

She Should Have Been a Man: A Story about a Princess

Victoria Penziner

Iran is at a crossroads, caught between the Middle East and Central Asia. The actions and policies of the late Shah of Iran placed Iran in a category of being neither Eastern nor Western, traditional nor modern. Ashraf Pahlavi, his twin sister, embodied many of these challenging transitions. She was one of the most controversial figures throughout his reign, and the mention of her name continues to spark controversy. For many she conjures images of corruption and immorality, for others she serves as an example of the Shah's reforms. She enjoyed both the West and Iran, but was not completely accepted in either. She was a hybrid woman, poised to enjoy the West, while remaining loyal to Iran and her brother.

The historiography on her is very small, for many reasons not the least of which is that she is still living and the events she is narrating are at most 50 years old. Usually a sentence or two is devoted to her in Iranian texts. Whether those words are positive or negative depends on the author's biases. Her writings are undoubtedly propagandic, and they serve to defend her family and herself. This paper is based mainly upon sources in English such as, United Nations documents, memoirs of people who lived through the Shah's reign and the fall, contemporary newspaper articles, and her own autobiography. The image of a woman caught between Iran and the West, image and reality is uncovered.

Many marginalize her work with social issues, explaining that because she was appointed to her posts, she was somehow unworthy of them.¹ She is criticized for her business sense and extravagant living, which many of her enemies use as an indicator of her corruption. This paper will focus mainly on Ashraf, her location in world politics, and her reaction to the end of

¹ Nikourkari, Mondana, Redefining "Success:" Iranian Women's Political Activism during the Pahlavi Reign and the Islamic Republic, Dissertation, University of Vermont, May 1996, 61.

Muhammad Reza Shah's reign. In order to do this, it is necessary to examine her life and trials, as well as popular opinion and her own self-conceptualization.

Owing in part to her being a woman in the politics of a religious nation, she was a natural target for controversy. Her strong personality and high profile won her many nicknames that were as colorful as they were plentiful and each describes an aspect of her life. She was called, "Black Panther,' 'Roaring Engine of the Court,' 'Red Princess,' 'Mistress of Intrigue,' 'Terror of the Persian Bureaucrats,' and 'Angel of the Poor.'"² These names conjured up very real images of Ashraf and reflected public opinion. Parvis Daneshvar explains that she was very unpopular with the public and a very controversial member of the Royal Family.³

Her loyalty to her brother and his reign is unwavering and in her later life, she demonstrates this time and again. She has fought to explain the Pahlavi dynasty and provide a lasting answer to history while simultaneously crusading for human rights via her United Nations work. She was a one-woman propaganda machine and there is nothing that pervades the actions and writings of Ashraf Pahlavi so fully as her unyielding defense of the Pahlavi regime.

Her Attitude

Her attitude and personality played a large part in her position in world and national politics and in her pride and defense of the Pahlavi regime. Therefore, it is necessary to examine various aspects of her personality. In 1976 the London *Times* explains "long before the Pahlavis were securely seated on the Peacock Throne she [Ashraf] acquired a reputation for guts, not shared by the rest of her family."⁴ It would seem that her entire life was leading up to her role as defender of the Pahlavis. She was born on October 26, 1919, twin sister of the Crown Prince and

² Krause, Walter W. Soraya, Queen of Persia, (London: Macdonald & Co., 1956), 53.

³ Naraghi, Eusan, From Palace to Prison: Inside the Iranian Revolution, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994), 69.

⁴ The most powerful woman in a land where power rules supreme, *The London Times*, 6/7/76.

second daughter to Reza Pahlavi and Taj o Maluk.⁵ She explained that it was easier to accept her many years in exile because of this social isolation early on.

In the biography of Queen Soraya, Muhammad Reza Shah's second wife, Walter Krause gives a very succinct description of Ashraf's personality, saying that she "combined the cunning of the female with the energy of the man,"⁶ and she stopped at nothing to neutralize or win over her opponents.⁷ Ashraf describes herself as being "volatile, quick-tempered and sometimes rebellious."⁸ Krause goes on to say that she was outspoken but compassionate and her "volcanic character [was] inherited from her father."⁹ Eusan Naraghi describes her as combining audacity, seductiveness, and fearlessness to take on the most daunting of statesmen.¹⁰ The disadvantage of many of her personality traits was that she was also described as ruthless and immoral.¹¹ The CIA assessed her as being "corrupt, a lady possessed of a greedy nature."¹² In any case, it was her undoubtedly strong personality that did not allow her to fade into obscurity like the rest of the Pahlavi family.

She always had a deep connection with her twin brother and saw her place as "in the sun-next to the Shah."¹³ This arises not only from their strong physical connection, owing to their twinship; but also from mutual trust. Naraghi explains that "her strong personality allowed her to act with determination where he was apt to hesitate, and she was prepared to take risks that the Shah himself would never have contemplated."¹⁴ Her close relation to him also arose from the admonishment of Reza Shah who advised his daughter to "always be strong for your brother.

⁵ Pahlavi, 2.

⁶ Krause, 53.

⁷ Naraghi, 62

⁸ Ibid, 15.

⁹ Ibid, 53-54.

¹⁰ Naraghi, 61.

¹¹ Reeves, Minou, *Behind the Peacock Throne*, (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1986), 49.

¹² Daneshvar, Parviz, *Revolution in Iran*, (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1996), 69.

¹³ Krause, 54.

Stay close to him and tell him to stand firm in the face of dangers of any kind.”¹⁵ It would seem that even Reza Shah understood the differences between his children, and that the strengths of Ashraf compensated for the weaknesses of Muhammad Reza. Apparently she took this advice to heart and as Naraghi explains, from the beginning of his reign Ashraf was “privy to his [the Shah’s] secrets.”¹⁶

Her Political Life

Before jumping full force into politics, Ashraf became the Shah’s confidant. Naraghi explains that she would confront “influential politicians or journalists who opposed” her brother.¹⁷ He explains that the Shah confided so freely in her because she was not a political threat as his brothers were; Iran would never support a female ruler.¹⁸ She was capable of intrigue when the Shah was unwilling to directly confront someone such as a minister.¹⁹ Naraghi goes on that she was a liability to him because of her deceptive abilities, and after his first seven years on the throne he felt she had gained too much power over him.²⁰ Naraghi goes so far as to imply that the Shah was somewhat fearful of her, because whenever he needed to rebuke her, he would assign someone else to do it.²¹

As the Shah decided her services to him were no longer needed, she turned her passion towards society. She had begun her work with social issues during the war, working with the Red Cross in Iran.²² She describes this increased social consciousness as being brought on by a visit to the slums of Tehran. During this visit, she saw firsthand the poverty that infested the

¹⁴ Naraghi, 62.

¹⁵ Pahlavi, 63.

¹⁶ Naraghi, 60.

¹⁷ Naraghi, 63.

¹⁸ Naraghi, 63.

¹⁹ Naraghi, 63.

²⁰ Naraghi, 63.

²¹ Naraghi, 63.

²² Cross, David, *More dedicated to work than play*, London Times, 9/24/71, 11a.

country. Krause argues that she had merely gotten lost in the south of Tehran.²³ He quotes Ashraf as saying that she “saw the people, my people...men, women and children, living in terrible caves like animals. I saw cripples, beggars, invalids, starving children and wasted mothers all huddled together in unspeakable squalor. This miserable world is called a slum, but the word is quite inadequate to describe the gruesome character of such suffering.”²⁴ Ashraf does not describe this in so many words, as she merely explains that the sight “literally made her ill.”²⁵

Ashraf felt that she could provide a service to her nation by becoming involved in social issues. She began by working in the field of social work by funding the “Social Services Foundation” and by persuading “a group of well-educated Iranian women to...help [her] carry out several welfare programs.”²⁶ Reeves offers a different view of this explaining it was “profit-seeking” women who became the “demagogues of the regime’s philosophy staffed the foundation” and that Ashraf’s appointment to this was an example of the Shah’s “nepotism, waste, and incompetence.”²⁷ Ashraf defends her programs as being designed to “bring as much progress as we could, even to the most outlying rural villages, with as little disruption of traditional values as possible.”²⁸ Whether these initial programs were corrupt or not, it appears that they had a somewhat positive impact on the population of Tehran.

In 1946, she traveled to Russia on an invitation from the Red Cross, who had recognized her work with social issues in Tehran. This trip had a dual purpose, to study the socialist machinery for societal improvement and to meet with Stalin. Naraghi explains that the Soviet Union “had failed in its attempt to seize Iranian Azerbaijan and the Shah was trembling at the

²³ Krause, 60.

²⁴ Krause, 60.

²⁵ Pahlavi, 79.

²⁶ Pahlavi, 78.

thought of meeting” Stalin.²⁹ During this meeting, she discussed political issues such as Russian interests in Azerbaijan provinces,” Iranian allies, and oil interests.³⁰ This meeting ended after two hours, (when she had been allotted ten minutes) by Stalin complimenting Ashraf saying, “Give my best regards to your brother...and tell him that if he had ten more like you, he would have no worries at all.”³¹ He then told her, “*Ana Pravda Patriot*,” you are a true patriot.³² Naraghi explains that she was so charming; Stalin even offered her a sable coat.³³

Soon after this diplomatic mission, she was invited by the American Red Cross and met with President Truman. She explained to him the Shah’s willingness to build a “modern and independent nation.”³⁴ This sentiment was both a promise to modernize and an assurance that Iran would not ally itself with the Russians. This was less of a diplomatic mission than the one to Russia, but still provided a stepping-stone for her political career. She felt that with each of these missions, she was enhancing the Shah’s image abroad, publicizing the development of her country and collecting information about other cultures that she could implement into her social projects in Iran.³⁵ It seems that she saw herself as the Shah’s liaison to the world, while he was fighting to consolidate his rule in Iran. Naraghi explains that she was an asset to the Shah internationally.³⁶

Mossadegh

When she returned from the American visit, she found Iran transformed and her brother’s throne in danger. Dr. Muhammad Mossadegh dominated the government of Iran, a man who

²⁷ Reeves, 49, 51.

²⁸ Pahlavi, 192.

²⁹ Naraghi, 61.

³⁰ Pahlavi, 86.

³¹ Pahlavi, 87.

³² Pahlavi, 87.

³³ Naraghi, 61.

³⁴ Pahlavi, 97.

³⁵ Pahlavi, 97.

was not a friend to Ashraf or the Pahlavis. She explains that she came into direct conflict with him during a meeting where they discussed the Imperial Organization of Social Services.

Whereas she wanted to talk about social work, he wanted to talk about oil, and in doing so criticized the Pahlavis.³⁷ Never known to be a subtle person, she asked him to leave her office. In the span of a sentence, the two became enemies. Krause explains that by doing this, she had forgotten “the unwritten law of the Orient, to conceal the barbs of your real thoughts beneath a cloak of civilities and to ‘make politeness the devoted servant of speech.’”³⁸ When he did come to power, he denounced her openly exiling her, “as a drunk is ejected from a public-house,” for the “treacherous obstruction and opposition to the politics of the Court.”³⁹

Her Parisian exile was both a blessing and a curse. With her flair for glamour and glamorous living, Paris was very exciting. It was the “happiest and freest” years of her life, and was able to enjoy the city away from restrictive court rituals, as a princess traveling abroad. Conversely, she was forcibly separated from her brother during one of his most vulnerable moments.⁴⁰ In 1953 British and American Intelligence agents approached her wanting to use her in one of their operations, Operation Ajax. This operation restored the Shah to the throne, and removed Mossadegh from power. Naraghi describes her role as being “to persuade her still wavering brother to take a clear stance on the execution of the plan.”⁴¹ Ashraf describes this event in her autobiography by saying that the agents contacted her for this plan and she was more than happy to oblige. She considered it her duty as a princess and sister of the Shah to aid the regime in any way she could. She further denied receiving any financial compensation for this

³⁶ Naraghi, 62.

³⁷ Pahlavi, 117.

³⁸ Krause, 54-55.

³⁹ Krause, 55.

⁴⁰ Pahlavi, 119, 128.

⁴¹ Naraghi, 62.

arrangement, and when the proposition arose, she refused and walked out on the meeting.⁴² The agents understood their faux pas and sent a letter of apology. She then was flown to Iran and arrived at a brother's house. Soon after, the Teheran Martial Law Governor delivered a message to her from Mossadegh, who had learned of her arrival in Teheran.⁴³ She describes herself as being unable to leave without completing her mission, and told the governor, "Tell your master to go to hell. I am an Iranian, and I will stay in my own country as long as I wish."⁴⁴

In most accounts, it is only noted that she was the bearer of information, but had no real place. In her autobiography, the event becomes dramatized to the point that she is the heroine, which is her perception. It was vital to her public image that she appeared willing to help and not receive money to aid her country. Her strong stand against Mossadegh's minister also served to show her courage against the face of her enemy and determination not to be intimidated. In her autobiography, Ashraf refers to Iran in loving terms, as almost a member of her family who had become ill. This affair demonstrated her desire to appear supportive of her brother and his reign and to show her support of Iran. Perhaps, she was able to reconcile being out of the country and traveling so often, by recounting this event as such, and perhaps over-emphasizing her role in it.

In the post-Mossadegh era, Ashraf became a spokesperson for women's rights and set up the High Council of Women's Organizations to consolidate the smaller women's rights groups into a single entity that could work effectively towards equality and liberation.⁴⁵ Despite her words to the contrary, Ashraf played a marginal role in many of the Iranian societies she endowed. As women's rights are a yardstick by which modernization is measured, by heading

⁴² Pahlavi, 136.

⁴³ Pahlavi, 138.

⁴⁴ Pahlavi, 138.

⁴⁵ Pahlavi, 155.

these organizations, she enhanced both the Shah's and her own image abroad. She explains that her principle aim was to "integrate Iranian women into every facet of society and to recreate the condition of equality our female ancestors had enjoyed centuries ago."⁴⁶ By invoking ancestry, Ashraf was strengthening the Pahlavi emphasis on the Persian state, as opposed to the Islamic one.

In 1966, this society would eventually become the Women's Organization of Iran and dedicated itself to encouraging women to take a part in "social and public services."⁴⁷ This society was closely tied to the ministers of the country because Ashraf believed "you cannot emancipate women in a male-dominated society without the active support of at least some of those men."⁴⁸ These women's organizations were not immune to the earned and unearned criticism that followed Ashraf everywhere. Naraghi explains that she "had a reputation for rewarding people in her inner circle" and she believed in the "struggle for emancipation women should behave as men" both on a personal and political level.⁴⁹ The favoritism in her staffing and the disregard she showed many traditional gender roles earned her many enemies among society and the religious community.

United Nations Career

As the political situation in Iran stabilized, Ashraf again, became a domestic liability for the Shah. In the 1960s, the Shah appointed Ashraf Iran's ambassador to the United Nations (UN) where she became involved with the Human Rights Commission where she campaigned "ardently for the world's hungry and for women's rights."⁵⁰ Her causes included many areas of human rights such as women's rights, apartheid, war, and illiteracy. She explained that it was

⁴⁶ Pahlavi, 155.

⁴⁷ Iranian Women Assume their Role, *London Times*, 25 Sept. 1971, Iran VII.

⁴⁸ Pahlavi, 156.

⁴⁹ Naraghi, 62.

“self-evident that the independence, self-determination and freedom from war are the most basic essentials for the practical realization of individual’s rights and freedoms.”⁵¹ Many of her thoughts and ideas were gained from her years in Iran and she sympathized with many from her travels abroad. Her activities in Iranian and world politics and her experiences abroad had taught her that different countries have different needs. She called it the duty of the international community to support third world nations in their attempts at reform further, the international community should come to the nations’ assistance with constructive and systematic action if it is threatened.⁵² This sentence identifies her with Third World national problems while asking the world to be patient with Iran and with her brother’s reform plans and thanking the West for their intervention in the Mossadegh affair.

She considered the UN a forum to discuss openly the ideas that she had developed in Iran about human rights and considered herself a spokesperson for the Third World and its problems. Despite her personal excesses, she realized that hard work was the only way for equality and real social change. She was eager to join the UN because of her “long years of social service activities,” and “many years of labour [sic] aimed at the realization of equal political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights for Iranian women.”⁵³ Her willingness to be a part of the UN and excitement at the prospects she believed it held are feelings that characterize the Third World nations as they gained entrance into the UN. For many Third World countries, one of the milestones in their modernization is their acceptance into the UN.

Despite this excitement and optimism, she remained aware of the United Nations weaknesses. In one of her first speeches she addresses this issue, saying that the numerous

⁵⁰ Setting a royal pattern for the nation, *London Times*, 6 Sept. 1968, 15.

⁵¹ United Nations Economic and Security Council (UNESC), 21 Feb. 1967, E/CN.4/L863, 6.

⁵² UNESC, 14 Aug. 1967, E/AC.6/SR.411, 7.

⁵³ UNESC, 21 Feb. 1967, 1.

commissions of equal rights have compiled a wealth of knowledge on the subject, but that it had not been put to good use.⁵⁴ She explains that each member state of the UN cannot act solely in its own interests and that the spirit of the UN is to create bonds of friendship and trust between member states. “The honour [sic] of our age and our civilization has already been sullied, and deemed by the degree of tolerance shown by us to such outrageous violations of human rights” as exist in the world and in member nations.⁵⁵ She evokes the Iranian poet Saadi to explain this,

The sons of man are members of a body whole related,
For of a single essence are they each and all created;
When Fortune persecutes one member of this body sorely,
Surely the other members of the body cannot stand securely.⁵⁶

She then goes on, “the children of those helpless masses of humanity will never forgive our passivity towards such flagrant violations of human rights” as are being seen in the world now.⁵⁷

She then acknowledges the position that the UN had taken on humans rights violations, explaining that the time had come, “to think of practical measures to be taken to implement those resolutions,” which had been proposed to end the abuses of human rights.⁵⁸ She was telling member governments that they could no longer sit idly by and blame the UN for not implementing the proper human rights techniques, but that it was time for they themselves to take the initiative. She explains “passivity harms the cause of human rights,” but also “the responsibility for development lay mainly with the country directly concerned.”⁵⁹ By these words, she was lobbying the member states to take responsibility for their actions or inaction as Iran did, and was simultaneously lobbying the UN for greater enforcement of its resolutions.

⁵⁴ UNESC, 21 Feb. 1967, 3.

⁵⁵ UNESC, 21 Feb. 1967, 4.

⁵⁶ UNESC, 21 Feb. 1967, 3.

⁵⁷ UNESC, 21 Feb. 1967, 4.

⁵⁸ UNESC, 21 Feb. 1967, 4.

⁵⁹ UNESC, 21 Feb. 1967, 8, UNESC, 14 Aug. 1967, 6.

This is a skill she learned in Iran during her early years in politics; the key to lawmaking is lobbying for her cause, which is what she did.

In 1968, Ashraf was elected President of the International Human Rights Conference that was held in Teheran. She saw the Conference as a success for global human rights, but warned that for “Two thirds of the world there is no possibility of ensuring full enjoyment of these rights unless, at the same time, the conditions are created for respect of the most elementary rights, that is the right to adequate food, the right to health and the right to education.”⁶⁰ She explains that although much had been accomplished, there was a “curtain” between the minds and hearts of men that needed to be lifted.⁶¹

She crusaded for equality under the law for women via family rights both in Iran and in the UN. She constantly hearkens back to the advances women have made in Iran. She explains that it was her father’s un-veiling of Iran’s women that sparked her interest in women’s rights.⁶² She explains Iranian women won the right to vote and be elected in the “peaceful revolution which had changed the face of the country” and “without...a long suffragette movement,” unlike many Western nations.⁶³ She crusaded for women’s education, noting that family responsibilities could sometimes make women lose touch with the outside world, leading to their role in society, as she saw it.⁶⁴ She says that, “the highest priority should be accorded to the problem of illiteracy among some women; not only because women constituted the majority of illiterates and because the number of women illiterates is increasing more rapidly than illiterate men, but also because literacy can be a powerful means for their emancipation.”⁶⁵ She then reminded that

⁶⁰ UN General Assembly 23rd Sess., 1736th Plenary Meeting, 9 Dec. 1968, 2.

⁶¹ UNGA, 9 Dec. 1968, 3.

⁶² She May be a Princess, but the Shah’s Twin is more Interested in Equal Rights, *New York Times*, 22 March 1970, 74.

⁶³ UNESC, 2 Aug. 1967, E/AC.7/SR.558, 8, *New York Times* 22 March 1970, 74.

⁶⁴ UNESC, 2 Aug, 1967, 8.

⁶⁵ Illiteracy Among World’s Women Rising Steadily, *New York Times*, 4 Sept. 1975, 12.

the UN had passed a resolution that “called for each nation to allot a percentage of its defense budget” to fight illiteracy, only “Iran and a few small African nations” have followed through on it.”⁶⁶ However, she reminds the UN “All efforts would prove in vain unless women themselves showed a certain determination to alter their lot,” they need to take the initiative.⁶⁷ This is very similar to the argument she used on the UN to get member states to act on UN resolutions.

Many of her speeches supported the Shah’s White Revolution that began in 1963 and lasted through much of the decade. The Shah’s reforms took three phases land reform, modernization and the emancipation of women, which catapulted Iran’s women into the modern era.⁶⁸ She constantly referred to the Shah’s White Revolution that involved,

“The sale of government industries to cooperatives and private individuals; the establishment of a profit-sharing system between management and labor within these industries; revisions of the electoral laws to provide for universal (particularly female) suffrage; the creation of a Corps of Literacy, a Corps of Health, and a Corps of Development, which would improve the quality of education, medical/dental care, and agriculture throughout the country; the establishment of “Houses of Justice”-village tribunals-to simplify the judicial system and make it accessible to all; a plan for urban and rural reconstruction; nationalization of water resources; reorganization of government bureaucracy; and an overhaul of the education system.”⁶⁹

Much of his White Revolution focused on land reform, and Ashraf uses the UN to explain that it was “based on the concept of integrated reform.”⁷⁰ She then outlines the plan used in Iran for land reform. She explains that “during the first two phases of its (Iran’s) land reform, (it) had given land to more than 11.5 million farmers by distributing more than 67,000 villages and 17,000 farms, and it had established nearly 7,000 co-operatives [sic] with some 900,000 members.”⁷¹ Ashraf points out that “no serious financial crisis had resulted from” the land

⁶⁶ Pahlavi, 193.

⁶⁷ UNESCO, 2 Aug. 1967, 8.

⁶⁸ Pahlavi, 194-195.

⁶⁹ Pahlavi, 167-168.

⁷⁰ UNESCO, 14 Aug. 1967, 4.

⁷¹ UNESCO, 14 Aug. 1967, 6.

reform program when she spoke to the UN.⁷² When she said this in 1967 no major crisis had resulted from it, but soon after, crises and corruption followed.

She then attacks the UN's land reform programs because they focus solely on land reform did not work and were merely a redistribution of poverty because the population does not deem them necessary.⁷³ A successful reform needs to be "carried out for the people, by the people."⁷⁴ This is very different from her brother's idea of reform from the top. It is important to remember that this was an anomaly in her otherwise supportive attitude and it is reflective of what the London Times calls, "her well-known socialist principles," hence the title "Red Princess."⁷⁵ Although she proposed this plan to the UN, it was an extension of her brother's reform plan and merely had more utopian ideals behind it. She rallies for a utopian view of land reform with the "full participation by the peasantry at all stages of the reform" and that through this full participation would the concept of democracy be fully realized.⁷⁶ She realized that through this program there would be a period of initial agricultural decline, but that eventual this reform program would stimulate production and industrial development.⁷⁷

By 1971, Iranian women had the right to vote and were in positions of authority, with upper class, educated women in the Parliament and Senate. Despite all this, many areas of Iran were not penetrated by this liberation which rarely reached beyond the cities.⁷⁸ Education was the key to advancement in Ashraf's mind. She explained that women needed know their "legal

⁷² UNESCO, 14 Aug. 1967, 6.

⁷³ UNESCO, 14 Aug. 1967, 4.

⁷⁴ UNESCO, 14 Aug. 1967, 4.

⁷⁵ Cross, 11a.

⁷⁶ UNESCO, 14 Aug. 1967, 4.

⁷⁷ UNESCO, 14 Aug. 1967, 5.

⁷⁸ Cross, 11a.

rights and how to go about rectifying an unjust situation” such as their husband having multiple wives.⁷⁹

In 1975, she was Iran’s delegate to the International Women’s Year Conference where Secretary-general Kurt Waldheim lauded both her and Iran for their progress in women’s rights, saying she was “acting as a...representative of a country who is known for its successful efforts towards economic and social development.”⁸⁰ This a public acknowledgement of friendship between the two. She explained that there was a “myriad” of women’s problems throughout the world, and that there was a difference between first and third world women’s problems.⁸¹ She pointed out the main difference as being “one woman’s stereotype is another’s sense of security, identity and continuity.”⁸² She went on saying “Western women were much more concerned with the refinements of emancipation...while third world women were still struggling for such basic freedoms as the right to divorce and the right to have custody of their own children.”⁸³ Here Ashraf identified herself with the Third World and its problems, and explained the need for consideration and toleration of other cultures in the business of liberating women.

The 1970s

The 1970s were a boom period for Iran. Oil wealth was estimated at twenty two billion English pounds in 1976.⁸⁴ This new oil wealth combined with the Shah’s White Revolution for modernization to implement Western values in a very Western way. The *London Times* characterized this reform as being single-minded and over zealous.⁸⁵ The *Times* argues, “he (the

⁷⁹ Cross, 11a.

⁸⁰ Dear Mr. Secretary General Waldheim, *The New York Times*, 23 Dec. 1979, 29.

⁸¹ Ashraf Pahlavi, And Thus Passeth International Women’s Year, *The New York Times*, 5 Jan. 1976, 29. (This will be footnoted as Pahlavi, *New York Times*, 5 Jan. 1976, 29.)

⁸² *New York Times*, 5 Jan. 1976, 29.

⁸³ Pahlavi, 193.

⁸⁴ *London Times*, 7 June 1976, 10e.

⁸⁵ *London Times*, 7 June 1976, 10e, The ‘Iranian values’ which keep the Shah in Power, *London Times*, 26 Oct. 1978, 18d.

Shah) attempted to solve every problem at once, simply by throwing money at it, without establishing a clear order of priorities or earmarking the raw materials and skilled labor needed for each project,” which resulted in “complete chaos.”⁸⁶ These increased oil revenues were not completely detrimental to Iranian society, because it meant that there was an increase in social welfare funds, which as Ashraf explains, she took full advantage of. She worked with the Shah to form village tribunals to make “a mechanism of justices...available to those who could not or would not travel to the cities.”⁸⁷ Also, “3,500 new schools; miles and miles of new roads...the telephone and electricity systems” were introduced or repaired.⁸⁸ Iran set up tent schools for nomad children and set up a Literacy Corps of teachers educated by the army.⁸⁹

Ashraf notes that Iranians had “suffered under a have-not status for a long time” and were “determined now to have the ‘best’ – and to have it quickly.”⁹⁰ She does not distinguish between elite and common Iranians, perhaps to give a greater degree of unity to the country. She uses a day care center as an example of this desire to modernize quickly. Because the Swedes had the best day care centers, this day care center was going to be on that model. The planners were trying to determine how much balcony space each crib should have when Ashraf cried “Look...we are talking about cribs and balcony space for children who have never slept in a crib before, who are accustomed to sharing sleeping space on a floor with their parents and brothers and sisters.”⁹¹ She argues that this alien environment would harm the children more than help them.⁹² Eventually a truce was made and a “modern facility” was created with mattresses on the

⁸⁶ *London Times*, 26 Oct. 1978, 18d.

⁸⁷ Pahlavi, 192.

⁸⁸ Cross, 11a.

⁸⁹ *London Times*, 7 June 1976 10e.

⁹⁰ Pahlavi, 186.

⁹¹ Pahlavi, 187.

⁹² Pahlavi, 187.

floor for the children to sleep on.⁹³ Whether or not this incident happened is not as important as the issues it addressed. This incident characterizes Iran's major problem at this time, which was trying to balance itself between the West and the East. Ashraf argued that Iran needed to find its own way and that the West's system would not work in Iran, and that attacking Iran was not the answer.⁹⁴

Beginning of the End

The advances that were decreed by the Shah during the 1970s undermined his position by seriously underestimating the "resistance of the clergy and their hold over the masses."⁹⁵ As the Shah reformed and modernized, clerical unrest grew and the *mullahs* began preaching anti-Shah sermons that went unreported by SAVAK.⁹⁶ This was an indicator of both the corruption in the government and the erosion of his power.⁹⁷ In order to try to regain the power he was very quickly losing, the Shah tried to reduce the centralization and "clean house" within the government.⁹⁸

As he de-centralized his government, hostility towards he and his family grew. In 1977, this hostility was realized by a particularly frightening way for Ashraf. On Sept. 13, a gunman opened fire on her car, killing her lady-in-waiting and wounding her driver as they were all in Paris.⁹⁹ Minou Reeves recalls this incident as a "dramatic occasion" where Ashraf's enemies caught up with her, but that she "miraculously" remained unscathed.¹⁰⁰ This is characteristic of the skepticism that many saw the Royal Family and Ashraf especially. Soon after riots broke out

⁹³ Pahlavi, 187.

⁹⁴ 7 June 1976 *London Times*, 10e.

⁹⁵ Pahlavi, 195.

⁹⁶ Pahlavi, 195.

⁹⁷ Pahlavi, 196.

⁹⁸ Pahlavi, 197.

⁹⁹ Woman Killed, Shah's Sister Unhurt in Riviera Attack, *New York Times*, 14 Sept. 1977, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Reeves, 49.

in Tehran, and Ashraf was asked by the Shah to leave the country for his “peace of mind”¹⁰¹ Whether it was for his peace of mind, an effort to shift public opinion by distancing himself from Ashraf, no one knows.

Ashraf recalled the last time she saw Iran she flew over the Shahyad Monument and saw a black mass of women covered in the *chador* and she felt as though she was watching a child she had nurtured (women’s rights), “sicken and die.”¹⁰² Months later the Shah also fled the country, without the Western support that he had counted on so often in his reign.¹⁰³ He finally settled in Mexico, after being forced to leave Egypt and Morocco.

In Defense of History

Towards the end of the 1970s, when the pressure on the Shah’s government was mounting, Ashraf’s writings and speeches became defensive. The assassination of her son Shariar dealt her a serious blow, from which she has not fully recovered, which brought the reality and terror into a brighter light. In her statement to the Press, she explained that he was a true patriot and took that time to criticize the world’s lack of involvement in the problems shaking Iran. She explains, “My family devoted its life to the service of Iran in accepting that responsibility of laying down our lives for our cause and goal, which is Iran.”¹⁰⁴ She explains that “to see and hear the proliferation of lies and accusations that have been heaped on my family...they seemed to me particularly insidious, since these unsubstantiated allegations are displacing the truth-and being presented to the public as so-called proof that the new regime under Khomeini in Iran is not as ‘bad’ as the old one,” under the Shah.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Pahlavi, 206.

¹⁰² Pahlavi, 205.

¹⁰³ Pahlavi, 211.

¹⁰⁴ Nephew of the Shah is Slain in Paris, *The New York Times*, 8 Dec. 1979, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Pahlavi, 213.

For much of her family's defense she took out articles in the *New York Times*. One such article was to UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim. She explains that "In the last few weeks it has become highly fashionable to speak of denials of human rights and other injustices while referring to the Iran of the Pahlavis."¹⁰⁶ She attacks Khomeini's reign for the same reasons he attacked the Pahlavis asking, "What should be said of Mr. Khomeini, who does not even keep an account of the oil income while allowing all those close to him to bleed the country to death?"¹⁰⁷ She then asks why the United Nations is standing by while Khomeini "tramples upon the most sacred principles of the Charter of the United Nations."¹⁰⁸ She reminded him that "Iran was a peaceful and prosperous nation, internationally acclaimed as a model of success in the developing world."¹⁰⁹ She asks him why it was necessary to "throw a stone at those who defended the United Nations so wholeheartedly" as Iran had done.¹¹⁰

In another article entitled, I Will Fight These Slanders, Ashraf recalls both her father's and brother's reigns explaining that the tragedy of both their reigns was that "they were not allowed to finish their tasks."¹¹¹ She explains that her father, in his modernization did not wish to turn away from traditions and religion. She quotes him as saying, "If the Great Law-giver of Islam were alive today to see the progress of the world, he would confirm the complete harmony of his true teachings with the basis and institutions of the civilization of today."¹¹² She attacks the notion that her fund were acquired through illegal means explaining that she inherited land from her father and "acquired real estate at the right time."¹¹³ She explains that many people amassed great amounts of wealth through these means and by investing in industry, but that

¹⁰⁶ *The New York Times*, 23 Dec. 1979, 29.

¹⁰⁷ *The New York Times*, 23 Dec. 1979, 29.

¹⁰⁸ *The New York Times*, 23 Dec. 1979, 29.

¹⁰⁹ *The New York Times*, 23 Dec. 1979, 29.

¹¹⁰ *The New York Times*, 23 Dec. 1979, 29.

¹¹¹ *The New York Times*, 11 Jan. 1980, 23.

¹¹² *The New York Times*, 11 Jan. 1980, 23.

many are immune to the new regime's slander because they have close connections with the clergy.¹¹⁴ She then focuses her defense upon the Pahlavi Foundation, which she maintains “created hospitals, schools, museums, libraries, granted thousands of scholarships to needy students, built low-cost housing projects and dealt with many aspects of the betterment of our society.”¹¹⁵ She responds to the allegations of misuse of funds by explaining that Khomeini has not been able to prove that a single cent was used “for anything but the welfare of the people of Iran.”¹¹⁶ In this article she declares that “I still have the right to reply to accusations directed and my person and my family. I will fight these slanders with all my might and through whatever judicial means are available to me.”¹¹⁷

Her next article was written to illuminate the many killings occurring in Iran under the Khomeini regime and was dedicated to Mrs. Farrokhrou Parsa, former Minister of Education. She explains that she was executed “following a mock-trial carried out at night, in secret and with no regard to due process and right of appeal.”¹¹⁸ It is no accident that this sentence echoes both the Charter of the UN and the documents that govern the United States, such as the Constitution and Declaration of Independence. In this article Ashraf appeals to the world “in this great tragedy the beleaguered people of Iran more than ever need the whole-hearted moral support of the free world in helping them foster a true democracy before being completely terrorized and enslaved as a result of the crimes of madmen ruling Iran today.”¹¹⁹ She explains that the feeling of continuity in national identity is being eroded for Iranians by “a fanaticized

¹¹³ *The New York Times*, 11 Jan. 1980, 23.

¹¹⁴ *The New York Times*, 11 Jan. 1980, 23.

¹¹⁵ *The New York Times*, 11 Jan. 1980, 23.

¹¹⁶ *The New York Times*, 11 Jan. 1980, 23.

¹¹⁷ *The New York Times*, 11 Jan. 1980, 23.

¹¹⁸ In Memory of Mrs. Farrokhrou Parsa, Doctor in Medicine, Distinguished Scholar, Former Minister of education, Who was executed on May 8, 1980, *The New York Times* May 16, 1980, 6.

¹¹⁹ *The New York Times*, 16 May 1980, 6.

segment of the clergy chasing one-another into ever greater obscurantism, while destroying all the relics of our great past.”¹²⁰

She then takes out an article that thanks President Anwar Sadat of Egypt for taking in her brother after his exile. She explains that President Sadat gave “a much needed lesson to the international community at a time when the ethics of nations seem to give way and falter under the pressure of selfish interests and short term objectives.”¹²¹ Her brother’s biggest mistake, in her opinion, was that he trusted that his political alliances would support him when Khomeini came in. She then goes on to explain that “the champions of human rights...have disappeared into thin air when confronted with the numerous [sic] crimes of Khomeini’s barbaric regime which totally defies the rules of civilized conduct of nations.”¹²²

On July 27, 1980 Muhammad Reza Shah passed away after a battle with cancer. This left Ashraf as the sole defender of the reign, the family and his legacy. She wrote articles for the International Herald Tribune in 1986, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2001 and 2002 to commemorate his death. These give the best defense of his reign to date. She compares her brother’s and father’s reigns and uses their differences to show their strengths. She also emphasizes that her brother had more time to modernize and began to do so under the watchful eye of the British and Russians, whereas her father came to power without this pressure.¹²³ Her entry in 1999 explains that “The Islamic revolution pitted our people against history, thereby willfully condemning us to living in small, isolated, narrow, oppressive, and backward spaces.”¹²⁴ She calls upon the young people of Iran to rise up and reclaim the rights that her brother fought so hard to bring to his

¹²⁰ *The New York Times*, 16 May 1980, 6.

¹²¹ Thank You President Sadat, *The New York Times*, 8 Aug. 1980, 8.

¹²² *The New York Times*, 8 Aug. 1980, 8.

¹²³ In Memory of my Brother, Shahanshah, 27 July 1986, www.sedona.net/saipa/shah.html, 8/25/02, 2-3.

¹²⁴ In Memory of my Brother, Shahanshah, 27 July 1999, www.sedona.net/saipa/shah.html, 8/25/02, 2.

people.¹²⁵ The degree of loss that she felt on her brother's behalf is incalculable, but the fact that she has continued writing and fighting for the defense of his reign is significant.

Whether she was the great reformer she sets out to portray herself as is debatable. What is sure is that she believed in her brother, her family and the Pahlavi regime, and worked to the best of her abilities to promote understanding throughout the world for Iran. Ashraf now lives a much quieter life in Paris. Every couple of years she will write an article for the *International Herald Tribune* commemorating her brother and his work. Her dedication to her brother and her family is indisputable. She was a controversial figure who worked hard for women's and family's rights, and who worked hard to publicize the modernization efforts of her brother. She was an outspoken woman at a time when women rarely spoke up in public. Her attitude and her courageousness allowed her to endure long after her family had died away.

¹²⁵ In Memory of my Brother, Shahanshah, 27 July 1986, www.sedona.net/saipa/shah.html, 8/25/02, 2-3

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