

people of Afghanistan, when in fact it was highly unpopular, founded by a small group of intellectuals isolated from the rest of society, which took power via a bloody coup.<sup>1</sup> People who stood up against both the Soviet forces and the PDPA government, and who lived and worked during a time of heavy censorship and fear in the communist era, especially in Kabul, are subsumed under the blanket category of “jihadi fighters.”

When discussing Hosseini’s novel, *The Kite Runner*, Ivanchikova asks, “Why does Hosseini—a debut novelist seeking to break into the post-9/11 NATO-centric literary market—as well as the film director who further condenses the message for greater effect—resort to such gaudy anti-Sovietisms? Is it because one might expect that, in NATO-centric contexts, the audiences are well primed to see the Soviets as evil?” (65). Ivanchikova does not consider that Hosseini himself, as an Afghan American writer, may have had an anti-Soviet stance. The author also understands the communist era in Afghanistan as one of women’s advancement and economic justice, where women were relieved “from traditional customs and gender roles that relegated their lives to the private domain” (93). This is a problematic assumption, as the socialist era only benefited a small subsection of urban women in Kabul. Furthermore, gender policies under the PDPA were imposed from above and did not resonate with the majority of the Afghan people, as they were deemed insensitive.<sup>2</sup>

In her discussions and analyses of post-2001 cultural production, Ivanchikova portrays Afghanistan’s contemporary political history through the lens of either the United States or the Soviet Union. Yet being critical of one imperial power in Afghanistan does not mean promoting and whitewashing the atrocities of another. More engagement with Afghan sources and working carefully with the multiplicity of perspectives on the ground are necessary to avoid depicting and reproducing incomplete and inaccurate understandings of contemporary Afghan history, to which we are too often witness in Anglophone scholarship. The country’s forty-year political history is long, complex, and requires rigorous and careful analyses. Overall, Ivanchikova is successful in helping us (those in the US Anglophone context) understand the representational “matrices that persist and still structure our perceptions” (236). The book makes a contribution to the field of comparative literature and media studies and does diversify work within these areas of study.

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## **Creating the Modern Iranian Woman: Popular Culture between Two Revolutions. Liora Hendelman-Baavur (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019). 340 pp. ISBN: 9781108498074 (hardcover)**

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Liora Hendelman-Baavur’s *Creating the Modern Iranian Woman* is a timely and original contribution that examines Iranian women’s magazines published between the Constitutional

<sup>1</sup> Artemy Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Julie Billaud, *Kabul Carnival: Gender Politics in Postwar Afghanistan* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 48–51.

Revolution at the turn of the twentieth century and the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Incorporating primary and secondary sources, the study focuses on two major magazines, *Ettela'at-e Banuvan* (Ladies News) and *Zan-e Ruz* (The Modern Woman). A systematic review of these two periodicals between 1957 and 1979 is accompanied by briefer explorations of other publications from the period, including *Ettela'at-e Haftegi* and *Javanan-e Emruz*, enabling the author to examine what it meant to be a “modern Iranian woman” during this tumultuous time. Hendelman-Baavur’s study is further enriched by original interviews with many leading figures, including Iran’s former queen, Farah Pahlavi, and journalists Haleh Esfandiari and Mansureh Pirnia.

Within the field of Iranian studies, a focus on establishing an elite canon has meant that few scholars have undertaken the daunting task of studying mass-produced materials such as popular fiction and journalism. *Creating the Modern Iranian Woman* not only addresses a notable gap in the scholarship by focusing on texts that have commonly been considered popular and so unworthy of critical attention, it also uncovers the complexities inherent in popular writing: Hendelman-Baavur interprets her material against the grain of readings that reduce women’s magazines to mere vessels for state ideology, the doctrine of “Westoxification,” and patriarchal discourses. The book reveals that, in addition to their ideological alignments, such magazines also have social and cultural functions; they are “both products and agents” of social and technological change (85). Throughout her chapters, the author pays detailed attention to fully documenting this argument.

The book is divided into two parts; part 1, which encompasses three chapters, investigates the emergence and formation of the Iranian women’s press in the early twentieth century. Part 2 critically analyzes the materials produced in the two above-mentioned magazines in four chapters that deconstruct the representation of womanhood in these two periodicals. It also includes a helpful introduction, a summarizing conclusion, and a wide-ranging bibliography. Through her discussion of the transformations captured by these Iranian women’s periodicals, the author successfully demonstrates the many contradictions of this miscellaneous genre in which multiple subgenres and discourses coexist and compete, although the overarching focus of her analysis remains on the direct link between Iranian women’s publications and the nation’s progress toward modernization.

Chapter 1 provides a brief review of women’s entrance into print media in the early twentieth century to illustrate the relationship between women, the press, and the state. This chapter also highlights a major shift in women’s journalism at a time when the previously elitist media became increasingly oriented toward the masses. In their mission to “awaken” their underprivileged sisters, upper class women nevertheless remained faithful to the ideal of the modern woman as a devoted wife and mother. In contrast to the backward and ignorant woman, the new woman needed education to serve the patriotic goal of raising more enlightened future generations. Chapter 2 offers a critical evaluation of the continuities and shifts in the relationship between the state and the press. Under the guise of centralizing feminist activities, Iran’s last royal dynasty, the Pahlavi family (1925–1979), took over the women’s press and tied women’s emancipation to modernization campaigns. Yet Hendelman-Baavur also demonstrates that factors such as high publication costs, low circulation rates, low literacy rates, and a shortage of female journalists combined with cultural habits such as collective reading in public spaces to negatively impact women’s print media. These diverse micro- and macro-level dynamics make clear that the women’s press was far more than the passive product of the authoritative regime. Chapter 3 further illustrates how these economical and professional impediments led to the predominance of borrowed and translated materials and influenced the development of the press market. In addition to these restrictions, cultural barriers—or what Hendelman-Baavur refers to as “patriarchal paternalism,” a term that encompasses both the patriarchal culture of the time and the dominance of male patronage and readership—defined trends and led to pervasive self-censorship among female journalists.

In part 2, Hendelman-Baavur explores how women's publications functioned as agents of cultural change by creating the modern Iranian woman, with all her contradictions and caprices. Chapter 4 reveals that this new woman's modernized femininity still served her familial and domestic devotions to form a "symbolic defence against perceived threats to older values" (119). Reflecting this, Iranian women's magazines from the 1960s onward promoted women's education, but not employment. When a working woman was depicted among the pages of these magazines, she was most often employed in traditionally feminine occupations such as nursing or teaching, with overt emphasis placed on her devotion to the home. To reveal how Pahlavi state policies affected the content of women's print media, Hendelman-Baavur showcases examples from the late 1960s onward, which show that Iranian women were no longer being encouraged to produce more citizens because the regime's policies had shifted to birth control in response to the population boom, as a result of which the High Council of Family Planning was established in 1966.

One of the major conflicts the modern Iranian woman of this period faced becomes the topic of chapter 5: although women were urged to represent determination and pursue educational success, at the same time there remained an excessive emphasis on their bodies, beauty, diet, exercise, and fashion. Despite the liberatory intentions of these publications, the modern Iranian woman as she appeared in print was often objectified to please the male gaze. Women of the lower strata were often left out of the picture entirely, with the ideal modern woman imagined as belonging to the upper middle class. Another inherent contradiction in this ideal, according to Hendelman-Baavur, was that although the modern Iranian woman challenged an Islamic femininity based on invisibility and immobility, she also demonstrated conservative ideals (backed by Islamic images)—and yet she also was Western (*farangi*) in appearance, identity, and role. Elaborating on this ambiguity, chapter 6 addresses the anxieties surrounding cultural assimilation and the divided national loyalties that arose from the fear that the Western woman might steal the heart of the modern Iranian man. This anxiety led to the production of a whole range of films and fictions featuring a model of Westernized womanhood that ultimately responded to the voyeuristic male gaze. She was beautiful, but she also was superficial, arrogant, and materialistic. In the words of Ali Shariati, she was a disease, to recover from which one had to return to the Iranian woman. In contrast to this Westoxified woman, Hendelman-Baavur reveals that there also was a parallel Western woman whose social achievements were a source of great admiration and aspiration. Queen Farah, as discussed in chapter 7, was represented as a compromise between these apparent opposites: as a devoted mother and wife and yet a socially active figure, she epitomized the perfect combination of the traditional and modern ideals of womanhood, or what the author refers to as "modernized patriarchy" (298).

In her introduction, Hendelman-Baavur promises to "explore Iranian women's magazines and their various functions from production to consumption" (19), and her tour through the prerevolutionary landscape of the modern media-politics of Iran does exactly that. Although there have been sporadic studies published on Iranian women's magazines and a wide range of feminist works on the modern Iranian woman, previous research has not often brought together the fields of journalism, feminism, sociology, and popular culture. In demonstrating how women's magazines acted as cultural sites where modern Iranian womanhood was constructed and promoted, the book sheds light on a previously neglected aspect of Iranian studies. By showing how the popular press functioned as the textual manifestation of the popular culture, Hendelman-Baavur lays bare the inconsistencies of the dominant, residual, and emergent ideologies of the period. Her meticulous consideration of primary materials, as well as her careful attention to relevant scholarship, enables Hendelman-Baavur to locate her research in its own sociopolitical, historical, and cultural context. Jargon and convoluted language are avoided, making the book accessible to a nonspecialist audience, and an array of helpful illustrations, figures, and footnotes clarify the major arguments and effectively connect readers to relevant scholarship. This informative book is mostly relevant to scholars of Iranian studies whose research particularly focuses on identity, gender, culture, and

media, but it also will be of interest to scholars of comparative studies or those working at the intersection of feminism and the media in the broader Southwest Asian and North African region. Liora Hendelman-Baavur's *Creating the Modern Iranian Woman* is a welcome exploration of Iranian women's journalism, and one would only wish that its author will extend her research to magazines published after the 1979 revolution.

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**The Unfinished History of the Iran–Iraq War: Faith, Firepower, and Iran's Revolutionary Guards. Annie Tracy Samuel (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021). xvii + 302 pp. \$99.99. ISBN 9781108777674 (hardcover)**

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There exists a burgeoning body of literature on Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), a military, political, economic, and cultural organization that is responsible for protecting the regime from internal and external enemies. Such works were written and published initially by scholars like Sepehr Zabih (1988) and Kenneth Katzman (1993), and, more recently, by Afshon Ostovar (2015) and Hesam Forozan (2016). Annie Tracy Samuel's book *The Unfinished History of the Iran–Iraq War* makes a significant and original contribution to this literature by examining how the IRGC both prosecuted and recorded the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988). Alongside the 1979 Iranian Revolution and as the longest conventional conflict of the twentieth century, the war has constituted the most formative event in the Islamic Republic's forty-three-year existence. Samuel's book uniquely explores how the Revolutionary Guards have documented and assessed their role in the war, as well as the latter's trajectory and outcome and its intrinsic relationship with the revolution. It also rigorously investigates how the IRGC's history of the conflict sheds light on its own essence and evolution, and those of the war, revolution, and republic themselves.

Methodologically, Samuel's book is based on a vast volume and impressive array of heretofore unaccessed primary sources. They mainly consist of Persian-language publications on the war produced by high-ranking members of the IRGC's Holy Defense Research and Documentation Center, and offer a rare glimpse into its inner workings and perceptions of the conflict, revolution, and other subjects. The book demonstrates how the IRGC's prosecution and recording of the war have contributed to its expansion and empowerment, professionalization and formalization, and institutionalization and legitimization. In the process, these endeavors have enabled the organization to participate in the enterprise of national commemoration, identity construction, and cultural production that has been vital to the regime and its resilience.

In addition to furthering our understanding of the past and present behavior of the IRGC and regime, Samuel's book complicates and challenges the conventional wisdom that exists about them in the West and beyond. To this end, the book counters the reductionist, essentialist, and literalist binary or dichotomy of faith versus firepower that scholars like Shahram Chubin (1988) have put forth in previous literature about the organization and the war. By contrast, the book shows that faith and firepower were equally important to the war effort because religious commitment or revolutionary fervor alone was insufficient to turn the tide