distinct orientations can further be detected in the tone and style of published letters by women, evoking Carol Gilligan’s divisive yet instructive (in this case) observation regarding moral sensibilities and the disparity between a female “ethics of care” (an emotional perspective) and male “ethics of justice” (a rational perspective).⁵² Iranian women’s appeal to their “dear sisters” was usually articulated in empathic tone, in form of advice passed from mothers to daughters. This tendency evoked a sense of female intimacy that would be recovered in the 1960s and 1970s. As we shall see in ensuing chapters, commercial magazines of the second Pahlavi monarchy employed this strategy to similar effect through regular features of readers’ letters as well as phone calls to the editorial desk, which were routinely segregated into correspondence sections. Addressing their fellow “patriotic brothers,” early women writers took the path of “moral persuasion,” as Afary describes it, by appealing to men’s sense of honor and justice, questioning their integrity and invoking the principle of humanistic

⁴⁹ Najmabadi, “Veiled Discourse,” 501; Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 75.

⁵⁰ Tavakoli-Targhi, “Going Public,” 176.

⁵¹ Najmabadi, “Veiled Discourse,” 488, 503.

⁵² Gilligan, “Hearing the Difference: Theorizing Connection,” 120–127.

equality.⁵³ The outspoken biweekly *Nameh-ye Banuwan* (Women's Letter, 1920–1921), for example, stated that its main purpose is “the awakening of the suffering Iranian women,”⁵⁴ while reminding male readers that “Women are the first teachers of men.”⁵⁵

The use of quantitative data in support of their demands for education was another recurrent feature in women's arguments. Underscoring the more advanced circumstances of women in Japan, Turkey, and European countries, Iranian men were urged to follow a path of modernization on which other countries had embarked. By introducing statistics from other countries, advocates of female education could stress the relational condition of their lives and point to male supremacy and socio-historic biases as prime culprits for their poor conditions and illiteracy. Conversely, Michael Amin points to the complex approach of early women's periodical journals in their coverage of foreign women's achievements. He shows how one article could convey the notion that European women had better position for securing their rights in modern society, while another article in the same issue declared that “they are morally lax in comparison to observant Muslim women.”⁵⁶

Locating the metaphoric integration of the European woman in the Iranian political discourse as a point of reference in the early nineteenth century, Tavakoli-Targhi contends the European woman served as an important metonymy for delineating self and “Other,” Iran and Europe, Islam and Christianity. He further emphasizes that the image of the western woman continued to provide Iranian modernists an ideal model for education and unveiling, as opposed to her negative associations with western immorality, pornography and deviation from the straight path of Islam, among anti-imperialist/anti-Shah activists and Islamic forces in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵⁷ The blatant ambiguities in the portrayal of the western/foreign woman as a terrain of contestation, and the ways in which this powerful symbol permeated Iranian popular culture by the late Pahlavi era, is the focus of Chapter 6.

⁵³ Afary, “On the Origins of Feminism in Early 20th-Century Iran,” 71.

⁵⁴ Khiabany, *Iranian Media*, 184.

⁵⁵ Childress, *Equal Rights Is Our Minimum Demand: The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 34.

⁵⁶ Michael Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*, 59.

⁵⁷ Tavakoli-Targhi, “Women of the West Imagined: The *Farangi* other and the Emergence of the Woman Question in Iran,” 115.

The introduction of a nonofficial press in Iran played a major role in promoting the integration of women in the field of journalism in particular and in the public life in general. Constitutional newspapers began discussing woman's position and role in the family and society openly, and documented their participation in the national movement. Published letters authored by women laid ground for developing a new, modern language within the national discourse and popular imagination. Thus, despite the opinion shared by many editors at the turn of the century that "newspaper work is no place for the gentler sex,"⁵⁸ these developments gave impetus to the establishment of the first independent women's periodicals in Iran.

The Harbingers of Women's Journals

The first newspaper published by a woman in Iran, *Danesh* (Knowledge), was founded by Khanom-e Doctor Kahhal (Mrs. Doctor Kahhal) in 1910 in Tehran. Proclaiming itself "a useful [newspaper] for girls and women" on issues of "morality, domestic science, child rearing [and] married life," *Danesh* did not offer "high" political news but rather instructive information, practical knowledge with entertaining snippets in the form of translated serial stories.⁵⁹ In its first issue the periodical disavowed political partisanship by explicitly stating that politics are not among its areas of interest. It started as a weekly newspaper, with its eight pages regularly featuring articles and reviews, a section covering prominent foreign women (such as Queen Elizabeth), and classified ads. In its extensive coverage of translated material on medical issues, including various aspects of women's well-being and children's health (such as oral hygiene and eye care), *Danesh* occasionally conveyed the domestic benefits of well-informed wives and mothers.⁶⁰

Kahhal, similar to her male contemporaries, recognized the advantages of the press in educating the public, and the advantageous strategy of writing for women while selling to men. She expected men to find "domestic sciences" important enough to guide their female relatives by using her paper. From the very first issue, *Danesh*

⁵⁸ As quoted in Mowlana, *Journalism in Iran*, 460.

⁵⁹ Kayhani, "Nahve-ye enakas-e masael-e zanan dar 10 ruznameh-ye tehran," 68.

⁶⁰ Shaikholislami, *Zanan-e Ruznameh-negar va-andishmandeh-ye Iran*, 82–83.

relayed the idea that education should be acquired on a regular basis and over time, thereby tacitly promoting her publication as an appropriately legitimized didactic tool in the process. The newspaper made a direct appeal to male readers, exhorting them to read issues of *Danesh* to their illiterate mothers and wives so they too would have the opportunity to benefit from its essential information.⁶¹ Whereas *Danesh* presented itself as a pivotal means for teaching illiterate women to be more “sensible and tidy,” it emphasized that a literate woman “must invest more of her time in reading newspapers. For a woman who reads a newspaper knows everything.”⁶²

Although *Danesh* has long been known as the first periodical for women in Iran, little is known about the circumstances of its publication, and even the background of Khanom-e Kahhal has remained obscure. Numerous accounts identify the proprietor as the wife of Dr. Hossein Kahhal, the editor of the newspaper *Esteghlal-e Iran* (“Iran’s Independence”).⁶³ Others identify her as Ma’sumeh Kahhal and maintain she was not related to that editor, but was in fact the first female optician in Iran. Later accounts further disclose that she was the daughter of Mirza Mohammad (Ya’qub) Hakim Bashi from Hamadan, who converted to Islam. She reportedly obtained basic medical training from her father, continued her studies at the American Missionary School, and later ran a private practice in Tehran, which she advertised in *Danesh*.⁶⁴ The incongruities in biographical accounts of the founder/proprietor/writer of *Danesh* attest to some methodological difficulties resulting from the scant sources on Iranian women in journalism. A general lack of consistency in dates and other basic details concerning their life, publications, and social activities is a frequent difficulty in the available records.

Like many of the period’s newspapers and journals, the publication of *Danesh* did not last long, and by the summer of 1911 the

⁶¹ Ilahi, “Tak nigari yek ruznameh: Danesh,” 324.

⁶² Quoted in Turkchi, “Danesh, nakhostin-e majaleh-ye zanan-e Iran,” 25–26.

⁶³ Browne, *The Press and Poetry*, 17, 84–85; Shaikhholislami, *Zanan-e ruznameh-negar*, 82–83; Hashemi, *Tarikh-e jarayed*, vol. 2, 267 and Tavana, *Zan dar taarikh-e moaser-e Iran*, vol. 1, 115.

⁶⁴ Kohan, *Tarikh-e sansur*, vol. 2, 386–390, 696–697; Pirnia, *Salar-e zanan-e Iran*, 59, 226; Khosrow-panah, *Hadafha va-mobareze-ye zan-e Irani: Az enghelab-e mashruteh ta saltanat-e pahlavi*, 227–228 and Khah, “Zanan-e mashruteh,” 8.

publication discontinued.⁶⁵ The historical significance of *Danesh* for the current discussion lies in being a forerunner of the later magazines, which are discussed in the following chapters, in its depoliticized tone, reliance on scientific expertise, secular outlook and the essentials it drew from the format of western women's periodicals. These attributes continued to characterize women's magazines of the late Pahlavi era, and as elsewhere had an influence in shaping the image of the modern woman they presented.

A year after the demise of *Danesh*, in 1912, the newspaper *Shekufeh* (Blossom) was founded in Tehran by Maryam Amid-Semnani. In the masthead, she was introduced as Mozzayen ol-Saltaneh, daughter of the late Mirza Sayyid Razi *Ra'is al-Atebba*, a high-ranking medical advisor to the Qajar royal court.⁶⁶ Making use of an honorific epithet, though not uncommon at the time, suggests that socioeconomic status was essential for pioneer women's initiatives in journalism. Amid-Semnani was not only the proprietor, she also served as the editor and the main writer of *Shekufeh*, although the authorities in the late Qajar period were not inclined to issue a permit to newspapers owned by women. Coinciding with overall public opinion, still unaccustomed to women publicists, it seems her late father's appellation was meant to legitimize her journalistic endeavor. By lending a flavor of male guardianship, it also implied the distinguished origin of her family, prominent social status and moral propriety. Moreover, emphasizing the high rank and professional prestige of her father may have been a gesture to the elite group of the urban upper-middle and upper class she considered potential consumers of her paper.

Shekufeh included three pages of articles and its entire back cover was dedicated to social caricatures. Literature, health, girls' education, child marriage, and child-raising were main themes in its content. In its third year of publication, in the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution, *Shekufeh* adopted a stronger political tone by reminding women of their nationalist duties and calling on them to unite against foreign influences.⁶⁷ Existing accounts of the periodical's life span vary; some noting it lasted three years (until 1916),⁶⁸ while

⁶⁵ Kohan, *Tarikh-e sansur*, vol. 2, 390.

⁶⁶ Shaikhholislami, *Zanan-e ruznameh-negar*, 83.

⁶⁷ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, 92; Sanasarian, "Characteristics of Women's Movement in Iran," 91.

⁶⁸ Khosrow-panah, *Hadafha va-mobareze-ye zan-e irani*, 231.

others claim *Shekufeh* was published until the death of Amid-Semnani in 1919.⁶⁹

Social privileges and economic welfare were undoubtedly beneficial, but Iranian women's initiatives in the field of journalism still faced challenging obstacles. In 1925, literacy rate among urban women in Iran was barely 5 percent and three decades later, according to the 1956 census, it reached only 7.3 percent nationally.⁷⁰ The low literacy rate, especially among women, had major implications for the circulation of print media and the formation of readership, as well as on the number of potential female writers who could contribute to the journals' content. Hamid Mowlana estimates that from the Constitutional Revolution until 1925, approximately thirty women were engaged in journalism.⁷¹ These figures further explain why advocates of women's emancipation regarded expanding education the principal objective of their sociopolitical efforts. This objective was also backed by an intellectual atmosphere that perceived education as perquisite of national freedom and progress.⁷²

An article, published in the first issue of *Shekufeh*, underscored that "newspapers and periodicals specifically dedicated to women and written in a language familiar to them" are the principal means "to awaken (*bidar*) them from the deep slumber of ignorance."⁷³ Elaborating on the realities of women's ignorance, the article further stressed: "most of us even all of us are deprived still of any share in the benefits of science, industry and livelihood, while children at least until the age of seven are educated by mothers who cannot even count 10 *shahi* [coins of Qajar-era currency]."⁷⁴ Utilizing the newspaper to raise public awareness about women's right for education was intended to support Amid-Semnani's main social activities, including founding and managing several schools for girls, and forming a society that encouraged women to advance domestic fine crafts and artistic productivity among other women.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Shaikholislami, *Zanan-e ruznameh-negar*, 87.

⁷⁰ *Iran Almanac* 1970: 527.

⁷¹ Mowlana, *Journalism in Iran*, 460.

⁷² Menashri, *Education and the Making of Modern Iran*, 27.

⁷³ Quoted in Kayhani, "Nakhostinha dar matbu'at-e zanan."

⁷⁴ Kayhani, "Nakhostinha dar matbu'at-e zanan."

⁷⁵ Shaikholislami, *Zanan-e ruznameh-negar*, 86–87.

Eager to gain and spread knowledge, female pioneers in journalism and education in Iran had to prevail over strong opposition from conservative factions, who considered educating women to be either inane or morally dangerous. In most cases, the opposition was led by radical clerics who aroused their students against women's social activities, such as the formation of women's societies, the establishment of schools for girls, and the publication of women's opinions in newspapers. The opposition, during and after the Constitutional Revolution, took on many forms of both verbal and physical violence, such as damaging and ransacking property, social boycotts, and public allegations of immorality, heresy, and sedition. While some distinguished clerics supported the idea women should earn some education,⁷⁶ others, including Shaikh Fazlullah Nuri and Sayyid Ali Shushtari, vociferously condemned the emerging schools for girls as contrary to Islam.⁷⁷

Clerical opposition to educational reforms had erupted previously in response to the establishment of *Dar al-Fonun* (Academy of Practical Sciences) in 1851, and was further stoked following the opening of the first modern, non-religious primary and secondary schools during the 1870s. Although girls' schools could not have been perceived as an encroachment on the traditional clerical turf of education, which officially excluded women, members of the Shi'ite establishment cautioned that they might lead girls' "minds astray, and turn them into unbelievers and wantons."⁷⁸ Until the establishment of the first state schools for girls in Tehran in the late 1910s, educational opportunities for Muslim girls were scarce and private. For girls who received a modern education from sources other than their fathers, husbands, private tutors or in missionary schools, private classes were established—sometimes without the knowledge of their families—by groups of social-activists or individual women like the editor of *Shekufeh*. When local opposition against these establishments escalated and imposed state intervention, the authorities often opted to close down the schools for girls. In Isfahan, for instance, after a mob attacked the first girls' school in the city, the headmistress Badr al-Duja Derakhshan

⁷⁶ Bamdad, *From Darkness into Light: Women's Emancipation in Iran*, 44–45.

⁷⁷ Afary, *Grassroots Democracy*, 238.

⁷⁸ Bamdad, *From Darkness into Light*, 53.

was arrested, and released only after her family guaranteed the school would not renew its activity.⁷⁹

Derakhshan's arrest did not discourage the school's founder, Sadigheh Dowlatabadi (1883–1961) from establishing the Society of Isfahan's Ladies (*sherkat-e khavatin-e Isfahan*) in 1918 and the third newspaper for women in Iran *Zaban-e Zanan* (Women's Patois, 1919–1921) the year after.⁸⁰ Born into a family of distinguished clerics in Isfahan, Dowlatabadi was privately tutored in Persian, Arabic, and French.⁸¹ The journal she founded was the first women's periodical published outside of Tehran and the first to include the noun "women" in its title. Nassereddin Parvin maintains that the historical significance of *Zaban-e Zanan* is its forceful stand on the question of women's rights.⁸² Using the newspaper "to challenge the backwardness and feeble-mindedness in Isfahan" concerning women, as one of its articles noted, the forthrightness of Dowlatabadi and the forceful tone of her writing antagonized the city's conservative factions from the very first issue.⁸³ She encountered strong religious opposition and, on at least one occasion, her office was stoned and looted. However, it was the unfavorable tone and critical position toward government policies that prompted the authorities to ban *Zaban-e Zanan* during its third year of publication.⁸⁴ The increasingly hostile environment, closure of the newspaper, and fractured support of her family eventually forced Dowlatabadi to resettle in Tehran in 1921, where she renewed the publication for several issues. Shortly afterward Dowlatabadi traveled to France, where she studied psychology and education, represented Iranian women in international congresses, and wrote articles for French journals. Upon returning to Iran in 1927, she was hired by the Ministry of Education and served as an inspector of girls' schools. In 1936, she was appointed director of the Ladies' Center (*Kanun-e Banuvan*),⁸⁵ and eight years later *Zaban-e Zanan*

⁷⁹ Nashat, "Women in Pre-Revolutionary Iran: A Historical Overview," 24.

⁸⁰ Biranvandi, "Zanan-e ruznameh-negar dar Iran," 253–259.

⁸¹ Manoutchehrian, "Dawlatabadi, Seddiqa," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, December 15, 1994; Qavimi, *Zanan-e mashhur-e Iran, karnamah-e zanan-e mashhur-e iran, dar 'ilm, adab, siaysat, mazhab, hunar, ta'lim va-tarbiyat az ghabl az islam ta asr-e hazer*, 110–111.

⁸² Parvin, "Zaban-e Zanan."

⁸³ Shaikholislami, *Zanan-e ruznameh-negar*, 96–97.

⁸⁴ Parvin, "Zaban-e Zanan."

⁸⁵ Shaikholislami, *Zanan-e ruznameh-negar*, 97–98.

briefly reappeared in Tehran in a magazine format, but was not published on a regular schedule.

These three early periodicals, *Danesh*, *Shekufeh*, and *Zaban-e Zanan*, were the harbingers of Iranian women's press. From the 1920s onward, the number of Iranian periodicals by and for women gradually increased, notwithstanding a general decrease in the 1930s because of a general policy of suppressing the press under Reza Shah. During World War II and the ensuing decade, more than 25 women's weeklies, biweeklies, and monthlies were published in Iran, covering a range of topics in literature, history, culture, law, and politics. The leading publications were emblematic of the period's partisan press and demonstrated political convictions: *Nesvan-e Vatankhah* (Patriotic Ladies), initiated by the *Society of Patriotic Women of Iran* (1923), was associated with the Socialist Party; *Bidari-e Ma* (Our Awakening, 1944) with the communist *Tudeh* Party; and *Zanan-e Iran* (*Women of Iran*, 1945–1946) with the Iran Party. Others were initiatives advanced by nonpolitical societies such as *Alam-e Nesvan* (*Women's Universe*, 1921–1934), published by the alumnae association of the Iran Bethel School for Girls in Tehran under the auspices of the American Missionary Organization. Although most were printed in Tehran, women's periodicals were also published in provincial towns; for example, *Payk-e Sa'adat-e Nesvan* (*The Courier of Women's Prosperity*, 1925–1928) was published in Rasht by a local women's association of the same name. In the early 1940s, when Tehran was under British and Russian occupation, it became a hub of foreign publications; even the Public Relations Bureau of the British Embassy published a women's monthly by the name *Alam-e Zanan* (*Women's World*, 1943–1945).

Taken together, the biographies of pioneer women in Iran's printed media reveal that the majority were related to men who were also involved in journalism and, as Gholam Khiabany rightly observes, in some respects "these publications were more like a family business."⁸⁶ Shahnaz Azad, who founded *Nameh-ye Banuwan* in 1920, was married to Abulghasem Azad, manager of the periodicals *Asayesh* and *Azad*. Zahra (Kia) Khanlari co-founded the women's magazine *Zanan-e Iran* and assisted her husband with the production of the literary periodical *Sokhan*. Other women engaged in journalism like Fakhr Afagh Parsa,

⁸⁶ Khiabany, *Iranian Media*, 185.

founder of *Jahan-e Zanan* (1922–1923) and mother of Farakhrou Parsa (the first woman minister under the second Pahlavi monarchy, who was executed by the revolutionary regime in 1979); Fakhr-Ozma Arghun (Adel Khalatbari), founder of the journal *Banuvan* (Ladies, 1935–1936) and mother of the noted poet Simin Behbehani, were also daughters or wives of writers, journalists, proprietors, or editors of newspapers.⁸⁷ Other leading figures in the literary circles were the poet E'tesami as mentioned above, and noted author Simin Daneshvar, who worked for Radio Tehran, the daily morning paper *Iran* and also contributed to the journal *Zanan-e Iran* and other publications. Their biographical accounts reflect on how the publicist legacy developed and was passed from mothers to daughters, from pioneering women to the following generation of female writers and activists, who enjoyed the fruits of formal education, and during the ensuing decades attended universities and vocational institutes in growing numbers.

The national struggle for a constitution and self-reliance led in 1925 to the overthrow of the Qajar dynasty and the ascent of Reza Shah Pahlavi, a former officer in the Persian Cossack Brigade who served as prime minister starting 1923, to the throne. During his reign, Reza Shah sought to transition Iran from a feudal country with fragmented territorial authority and with a population consisting mostly of tribal and non-tribal ethnic communities (*gemeinschaft*), on a verge of political and economic collapse and under the yoke of foreign powers, into a society (*gesellschaft*) and secular nation state. Until the British-Soviet invasion forced him to abdicate the throne in 1941, due to his controversial sympathy for Nazi Germany, Reza Shah confirmed and advanced a series of comprehensive political, legal, cultural, social, and economic reforms. Similar to those of King Amanullah in Afghanistan (1919–1929) and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey (1923–1938), these reforms involved changing the dress code for men and women and the fostering of modern patriotism. Although the press had a major role in setting up the grounds for the change in dynasties and later served an important channel to propagate his reforms, Reza Shah did not refrain from repressing newspapers and editors. Correspondingly, he advanced universal education for girls and supported their participation in the work force but his centralizing policies co-opted women's independent associations, and eliminated their autonomy.

⁸⁷ Qavimi, *Zanan-e mashhur-e Iran*, 119, 218; Pirnia, *Salar-e zanan-e Iran*, 88, 93.

His general suppression of the press, as we shall further see, also had an effect on the development of women's periodicals in the 1930s.

By the mid-1950s, special periodicals designed for women sprouted on the Iranian scene, but most of them survived only for brief periods due to lack of social support, financial setbacks, suppressive state policy, or a combination of these factors. In most cases, female publicists discovered what many learned before them, that publishing was not an easy undertaking. Amid-Semnani was forced to sell some of her private assets to fund the production of *Shekufeh*.⁸⁸ Only a few issues of *Jahan-e Zanan* were published in the early 1920s before the periodical was proclaimed anti-religious, and its publisher Afagh Parsa was forced to leave Mashhad and move with her family to Arak.⁸⁹ The poor literacy rate (especially among women), lack of funds, and stark opposition by conservative factions also thwarted the ability of women's periodicals, and newspapers in general, to develop a substantial audience, and survive over time. Women's periodical journals, similar to other small newspapers, did not even own their own printing facilities, forcing them to depend upon the presses of large newspapers.⁹⁰ Moreover, the logistical infrastructure for gathering information, marketing, and distribution was less developed than it would be in subsequent decades.

This background elucidates the dearth of Iranian press that Mas'udi addressed in the late 1950s, in the speech quoted at the beginning of this chapter. The introduction of *Ettela'at-e Banuwan* in 1957 marked the commercial publication of women's magazines in Iran and an important phase in their professionalization. For the first time in the country's history, a private publishing group launched a satellite magazine for women. Ettela'at publishing group, headquartered in Tehran, had the most advanced organizational, technical, and logistical infrastructure in the country, a firm position in the industry, and three decades of experience in the print media market. In many other respects, as we shall see in the next chapter, the inauguration of *Ettela'at-e Banuwan* represented a turning point in the history of Iranian press as whole, signaling its transition from an era of partisan and elitist press to the era of mass communication.

⁸⁸ Shaikholislami, *Zanan-e ruznameh-negar*, 87.

⁸⁹ *Zan-e Ruz* 148, January 6, 1968.

⁹⁰ Elwell-Sutton, "The Iranian Press, 1941–1947," 73.