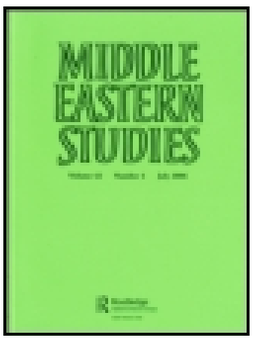

Middle Eastern Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fmes20

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Alex Shams

To cite this article: Alex Shams (2021): From guests of the Imam to unwanted foreigners: the politics of South Asian pilgrimage to Iran in the twentieth century, Middle Eastern Studies, DOI: 10.1080/00263206.2021.1891532

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2021.1891532


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https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2021.1891532

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From guests of the Imam to unwanted foreigners: the politics of South Asian pilgrimage to Iran in the twentieth century

Alex Shams

Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA

In January 2020, Iran's religious representative in India, Hojjat ol-Eslam Mahdi Mahdavipour, called for efforts to attract more Indian pilgrims to the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad, Iran, noting that out of 250 million Indian Muslims, only around 150,000 came as pilgrims yearly.[1] Indeed, their large population contrasts with the near total lack of Indian Muslim presence in Iran, despite proximity and friendly relations. Since the mid-2000s, Iran has opened up to transnational Shiʿi pilgrimage on an unprecedented scale, expanding religious, political, and economic relations across the region. Before 2003, almost no Iraqis visited Iran. In 2019, between 2 and 3 million Iraqis came as tourists and pilgrims.[2] Visitors from Persian Gulf states like Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia also increased dramatically, despite political tensions. But pilgrims from South Asia – home to a quarter of the global Shiʿi Muslim population – have lagged far behind.

Articles in the Iranian press frequently stress the importance of building bridges with South Asia, pointing to historical ties. Few, however, consider why ties were severed, or why Iranians are largely unfamiliar with South Asian Islam today. Only a century ago, pilgrims from British-controlled India were a significant presence in Iran. Around 1,000 South Asians could be found at any given time in the shrine city of Mashhad in the 1920s.[3] These included pilgrims as well as a permanent community of merchants, agricultural workers, artisans, and volunteers at Imam Reza's shrine. Considered 'guests of the Imam', an infrastructure of religious endowment funds addressed their needs, a product of strong relations between Iran and South Asia in the nineteenth century powered by wealthy Subcontinental Shiʿi dynasties and stability in Qajar Iran.

Beginning in the late 1920s, the number of South Asians in Iran experienced a sharp decline on a scale unprecedented outside of wartime. Iranian government policies increasingly viewed South Asian Muslims as suspicious and unwanted foreigners, leading to harassment, detention, and even deportation. Ironically, even as Iranian intellectuals close to the state drew on the pre-Islamic past to develop an Iranian national identity connecting India and Iran through 'Aryan affinities', including by inviting Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore to visit in 1932, they denigrated Indians as backwards 'others' and undermined existing ties based on shared Islamic and Persian culture, a fact noted with alarm at the time by Persian and Urdu poet Allama Iqbal.[4] Decrees intended to 'nationalize' Iranians and impose central government control created growing difficulties for South Asian Muslims, and eventually spelled the end of their presence in Iran. The climate had changed so dramatically that only a few decades later, as part of a campaign to undermine the exiled Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's support, the Shah's secret police spread rumors that he was not Iranian but in reality 'an Indian' foreigner working on behalf of British and Russian imperialism. In 1978, an article appeared in government-backed *Itila'at* newspaper again claiming Khomeini was an Indian agent of 'black imperialism' linked to British colonialism (and on Egypt's payroll), leading to uproar at the perceived insult.[5] The angry protests that

CONTACT Alex Shams ashams@uchicago.edu
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followed sparked the Iranian Revolution that brought down the Shah. Even today, critics of the Islamic Republic commonly repeat claims of Khomeini's Indian-ness to undermine the post-1979 state's legitimacy.[6]

The irony of this 'insult' is that Khomeini, like many Iranians, did indeed have Indian roots. His was one of hundreds of families from Iran that migrated to South Asia in recent centuries to serve as scholars in the Persian-speaking Shiʿi Muslim courts of places like Awadh and Kashmir, a region which even acquired the moniker *Iran-i Saghir* (Little Iran). A patriarch from Khomeini's family left Kashmir in the mid-1800s for the Iraqi shrine city of Najaf; he eventually settled in Iran, where Khomeini was born.[7] Khomeini's family's identity was defined not by nation-states but by mobility across the transregional circuits of Shiʿi Muslim and Persianate culture that historically connected West, South, and Central Asia. Only a century later, such an identity had become almost unimaginable to Iranians.[8] Khomeini's Indian-ness was no longer innocuous fact; it had transformed into a slur.

The shadow of South Asia hangs over the study of modern Iran. Yet its presence is most notable in its absence. While recent decades have seen burgeoning fascination with cultural worlds engendered by the use of Persian as a lingua franca from the 1300-1800s, scholarship has largely ignored its afterlives in Iran's twentieth century history. Even after British and Russian colonization in the nineteenth century ended Persian's status in South and Central Asia, networks of pilgrimage and trade continued to cross geographies connected by shared Persianate culture. The cosmopolitan atmosphere of Mashhad was among the remaining bastions of this 'Persianate cosmopolis'.[9] The Shiʿi Muslim shrine cities – in which Southern, Western, and Central Asians intermingled and Persian remained a lingua franca – sustained this Persianate world into the twentieth century.

As Mana Kia notes, 'The modern story of Iranian national identity… required suppression of multiplicity' by creating a narrative in which Persian culture was equated with Iran's nation-state and connections to neighbors were severed and written out of history.[10] This process was given state backing with Reza Shah's modernizing reforms in the 1920s and 30s.[11] The drive to nationalize Iran required de-nationalizing South Asians and marking them as foreigners. This included 'dress codes' that banned veils and turbans and required Western-style clothes for Iranians, and an eventual decree that South Asians wear 'national dress' like saris to visually distinguish themselves as foreigners. It also involved imposing direct control over Imam Reza's shrine in Mashhad, targeting its status as a quasi-sovereign, transregional hub bolstered by Shiʿi Muslim funding from elsewhere, thus undermining religious endowments sustaining South Asian presence. Reversing centuries in which the Persian state tied its legitimacy to protecting Shiʿi communities beyond its borders, these policies sharply defined Iranian citizenship to exclude South Asian Muslims, identifying them as connected to British imperialism. As Reza Shah sought to demonstrate Persia's development as a power on par with European states, pilgrimage from South Asia became a battleground for anti-imperialist sentiments – taken out on colonial subjects themselves. As the most visible, prominent, and numerous 'foreign' group, South Asians in Mashhad – British Indian but also British Afghan subjects – bore the brunt, including as victims of the Gauharshad Massacre.

Scholars of modern Iranian history have highlighted the 'nationalizing' aim of Reza Shah's reforms; they have largely neglected to describe the transregional connections these policies were in part directed against. This article applies insights from Persianate studies to twentieth century Iranian studies. By focusing on Imam Reza's shrine in Mashhad, it argues that the Iranian nation was produced in part by erasing such local histories of transregional connection and expelling those inassimilable to the project of Iranian national sovereignty. Drawing upon British, Iranian, and Indian archival sources as well as Urdu travelogues of Iran, the article explores how modern Iranian nationalism was not only about articulating an idea of the nation vis-à-vis alternative internal identities; it required disentangling Iranians from pre-existing transregional linkages and subsuming local identities rooted in long-distance mobility, as in the shrine cities,

to a homogenous national identity defined by borders and territory. In order to do so, the article first offers an overview of the interconnected worlds of the Persianate cosmopolis and the Shiʿi shrine cities. It then examines how Reza Shah's nationalizing policies affected Mashhad's transregional connections, with a focus on how years of harassment stemming from the imposition of dress codes eventually resulted in a compromise through British intervention which mandated 'national dress' for South Asian pilgrims. This compromise, however, failed to relieve the pressure, and arbitrary expulsions continued.

This is the story of how 'Indian' went from being synonymous with a 'guest of the Imam' in Iran to being a racial slur that helped incite the Iranian Revolution over the course of the twentieth century. The article concludes by exploring how despite that history, emerging contemporary social worlds of Shiʿi pilgrimage are highlighting unexpected resurgences in Iran-South Asia connections, less than a century after nationalist leaders sought to snuff them out.

Pilgrimage connections

In 1929, Sayed Qasim Ali Shah traveled overland from Multan, British India to Mashhad on pilgrimage to the tomb of the eighth Shiʿi Imam, Reza. A low-ranking civil servant, he had been intrigued by stories of Iran's rapid progress under 'the reforming influence' of Reza Shah.[12] The image of Iran forging an independent national future provoked optimism in colonized countries, fueling dreams of Indian 'Swaraj', self-rule free from British imperialism.[13] Visiting Iran, however, robbed Shah of his optimism. He was harassed by Iranian officials and insulted by border police on account of his identity as an Indian and British subject. In Mashhad, Shah visited the British consulate to complain. He denounced Iranians as dishonest, government officials corrupt, and Mashhad immoral and dirty. He described the Iranian police as 'frankly hostile', complaining that they had told him, 'This is a new Persia … You will find it is altered now; no more concessions and no more preferential treatment for your people'.[14]

Shah was not alone in this negative impression. In the years that followed, accounts like his multiplied. As Reza Shah instituted new laws to centralize Iranian government control, harassment grew. As the story highlights, pilgrimage is not just about visiting the shrine; it includes the journey and the experiences along the way.[15] Pilgrimage produces relations between pilgrims and those they encounter, 'connecting the local and the global … [and allowing] them to create shared identities in a multiplicity of social and cultural contexts'.[16] By the same token, pilgrimage can alter pilgrims' perceptions of the lands they visit, the lands they come from, and how they understand their relationship to both. For South Asian pilgrims, Iran was a holy land, the seat of a Persian-speaking empire dotted by shrines from early Islamic history, many of whose descendants were buried in South Asia. Ali Mirza Maftun, a Delhi poet visiting in 1826-7, saw 'Iranian kingship as a Shiʿi monarchy, as protector of the faithful and the domains of the faithful'.[17] A century later, Iran's status as one of the few non-colonized Muslim states was added to these impressions. Many pilgrims came with high hopes; yet from the 1920s onward, they often found themselves targets of harassment.

Colonial penetration both strengthened and disrupted long-standing networks of pilgrimage.[18] Hiring motor transport on 'the Persian route' was so cheap that many who set out from India intending to visit the holy sites of Iraq by steamship returned overland, performing a pilgrimage to Mashhad along the way.[19] The opening of the railroad through Baluchistan to Duzdap (modern Zahedan) in 1919 created a quicker, safer path, with two trains to India every week.[20] Investment in pilgrimage was political. At the turn of the century, a majority of the world's Muslim population lived under colonial rule, whether British, French, Russian, or Dutch.[21] Initially concerned with preventing the spread of disease and anti-colonial sentiment, colonial powers facilitated pilgrimage for economic profit and improved public relations.[22] Many pilgrims came from the upper echelons of society, and well-organized voyages were an avenue for colonial

authorities to display their organizational skills. In the 1880s and 90s, Russia opened consulates in Mashhad and Damascus with the aim of supervising and aiding Russian Muslim pilgrims from the Caucasus and Central Asia.[23] Nervous about Russia's foothold in Persia, Britain followed suit, opening a consulate in Mashhad under the rationale of aiding British Indian pilgrims.[24] The consulate became a site of British intrigue toward Iran and Russian Central Asia, just as Russia's consulate had its own diplomatic ambitions. British authorities spied on politically active Indians and worked with local authorities to pursue them, while also recruiting Indian agents to carry out reconnaissance in Iran.[25] These consulates, connected to foreign penetration that included economic and legal capitulations, made Iranian authorities increasingly suspicious of British motives – and Indian travelers.

The 1920s and 30s were a period of unprecedented political centralization in Iranian history, in part a response to British colonial consolidation of power on both sides of Iran – India from the mid-nineteenth century, and Iraq since 1918. The absolutist Qajar dynasty had ruled Persia ineffectively for decades, allowing European colonial powers to develop political and economic footholds, and failing to effectively implement centralizing policies.[26] The discovery of oil in Iran in 1908 fueled British and Russian moves toward indirect colonial rule, including through the creation of spheres of influence. It also led to growing national sentiment and anti-colonial consciousness among Iranians, manifested in the 1905-12 Constitutional Revolution. Growing British control over Iran's nascent oil industry – and the arrival of thousands of Indian workers to Iran to take jobs in the rapidly-industrializing oil cities, even as British authorities frequently declined to employ Iranians – fuelled this anti-colonial sentiment.[27]

Following an early 1920s coup, Reza Shah dispensed with republican reform and re-established absolutist rule under the newly-declared Pahlavi dynasty. Sensitive to Qajar failures, he promulgated policies to subject Iranians to state authority, including conscription, disarming and settling tribal federations, and marginalizing religious authorities. Historical accounts of Reza Shah frequently portray him as a 'man of order' saving Iran from collapse or colonization, downplaying opposition as 'reactionary' or 'obscurantist', particularly from the clergy.[28] This aligns with a trend in Iranian historiography toward 'methodological statism', where the state is imagined as 'omnipotent' over a subservient society.[29] But on the contrary, Reza Shah's rule was deeply unpopular, and he encountered widespread resistance from subaltern groups threatened by ill-planned and ill-executed policies.[30]

This article expands on the growing body of 'histories from below' by examining the fate of communities marginalized by the rising importance of citizenship.[31] Historical analysis has tended to replicate views of elites close to the state, reproducing the Pahlavis' self-image and reifying the notion of Iran as an eternal and immutable nation-state.[32] This approach overlooks the fact that citizenship was a messy process, involving laws and decrees that included some and excluded others. Citizenship converted vaguely-defined frontiers into armed borders and imposed restrictions on communities whose lives were defined by mobility, including the between one-third and one-half of Iran's population that was nomadic before 1900.[33] Scholars of Middle Eastern studies have increasingly turned attention to religious and cultural minorities' histories, exploring the perspectives of internal 'others' excluded from national narratives. But this has the unintended effect of reinforcing citizenship as a litmus for inclusion in national history. The emergence of 'minorities' as a category is indelibly tied to the imposition of political authority, excluding those who failed to acquire citizenship and come under state control.[34] Focusing on the category of minorities excludes stories bound up in modern citizenship's history through their absence, particularly those defined by transregional connections.

In 1900, South Asians were a deeply embedded community across the Shiʿi shrine cities. Within just a few decades, they were almost completely dislodged. This article explores how South Asian Muslims with historical ties to Iran were dislodged from claims to belonging, how longstanding social categories based on travel, including *mujawir* ('neighbors' of Imam Reza, i.e. those from elsewhere now resident around the shrine) and *za'ir* (pilgrims i.e. 'guests of the

Imam') were reduced to deportable, non-citizen foreigners.[35] In doing so, I analyze the social world of pilgrimage to tell a wider story: the decline and fragmentation of a transnational Shiʿi world embedded within the Persianate cosmopolis. Investigating the decline of South Asian communities in Mashhad illuminates broader questions about how nation states and colonial powers reshaped relations between neighboring regions, and how these ties were ruptured and erased from subsequent historical accounts.

Shiʿi transregional, Persianate cosmopolis

The 'transregional' world of Shiʿi pilgrimage, scholarship, and trade binding West and South Asia was defined by the presence of communities in lands from which they would later be excluded.[36] This includes 'Ajam' Persians living in Iraqi cities like Karbala, Najaf, and Kadhimiya, Persian and Arab scholars in Shiʿi states in India like Awadh, Hyderabad, Bijapur, and Banganapalle, and South Asians in Iran and Iraq's shrine cities, drawn by the appeal of pilgrimage, study, or trade. Pilgrimage involved extended journeys, and settling near the shrine for months, years, or even permanently was common.[37]

In contrast to the modern nation-state, in which citizenship guarantees belonging, Shiʿi shrines were exceptional spaces in which visitors were 'guests of the imam'. They were literal thresholds, '*atabat*' in Persian and Arabic – liminal domains in which anyone could belong – and 'cosmopolitan' spaces maintaining connections with distant places that produced their 'locality' and articulated 'relations between different geographical scales'.[38] An Indian's desire to spend his final years sweeping the shrine as an act of devotion, a Persian '*alim*'s [religious scholar's] wish to settle and marry in Najaf, or Afghan Hazara refugees' building lives in the shadow of shrines were all economically supported by the shrine's institutions.[39] Pilgrims themselves often engaged in acts of charity toward others as a way of expressing piety; even today, a corner of Imam Reza's shrine is known as *Kafshdari-yi Hendi*, the 'Indian Shoe Locker', in reference to a family of Indian Muslims who for generations helped pilgrims store their shoes and other possessions during visits to the tomb.[40] Charitable *waqf*s (endowments) catered to pilgrims settled around the shrine. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Imam Reza's shrine in Mashhad offered South Asian pilgrims free lodging, hot meals, and funds to purchase bread, coats and fur hats appropriate for Mashhad's freezing winter weather, and to travel home.[41] These funds came from the general endowment as well as gifts from wealthy South Asian pilgrims who created endowments specifying recipients as poor pilgrims from the Subcontinent.[42] The shrine was backed by relative economic independence promoted by the Shiʿi transnational sphere, especially from wealthy Indian Shiʿi states, what has been called 'Indian money'.[43] In turn, pilgrim spending on food, lodging, tour guides, and devotional souvenirs were a boon to local economies. Some wealthy Indian Muslims sent loved ones' bodies to be buried near the shrine in Mashhad, another substantial source of income for the city.[44] Shrine authorities sustained a network of social patronage and welfare including clergy, students, and the needy, and they employed artisans in maintenance and construction. These transnational funds, and the economic prosperity brought through pilgrimage more widely, could bolster the clergy's independence in shrine cities.[45] Clerics based in southern Iraq, for example, played active roles in the Iranian anti-colonial Tobacco revolt and the Constitutional Revolution.[46]

The shrine's position of quasi-independence vis-à-vis the state was exemplified in *bast nishini*, a custom in which outlaws or those opposing state policies could seek refuge in a shrine, which authorities largely respected.[47] *Bast* (sanctuary) turned the shrine into a 'public court'; taking refuge there allowed an individual to contest a law or ruling by appealing to a higher power, the shrine's sovereignty.[48] Mashhad was thus a site of potential alternative power. This fact – and the potential for colonial meddling – was revealed in conflicts that raged in Iraq's shrine cities in the early 1900s, including the Oudh Bequest scandal, when British authorities politicized

fund distribution by redirecting Iraq's largest religious endowment, funded by the South Asian Awadhi *darbar*, toward clerics favorable to their influence.[49] Reza Shah's move to appropriate control over shrine institutions aimed at concentrating funds in the hands of the state and restricting movements in the emerging age of borders and citizenship, coinciding with British colonization's entrenchment.[50] The drive to empower the central government and extend its sovereignty across national territory undermined 'competing sovereignties' – leading, in city after city, to the expulsion of diverse communities flourishing in the shadow of shrines.[51]

This Shiʿi transnational world emerged in the shadow of a Persianate world, or 'Persianate cosmopolis', predating it by centuries.[52] For nearly a thousand years, Persian was a scholarly and diplomatic lingua franca across Central, South, and West Asia.[53] The use of Persian in India attracted scholars, traders, and artists from West and Central Asia, facilitating an economy of Persian presence, including Ayatollah Khomeini's ancestors.[54] Even after the use of Persian as a lingua franca across India ended in the mid-1800s and local entities were integrated into British colonial administration, elite families continued learning Persian. For South Asian pilgrims to West Asia, the cultural terrain would not have been totally unfamiliar, especially in the shrine cities, where intermarriage and multilingualism were the norm.[55] Mir Asad Ali and Syed Muslim Reza, two Persian-educated South Asian travelers in the 1920s and 30s, describe speaking Persian and Arabic along the journey, and even encountering locals speaking rudimentary Urdu in shrine cities like Karbala.[56]

Since the Safavid period, Iran actively cultivated ties with Shiʿi communities abroad, securing pilgrims' access to Ottoman Iraq's holy shrines and acquiring exclusive rights and duties as protector of the shrine cities. [57] These shrine cities registered a marked increase in Persian presence during the eighteenth century, when an Afghan invasion devastated Esfahan, leading to the flight of Shiʿi clergymen and merchants to Iraq.[58] Shiʿi-led polities in India patronized the holy cities, funding canals, pilgrims' lodging, mosque renovations, and scholarships for seminary students, contributing to an upsurge in South Asian pilgrims, scholars, and travelers. After the Awadhi nawab was deposed and his territory annexed by Britain in 1856, much of the court moved to Iraq, bolstering Indian communities there by the thousands.[59] Many South Asian travelers went overland across Iran, visiting Mashhad along the way.[60] They benefited from the stability ensured by the Qajars, reflected in the appointment of a *mutiwalli* (caretaker) at Imam Reza's shrine under Fathali Shah after decades lacking one.[61]

Recent scholarship has argued for the importance of analyzing how myriad 'cultural entanglements' continued to connect Iran and British India, even as government policies set them on distinct courses.[62] Persianate studies have largely focused on Persian literary culture in the early modern period. Little has been mentioned about South Asian travelers to Iran long after that, perhaps because literary production shifted to Urdu. But Persianate connections were not just about language; they were about *adab* as a form of education and outlook sustaining a shared cultural sphere.[63] Mana Kia has argued that in order 'to remove Persianate culture from the shadow of nationalisms, we need to disaggregate the Persianate from Iran'.[64] We must also tackle the assumption that the Persianate happens only in Persian. Three Urdu travelogues from the early 1900s, Mir Asad Ali's *Safarnama Iraq-o-Iran*, Syed Muslim Reza's *Ruznama Iraq-o Iran,* and Nawab Ahmad Bahadur Yar Jung's *Bilad-i Islamiyah ki Sair* were written by Persian-educated intellectuals who recognized, as did writers before them, a sense of 'belonging to a single cultural space' with the people and places they encountered.[65] Speaking in Persian but writing in Urdu, these authors' works push us to recognize the continued relevance of Persianate *adab*.[66]

Scholars have argued that the nineteenth century was a period of decline in the Persianate sphere's connectivity. But stability in Iran, prosperity in India, growing ease and improvement of transport, and the existence of more well-established Shiʿi communities in both Iraq and India, which witnessed substantial conversion to Shi'ism, led to a pilgrimage boom. South Asian communities in Iran were fed by the steady stream of pilgrims heading to Iraq, which received around 100,000 yearly in the early 1910s, ten per cent of whom were Indian or Afghan, the remainder

from Iran.[67] During his 1931 visit, Mir Asad Ali estimated Mashhad was host to a total of 5–8,000 pilgrims during his stay, suggesting Indians were close to one-fifth of the total. Mashhad's total population was between 60,000 and 80,000 at the time, and more than 100,000 pilgrims visited yearly.[68] The size of the long-term Indian community in Mashhad is unclear. In the early 1800s, travelers reported coming upon settlements of a hundred Indians in small towns across Khorasan.[69] They were among thousands of South Asians who lived in the 'bazaars of Iran's inland cities, from Mashhad to Tabriz' and who 'dominated the caravan trade between India, Iran, and Central Asia', which had been largely run by South Asian merchants since the 1500s. Nearby Herat was said to have 600 Hindu traders, not including Indian Muslims, and an 1887 British report mentions 300 Kashmiri weavers resident in Mashhad alone.[70] As a pilgrimage center, Mashhad would have undoubtedly welcomed even more long-term residents than the trading-oriented towns around it.[71] Reports from the 1920s suggest the community may have numbered in the hundreds, and even more than 1,000, including an official on the princely state of Hyderabad's payroll.[72] Pilgrimage to Imam Reza was not a momentary, fleeting act; it sustained a constant presence of 'guests of the Imam' who stayed there for months, years, and even permanently.

Pilgrimage politics

When Reza Khan crowned himself Pahlavi Shah in 1926, he embarked on centralizing and modernizing reforms inspired in part by Ataturk in Turkey and Amanullah Khan in Afghanistan.[73] Similar to Amanullah Khan, Reza Shah banned veiling for women, a step Ataturk never took. Other policies included mass conscription, disarming of the tribes, a national dress code, undermining the clergy, and banning public commemoration of Shiʿi rituals during Muharram.[74]

This agenda in part sought to nationalize Islam by undermining the transnational connections that fed Shiʿi Islam. Reza Shah banned pilgrimage to Iraq and Saudi Arabia, ending access to holy sites outside Iran, as he considered the governments founded by British colonial powers illegitimate puppet states.[75] This was in part due to the fact that British authorities implemented nationality laws in Iraq that uprooted Persian-speakers and led to emigration, and that they refused to respect Iran's historical role administering southern Iraq's shrines, known as 'the holy places of Persia'.[76] British authorities in Iraq, noting declining pilgrimage numbers from Iran, argued that 'the Persian government discouraged the pilgrimage apparently on the grounds that it took money out of Persia'.[77] Reza Shah promoted pilgrimage to Mashhad as an alternative.[78] Concern with economic effects of pilgrimage was not limited to Reza Shah; indeed, capturing the Hajj's monetary potential was a central reason behind colonial efforts to develop travel packages.[79] Reza Shah's decisions were also informed by the political context. In the early 1920s, many Iranian-origin clerics in southern Iraq protested against Britain's occupation. In response, the British pressured and exiled some clerics.[80] The Shah helped them relocate to Qom, home to Imam Reza's sister Fatima Masoumeh's shrine.[81] Moving to Qom – only 150 kilometers from Tehran – brought them squarely under Reza Shah's authority.[82]

Reza Shah introduced bans on Ashura processions that stayed in effect for two decades. Part of popular rituals organized by grassroots religious institutions called *hiy'at*, they posed a threat to the state's monopoly over violence as a site of potential agitation connected to popular religion, the clergy, and neighborhood organization.[83] The ban was enforced by violence. A British report from Mazandaran mentions without surprise a massacre of twenty to thirty people after police broke up a procession.[84] Historians have written about these laws as part of a crackdown on the public role of religion.[85] But they were part of a broader consolidation of authoritarian rule and bureaucratic centralization, in which all independent forms of social and political organizing were crushed.[86] In this context, South Asian pilgrims became part of a political game between Iranian and British authorities. Reza Shah feared British and Russian interference due to previous military assaults, creation of spheres of influence, and land grabs

in the Caucasus, Afghanistan, and the Persian Gulf.[87] He feared that diplomatic missions were surveillance hubs.

The British indeed kept close records on developments from their missions, which were also a way to surveil their own subjects. It was common for well-off pilgrims to visit the consul and British authorities kept records of those conversations. British authorities knew that many Indian pilgrims were wealthy and their opinions influential; in 1929, for example, of the average one hundred Indian pilgrims visiting Mashhad every month, most were landed elites (*zamindar*), twenty-five per cent were government officials, and five to ten per cent were officers and soldiers.[88] Their experiences in Iran could have political consequences back in India. On the other hand, the fact that many pilgrims were officials in the British Indian government led credence to Iranian authorities' suspicions that Indians were tied to colonial authority. This was furthered by the fact that their status as British-protected persons gave them extraterritorial privileges and diplomatic protection, tying them closely to foreign 'power and prestige'.[89] But these suspicions failed to recognize that for educated South Asians, a government job was an attractive career not necessarily indicating political views.

The pilgrimage was not only an opportunity to pray at the tomb of Imam Reza; it was a chance to gather information and develop an understanding of a neighboring country independent of British colonial rule. While British authorities claimed India needed British rule to progress toward modernity, Indian anti-colonial activists deployed the image of Iran's successful development as an independent, modern state to argue India could also stand on its own feet.[90] Many pilgrims were motivated not just by interest in religious pilgrimage but also a desire to see what Reza Shah's self-rule looked like.

But many formed quite negative impressions. Jemadar Sayed Ryaz Hussain, a native of Mianwali district in Sindh, noted not only the deplorable state of Iran's infrastructure but also the 'hostility' of the average Iranian, complaining that 'he had not met a single honest or decent Persian: from responsible officials down to the pettiest trader or Shrine officials, they were all out to loot their Indian co-religionists'.[91] The pilgrimage had left Hussain compelled to renounce his former beliefs: 'He considered the favourable accounts of Persian progress which he had read in the newspapers in India to be deliberately false propaganda spread abroad with the object of making Indians discontented with the British connection and disposed to the same blessings of "Swaraj" as Persia enjoys', referring to Indian self-rule. The effect on Hussain, the consul continued, 'was to make him thankful that "Swaraj" had not yet been introduced to India', because, he said, 'if India gets complete "Swaraj" it will sink to the level of Persia within six months'. The consul suggested that in 1929, ninety per cent of pilgrims were disappointed.[92] The consul noted that pilgrims he met with said 'they thought it their duty when they went back to India to tell people quite frankly what the real Persia was like'.[93] Pilgrims who had previously considered themselves amenable to India's freedom struggle expressed misgivings about the reality of Reza Shah's Iran – misgivings they were likely to return and share with their compatriots.[94]

Growing hostility toward South Asian pilgrims was given legal backing through various avenues. Some of these were not necessarily targeted at them. For example, the 1931 foreign-trade act introduced monopolies over imports and exports and limited the amount of cash that could be brought by travelers into the country at 130 rials.[95] This compelled customs officials to seize at the border personal goods brought by pilgrims, many of whom combined *ziarat o tijarat* (pilgrimage and commerce) on their journeys.[96] In 1933, for example, twenty-two Indian pilgrims *en route* to Mashhad had their personal possessions and cash confiscated at the Zahedan border. Khorasan's governor and customs officials interceded with the central government on their behalf, asking that the law's enforcement be eased for 'pilgrims of Imam Reza', noting that they feared a continued decline in pilgrim numbers that would negatively affect Mashhad's economy.[97] The Finance Ministry responded with a terse telegram declining to offer 'pilgrims' special accommodations, highlighting that they would no longer be considered an exceptional category.[98]

British and Iranian archives suggest that the most pervasive form of targeting and harassment was linked to Reza Shah's clothing codes. This was a series of decrees beginning in 1927 policing what Iranian citizens could wear in public spaces.[99] The first stipulated Iranian men cease wearing any traditional or local clothing, and instead wear Western-style coats and pants, topped with a *kolah pahlavi*, a peaked Pahlavi hat, modelled on a French *kepi*. Men were banned from wearing turbans and the traditional frock without permission, which state authorities only gave to high-ranking clerics (Figure 1). In 1934, the Pahlavi hat was abolished and a wide brimmed hat introduced, known as an 'international' hat, and later *kolah farangi*, 'Frankish' or 'Western' hat. It became a required part of the dress code almost overnight. A British official, referring to the Pahlavi hat introduced only years before, noted: 'Their methods of enforcement vary from a polite reminder to assault and battery upon the unfortunate wearer of what is now an old-fashioned and degrading head-dress'.[100] The final round of dress codes was the 1935-36 ban on the veil, focusing on the face veil.[101] This was gradually rolled out. First, army commanders were instructed to arrive at public ceremonies or pick up their salaries with their wives unveiled (Figure 2). Later, enforcement became more rigid; in some places, police were instructed to rip the veils off women they found wearing them.[102]

Previously, men of different backgrounds and positions expressed identity through headgear – such as the wool Qajar hat, dervish hat, fur hat, skullcap, or turban – as well as robes, waistcoats, *shalvar* pants, and shawls or *kamarband* (Figures 3 and 4).[103] The same was true for

Figure 1. The Pahlavi hat, as worn by ʿAbd Allah Mustawfi, Shiraz, 1929. Source: Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran, Houri Mostofi Moghadam Collection.

Figure 2. A group posing with unveiled women as part of an unveiling ceremony in Khorramshahr, in January 1936. Source: Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran, Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History.

Figure 3. Men and women posing before the veil ban. Source: Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran, Ali Vali Khan Qajar Archive.

Figure 4. A group of 'Sufi' women in a village near Tehran. Source: Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran, Ali Vali Khan Qajar Archive.

women.[104] In fact, face veiling was largely limited to well-to-do urban women, in both Iran and India, and was 'a way of demonstrating that a family possessed enough wealth to keep its female members secluded and economically inactive and therefore entitled to claim a superior social status'.[105] A large percentage of South Asian pilgrims were part of those classes that maintained veiling as a social custom. Iranian authorities saw veiling and men's traditional clothing as both symptoms and causes of the nation's backwardness, and thus a goal of the dress codes was 'restoring a sense of social and national harmony through the forced imposition on the entire society of a modernism hitherto the preserve of the elites'.[106] The clothing laws demanded a uniformity across national space eliminating indications of ethnic, tribal, regional, or class background – forcing Iranians to abandon their freedom to reflect their identities through clothing.

The need to acquire a 'turban license' meant men who engaged in religious activities but were not mullahs (like Sufis, *maddah* [chanters], and holy men) had to give up traditional clothes, ironically leading to the visual constitution of ulama as a class separate from the rest of society.[107] Although some local elites had already adopted Western fashions – leading to 'an ever more visible gulf between elite and subaltern, town and country, educated and uneducated, religious and secular' – these decrees provoked widespread resentment of the Shah outside Iran's 'small Westernized elite'.[108] Hundreds of thousands left the country, including many who moved or were exiled to southern Iraq or Afghanistan. Some women refused to leave the house. In Zahedan, the wife of a general committed suicide rather than be forced to remove her veil.[109]

Resistance to the clothing codes has often been framed as religious rebellion against secularizing laws, reflecting Iranian authorities' assessment of the situation at the time.[110] This in part reflects the dress codes' nationalist framing, as the Pahlavi government's construction of the veil as an 'alien' imposition from the Arab world 'carried within it the seeds of hostility to religion', as well as the 'conscious use of the veiling issue to attack Islam and clerics'. [111] However, British officials stationed across Iran portrayed the acts of resistance and rebellion they were witnessing differently. They saw anger and protests in economic terms, noting that the dress codes required people living day-to-day to buy expensive items of clothing on a

regular basis.[112] The implementation of these codes was rife with corruption. A story mentioned by the Mashhad consul is instructive. Midway through an official meeting in which the announcement obligating Iranians to wear European hats was made final, two local officials left, rushed to a store, and bought all of the European hats for sale, to the surprise of the merchants, who were still unaware of the impending announcement. That afternoon the new clothing law was announced; the officials proceeded to sell back the hats at double the price.[113] In some cases, workers were forced to turn over their salaries to 'purchase' hats in the presence of soldiers.[114] The veil ban created an even trickier situation for women. Few instructions were given on what Western-style dress looked like, resulting in confusion. Moreover, the British consul noted that 'the necessity to provide new hats and clothing in replacement of the *chaddur* has been a severe financial strain on many of the population. Resistance has mostly been on these grounds, as the existence of large numbers of non-Moslems in the province has for long accustomed women to European and Indian costumes, while the religious influence is a factor of small weight today'.[115]

Resistance to dress codes imposed on men – the year before the anti-veil code was introduced – culminated in a 1935 protest in Mashhad at the shrine of Imam Reza, in the Gauharshad Mosque. Appealing to the tradition of protesting in the shrine against unjust laws, *bast nishini*, hundreds settled in the mosque, which became a 'public court' to air grievances.[116] In a telegram, the consul-general noted: 'Ostensible cause of the [protest] recent order to wear European hats, but real reason long continued oppression of the lower classes and the universal condemnation of the existing regime'.[117] By gathering inside Imam Reza's shrine, protestors were appealing to a 'competing sovereignty' with that of the Shah.[118] *Bast-nishini* was considered inviolable. As the consul noted, it was 'the one place, short of Heaven, in which every Shiah in Iran probably thought he would be safe from physical violence'.[119] In response to the gathering, Iranian police surrounded the crowd and on two different occasions opened fire 'indiscriminately'.[120] Official figures of those killed were not more than two dozen, but the British consul-general estimated that at least 128 people were killed, and 200-300 wounded.[121]

Transnationalizing the story

The Gauharshad Mosque massacre has been treated as a seminal event in Iranian history, when Reza Shah broke the back of religious classes who opposed secularizing reforms. But as the above illustrates, the protests were informed by economic complaints and resentment at despotic mandates. This framing also misses that the massacre did not just involve Iranians. Imam Reza's shrine was a transnational space where visitors prayed and sought lodging. When soldiers began firing at crowds, their bullets struck not only protestors but also pilgrims. The consul-general noted in a telegram to the British embassy in Tehran: 'A party of Afghan pilgrims amounting to twenty persons… unable to find lodgings, decided to spend their night in the mosque, are stated to have lost fifteen of their number including women and children'.[122]

The massacre signaled the end of Imam Reza's shrine's rival sovereignty and the transregional order it maintained. During the disturbances, 'practically all' Indian pilgrims fled Mashhad for Karbala.[123] In its wake, Iranian authorities began a campaign of expelling those who remained.[124] The consul-general noted soon after that a British Indian subject named Syed Mazhar Hussain, who 'for years held the coveted position of "Khadim' [servant]", was ordered by authorities to leave Mashhad. "He is very aged, so decrepit that he can scarcely walk," the consul said, noting that he had been allotted a small room in which to live, in return for which he acquired merit by assisting to sweep the courtyard.'[125] He was deemed by authorities a threat because he was 'friendly' with the shrine's chief caretaker (*mutiwallibashi*), who was executed in the wake of the massacre.[126] Mazhar had hoped to die while serving at the shrine. But his wish was not to be. His expulsion was part of a 'determined policy to remove all Indians from service in the Shrine'.[127]

In October 1935, a few months after the massacre, an unspecified 'number of British and Afghan subjects' were served expulsion orders, the only reason offered by Iranian authorities being 'political undesirability'.[128]

This policy undoubtedly had negative repercussions for the shrine, including a decline in income from wealthy Indian patrons. The British consul noted that 'inasmuch as the Shrine revenues consist very largely of gifts and bequests from India (including the very large Oudh Bequest), such a policy must, in time, cause dissatisfaction among Indian Shiahs'.[129] Iranian authorities' actions suggest that at least one goal was undermining the institutional independence of Imam Reza's shrine and asserting sovereignty by cutting the shrine's ties to transnational revenue sources.

The elimination of competing sovereignties inside Iran came hand in hand with defining the boundaries of the nation. While the massacre reveals a moment of spectacular violence, the archive reveals more quotidian forms of harassment. Dress codes are central to this story. Police began imposing clothing restrictions on pilgrims coming through the border soon after their imposition in cities. Indians headed to Mashhad were among the first to become trapped. Restrictions forbade men from wearing turbans, and later women from wearing burkas, both commonly worn by upper-class women and men in India. It is not difficult to imagine the shock and insult these pilgrims would have experienced when told that they could cross the border into what they considered a holy land only if they agreed to remove their veils and turbans – in effect, to disrobe for Iranian police.

Existing scholarship about the dress reforms focuses on how they intended to make Iranians into a unified, national 'imagined community' without regional or ethnic divisions, while simultaneously making them modern and Western.[130] Other scholars have noted how the codes were part of a trend toward religious modernism that involved attacks on the clerical establishment.[131] Gender studies scholars argue that dress codes created a hegemonic model of urban and secular national masculinity.[132] These perspectives take the Iranian nation-state as the central locus of identity. But I argue the clothing reforms were also tied to nationalizing identity by drawing clear boundaries between citizens and non-citizens.

The earliest trouble for South Asians in Iran begins in 1929. Rumors circulated that the Pahlavi hat, until then encouraged but not mandatory, would be enforced for men. In late January, Iran's Minister of Court complained to the British ambassador in Tehran that the Anjuman-i-Rezavi, an Indian association in Mashhad established in 1923 whose purpose was to aid pilgrims, was carrying on 'agitation' against the reforms.[133] Days later, seven members of the association – all British subjects – were arrested leaving Imam Reza's shrine, where they had held a *rawzakhani* ritual.[134] They were interrogated until 3 AM and forced to sign a document promising to leave Mashhad within twenty-four hours. Of the seven, four were permanently resident in Mashhad and had never been to India, while two others had been resident in Mashhad for many years. The British consul intervened to stop the expulsions. But he noted with concern that when the dress reform law became mandatory in March 1929, there would likely be more problems with police enforcing it on British subjects. This came to pass in May, when two Kashmiris were arrested for not having papers. The consul noted that the real reason appeared to be not wearing the hat.[135] Failure to wear Pahlavi hats introduced the prospect of summary deportation into the lives of Indians, even those long resident in Mashhad. Enforcement of the codes was widespread.[136] Problems worsened in the years that followed. In 1931, Indian pilgrims complained to the consul that they were denied entry to the shrine while wearing European headwear instead of the Pahlavi cap. The consul noted that 'the Pahlavi cap appears to have become a religious badge' and that the Muslim credentials of visitors not wearing the hat – which had been introduced as a national reform only the year before – were put into doubt. He recounted a bizarre incident where the Turkish vice-consul was attacked by a crowd at the shrine who called him an 'Armenian' and chased him out due to his lack of Pahlavi hat.[137]

Rules were initially enforced on both pilgrims and long-term residents, but effects were somewhat different given their different relationship to the law. This became especially clear when Iran passed the 1933 Nationality Law, an extension of the end of capitulations in 1926 which eliminated legal exceptions for foreign powers to operate special courts for their citizens.[138] British authorities saw this law as an attempt to extend Iranian sovereignty over anyone residing within Iran's borders to ensure Iranian laws could be enforced on them. As a British official noted in November 1936, the Iranian government does not want 'minorities of foreign nationality scattered throughout the country'. He said they 'consistently raised difficulties when such people wish to renounce Iranian nationality, and the police in the provinces are always ready to bully people of doubtful nationality into taking out "*sijjils*" [i.e. nationality documents]. Once they have taken out *sijjils* they are, as far as our information goes, left in peace. [The] lesson being that those who want to stay in Iran and feel attached to Iran should take out Iranian nationality.'[139] A number of Kashmiris who missed a deadline to declare themselves foreign citizens were naturalized as Iranians and found themselves unable to renounce it.[140] Imposing this sharp legal distinction between citizens and foreigners at the same time that police penetration of everyday life and surveillance of minute details of ordinary peoples' choices increased dramatically opened up an easy path to deportation for those who chose to remain foreign – a fact that became clear in the wake of the Gauharshad massacre.

Banning the veil, imposing the sari

Dangers to foreigners received renewed urgency in 1936. After years of dress codes for men, and rumors about impending codes for women, the decree banning the veil came into effect. In January, the Shah drove with his wife and daughters in a motorcade where they appeared unveiled for the first time.[141] Veiled women along the route were shuttled away by police. This came after months in which veiled women in Tehran were informally banned from boulevards and forbidden from entering cafes and cinemas. Pressure increased in February, as Iranian officials' wives were forced to appear unveiled at public functions with mass attendance, including at Imam Reza's shrine.[142] Aware of the deep unpopularity of the measure, Iranian soldiers lined the streets around the shrine during the event. Indian Muslim women in Mashhad were 'refused admission' to baths, cinemas, and other public venues because of their veils.[143]

While in Mashhad, South Asians were primarily Muslim, elsewhere in Iran many were Hindu and Sikh. Veiling was a common custom among well-to-do Indians of all religions, and the burdens of this law were felt by all religious communities. Of 1,300 British Indian subjects connected to the oil industry resident in Ahwaz, 400 were adult women. Many Hindu women wore the *chadur*, and British officials suggested that they would need to 'revert to their native costume', meaning a sari or otherwise identifiably Indian dress.[144] The same problem was faced by Iraqis and Bahrainis. Some Indian women shed the Iranian-style *chadur* but took to wearing Indian-style black burkas.[145] Despite this, the Mashhad consul received numerous complaints of police harassment of Indian women in burkas. When the consul followed up with the Iranian chief of police, he agreed that the harassment was unwarranted since burkas did not resemble the Iranian *chadur*.[146]

The British consul in Tehran met with police chief Colonel Mukhtari in February regarding the regulations. He notes that Kurramis, Pushtun Shiʿas, expressed 'great concern at developments', and they were warned that their wives might be harassed by police if they wore anything resembling a *chadur*.[147] Community leaders decided to agree to follow the new regulations, but some said they would prefer to leave the country.[148] The consul and police chief came to an agreement by which Indian women would be allowed to wear veils, but they should avoid wearing the Iranian *chadur* and instead wear 'national dress', including but not limited to saris. The condition of their acceptance in Iran was that they be physically distinguishable from

Iranians; that the borders of national territory be defined on women's bodies. Whereas previously Indian women might have worn local style *chadur*, allowing them to fit in, the agreement with Iranian authorities required them to always make their national difference visible. Even the burka, a black veil worn by upper-class Indian women, became controversial for resembling the *chadur.* Indians could stay in Iran, but only if they wore 'native' clothes, neutralizing their potential threat to the social order by highlighting their attachment to a foreign power.

This compromise resulted in part from the struggles of the Iranian police to enforce the law. A Mashhad police report reveals that in order to evade enforcement, some Iranian women wearing *chadur* lied and claimed foreign status as Afghans.[149] In Rasht, meanwhile, police arrested an Iranian woman wearing *chadur*, only to find out she was married to a British subject, likely a South Asian man, and thus had the right to veil given that she had acquired her husband's nationality.[150] These confrontations with women led Iranian police to proclaim that foreigners must carry identification at all times, presaging the eventual requirement that citizens do so as well. Central police authorities sent memos to local police requiring women to dress in their own country's 'national' styles that did not resemble the 'abolished Iranian clothing'.[151]

Despite the agreement, harassment continued. In April 1936, a group of Indians reached the Mirjaveh border crossing only to be informed that no visas would be issued for two months. After repeated enquiries, British authorities discovered that 'the reason for the prohibition was anxiety as to the effect of veiled Indian women in unveiled Meshed during Moharram'.[152] A year later, a group of pilgrims returning from Iraq toward India were treated so badly they cancelled their trip to Mashhad, where they had planned to stay for two weeks, and returned straightaway to India.[153]

News spread rapidly of conditions in Iran, leading to declining numbers throughout the 1930s. Mashhad police registers obtained by the British consul reveal a sharp drop from 1,950 in 1932 to 1,200 in 1933.[154] Authorities estimated each pilgrim spent about 200 rials, or thirty to thirty-five rupees, while in Iran, so this had a substantial economic effect. The number of Indians using Iran to transit to Iraq declined precipitously, from 673 in 1933, to 410 in 1934, to 322 in 1935, and 221 in 1936.[155] The British consul in Baghdad expressed concern to the Iranian foreign minister at the time, noting that often there was not a single Indian pilgrim in Mashhad even though, until recently, there were usually more than a thousand.[156]

In July 1936, British embassy officials sent a letter addressed to the chief of police, Rukn ed Din Mukhtari, regarding harassment of veiled Indian women. In the letter, he noted the previous agreement with Iranian police: 'All Indian women if they wished to remain veiled should be advised to wear a typically Indian dress and not the ordinary Iranian *chaddur*.' He complained, however, that this had not been communicated across the country. He noted that Iranian Minister of Foreigner Affairs Massoud Ansarie had recently told him that the Khorasan Governor General had informed the British Consul-General in Mashhad that Indian women needed to stop wearing veils, despite the 'national dress' agreement.[157] He urged Tehran police to ensure their counterparts respect the agreements. But it was of little use. British efforts in the 1930s to protect Indian subjects' right to wear veils, which they framed as protecting their subjects' 'religious freedom' from impingement by Iranian authorities, were by and large unsuccessful. The combination of Reza Shah's clothing and nationality codes along with police harassment were successful in curbing South Asian pilgrim numbers and normalizing arbitrary expulsions of foreigners.

Not only was the agreement frequently ignored, in some cases the rule of law was completely suspended. The presence of the sovereign himself could even elicit such violations. This became clear during Reza Shah's royal visit to Mashhad in 1937. As local officials prepared for his arrival, they noticed a problem: British subjects wearing clothes banned for Iranians, including residents on farmland adjacent to the Shah's estate in Fariman village outside Mashhad.[158] Indians and Afghans had been working there for many years. Protected by the British crown, they had not changed their clothing style. But ahead of the Shah's arrival, they were all evicted.[159] The British

consul protested on behalf of the tenants and acquired compensation. The consul reported the Governor General's displeasure at the whole situation: 'No person who insisted on wearing a turban and on keeping his women folk veiled could possibly remain on His Majesty's private estates lest haply the Royal eye might light on such a distressing sight. …The mere sight of British Indian subjects in their native dress gives his Excellency a severe pain and he is never tired of expatiating on the fact that in Turkey such affronts to the national honour are no longer tolerated'.[160] The wearing of 'native dress' by British Indians was an affront to Iran's national honor, a capitulation that, even if technically permitted, was too egregious for the Shah to witness.

The formulation of an Iranian aesthetic modeled on Western styles was accompanied by the inverse: the imposition of an aesthetic of foreignness for non-Iranians. The effect was to create a visual regime in which foreigners were immediately visible to police. This was connected to broader trends in Iran's cultural milieu, spurred by Reza Shah's nationalizing reforms. Intellectuals sought to 'refashion' Iran into a secular state in which Europe would be the benchmark of civilization.[161] They deployed European standards of 'everyday life' to judge Iranian lifestyles as substandard.[162] Indians, dressed in traditional clothing, were configured as backward in this civilizational hierarchy. The irony was that both Iranian and north Indian intellectuals were attracted to Aryan racial theory, which posited they were both on a spectrum connected to Europe.[163]

This hints at a deeper contradiction in Reza Shah's clothing policies: how were they both nationalizing and Westernizing? For Reza Shah, imposing Western-style clothes did not contradict his 'nationalizing' project because within the Aryan theory adopted as state ideology, Iran and Europe had shared racial roots.[164] Adopting European clothes was a return to this shared Aryan heritage and a rejection of clothes brought by invaders, Arab or Turkish.[165] Ironically, this approach was the opposite of the anti-colonial discourse regarding clothing that emerged in India, where 'national dress became a symbol of nationalism that distinguished local people from the Europeans present on their soil', part of a broader anti-colonial ideology which called for cultivating Western technological innovation but keeping the 'inner' core of national culture, associated with women and the home, intact – and wearing 'national' clothes.[166] In uncolonized countries like Iran and Turkey, 'Europeanization was seen as a precondition for emancipation and equality within a system of nations of which the country was already a member, albeit a precarious one.'[167] Intrinsic to this process of 'Europeanization' was a denial and erasure of pre-existing cultural and religious links to neighboring countries that were increasingly perceived as lower on the stepping ladder of (Western) civilization. Discrimination against Indians also mapped on to newly-emerging hierarchies of race and racialization inside Iran. The Pahlavi-era educational curriculum positioned Iranians as connected to 'white' Europeans, and South Asians were positioned not only backward but as *siyah*, 'Black', a category which in Iran came to encompass African-descendant communities and was closely associated with histories of enslavement, colorism, and racial discrimination.[168] While Reza Shah's clothing laws visually differentiated Iranians from their neighbors, the Aryan theory provided a pseudo-scientific basis for naturalizing the perception of distinctness and ascribing it not to modern nation-making policies but to innate racial difference. This was the final step in a process of otherization that disentangled pre-existing Muslim and Persian connections between South Asians and Iranians and largely erased the existence of a long history of cultural interchange that had bound these lands for centuries. In their place, a new world of borders, walls, and passports emerged, justified and naturalized according to emergent forms of national identity informed by European categories of racial hierarchy.

Conclusion

Throughout the 1930s, South Asians in Iran faced growing pressures as residents and as pilgrims. As Reza Shah's government pursued policies to define the Iranian nation as modern and Western, Indians who had for centuries maintained links with Iran found themselves unwelcome. Their

turbans, coats, and burkas, which were once an unremarkable part of a diverse cultural mosaic of clothing, now marked them as targets of police harassment. British negotiations on their behalf ensured protection, but the compromise required they wear 'national dress', itself an elusive and shifting category. This was a Faustian bargain; by identifying themselves as foreigners protected by the British crown, they were exempted from restrictions. But in doing so, Indians and Afghans not only positioned themselves as unequivocally 'outside' the nation, they also claimed affiliation with British colonial authority that opened them up to targeting on account of strained relations between Iran and the crown.

The border separating Iran from its eastern neighbors was more strictly enforced than ever before; it was planted on the bodies of pilgrims, forced to visibly stand apart from Iranians wherever they went. And even that could not save them from arbitrary eviction. Under Reza Shah's rule, Iran became inhospitable to those it once welcomed; Indian and Afghan pilgrims, once imagined as co-religionists, were now British subjects who could at best be temporary visitors or workers.[169] The first half of the twentieth century was a period of tightening borders and defining those who belonged in contrast to those who did not; the world of transregional Shiʿi pilgrimage, sustained through sovereign thresholds in which pilgrims could attain belonging irrespective of place of birth or national identity, was shut down.

The disappearance of the South Asian community of Mashhad is indicative of the decline of two worlds, the Shiʿi transnational and the Persianate cosmopolis. Deprived of foreign pilgrims and income, Imam Reza's shrine was over the course of the twentieth century increasingly transformed into a symbol of Iran and Iranian Islam. Its waqf became closely aligned with the state and its ambitions, especially since the 1979 Revolution as it has grown to become the largest landholder in eastern Iran and one of the country's main economic engines, its executive director even running unsuccessfully in the 2017 presidential elections. The shrine's *Kafshdari-yi Hendi* (Indian Shoe Locker) remains such in name only. It joins a list of sites across Iran like the Hindu temple of Bandar Abbas or the Rangooni Mosque of Abadan that speak to a former South Asian presence that has disappeared and is largely unremembered, ignored in Iranian history books and cultural heritage guides that stress a nation-state-centered view of history defined by Iran's present borders.[170]

But since the mid-2000s, things have noticeably changed. After decades of absence, millions of Arab pilgrims now frequent the shrine of Imam Reza. They are joined increasingly by Pakistani and Indian pilgrims, easily identifiable by colorful clothing. Even today, decades after Reza Shah banned traditional clothing for Iranians, the dress codes continue to mark the aesthetic border between Iranians and their South Asian neighbors. Traditional clothing for men was never re-instituted (and is still banned in official spaces like universities, outside of 'heritage' celebrations), and although mandatory unveiling was replaced in the 1980s with mandatory veiling, the form of veiling – a fitted black *chadur* or headscarf-coat combination – is resolutely modern, sharing only a vague resemblance to traditional Iranian women's clothing. A visual regime inscribed on Iranians' very bodies – first established in Reza Shah's time – continues to mark the border between Iran and countries to the East.[171]

But the re-emergence of circuits of mobility across this Persianate sphere reveal growing links between Iran and the Subcontinent that challenge these borders and ideologies. While Shiʿi studies, like Persianate studies, has tended to focus heavily on scholarly production, the history of the transnational social world of pilgrimage reveals circuits of mobility and shared culture being resurrected in unexpected ways in the present. In recent years, pilgrimage from South Asia to Iran has surged. In the process, shrines that have particular meaning for South Asians but are only occasionally frequented by locals, like that of Bibi Shahrbanu just south of Tehran, have seen growing popularity as central parts of pilgrimage itineraries for visitors from the Subcontinent.[172] One of the most visible cultural trends can be found in the world of *maddahi*, also called *nowheh-khani*, religious chanters who command vast followings among young Shiʿi Muslims. Chants inflected with Iranian- and Iraqi- style *nowheh* sung in Persianized

Urdu by Pakistani *maddah* Nadeem Sarwar, for example, have gained massive popularity in the Urdu-speaking world. He has helped introduce Iranian innovations in *nowheh-khani* to Pakistani and Indian publics, even embarking on a tour of India to promote peace between Pakistan and India – accompanied by an Iranian mullah.[173] Sarwar's work includes familiarizing audiences with contemporary *maddah* like Mahmoud Karimi from Iran and Bassem al-Karbalai in Iraq, forging a shared Shiʿi audioscape connected through Youtube, Tiktok, and Instagram videos enjoining viewers to accompany chanters on pilgrimage to Shiʿi shrine cities like Qom, Mashhad, and Karbala. He invites followers to join transnational routes like *Arbaeen*, the massive week-long walking pilgrimage of more than 20 million people that was until 2010 an exclusively Iraqi affair but which today welcomes millions of Iranian, Gulf, and South Asian pilgrims.

A surge of South Asian interest in theological training in Iran since 1979, meanwhile, has led to the rise of Persian-speaking public figures like Jawaad Naqvi, a mullah who lived in Qom for decades but returned to Pakistan and established an Iranian-style seminary. The continued use of Safavid visual cues to mark Shiʿi houses of worship in the Subcontinent, like blue tiles and *aineh-kari* mirrorwork, point to the continued existence of a shared vocabulary of Persianate aesthetics. For South Asian Shiʿi Muslims today, Iran is again a reference point, a 'problem space' to think through their own conundrums and questions.[174] This happens not only in the world of scholarly and religious texts, but in travels and movement, through pilgrimage and the insight it offers – for example, into Iran as a political experiment and a centralized, infrastructurally-developed neighboring state, a model, good or bad, of what an independent Shiʿi Muslim power could look like. When we only look at scholarly texts, we miss how believers are forging connections beyond the realm of text and what these mean for their understanding of themselves, their faith, and their politics.

Returning to the 'problem' of Ayatollah Khomeini's Indian-ness posed at the beginning highlights how important it is to think of him not only as a religious figure but as a social person connecting different worlds. His family's historical circuit of mobility was perfectly ordinary in the pre-twentieth century Persianate world of pilgrimage and scholarship. But something shifted in twentieth-century Iran that cut South Asia off from this social world and turned it into a foreign and distant land, only to be rediscovered decades later. This process did not occur evenly across the Shiʿi world. While Khomeini's Indian roots were controversial in Iran, the fact that Iraq's top-ranking cleric Ayatollah Sistani was born in Iran (from a family with roots in Sistan, hence his name) and speaks Arabic with a Persian accent is considered unremarkable. Although the denial and erasure of transnational and regional connections lies at the heart of the identities formed by the nation-states that came to take the place of the Persianate cosmopolis and the Shiʿi transregional, their afterlives remain barely hidden under the surface, even today.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Gautham Reddy, Kimia Maleki, Nida Paracha, Elmira Alihosseini, Samar Saremi, Sumaira Nawaz, Danya Pleshak, Hakim Sameer Hamdani, and Ali Gholipour. Thank you as well to the organizers of the 2020 Lahore Biennale for giving me space to think through these themes at 'Naskh va Taaleeq: Iran and Pakistan, Connections Old and New' and to all participants of the workshop for their thoughtful insights and invaluable comments.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work was supported by the Nicholson Center for British Studies Graduate Research Fellowship and the Wenner Gren Foundation.

ORCID

Alex Shams http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4787-9994

Notes

1. 'Ahamiat-i tavajuh bih buhrah bardari az zarfiat-e bisiar bala-yi shi'ian va digar mazahib-i Hindustan dar Mashhad-i Muqaddas [The importance of paying attention to taking advantage of the high capacity of Shiʿis and other religions of India in Holy Mashhad]' *Razavi News Agency*, 30 Day 1398 [20 January 2020], http://www.razavi.news/fa/interview/50985/مشهد-مقدس-اهمیت-توجه-بهره-برداری-ظرفیت-بسیار-بالای-شیعیان-دیگر-مذاهب-هندوستان- (25 May 2020).
2. 'Iraqi nationals top list of foreign tourist arrivals in Kordestan', *Tehran Times*, 5 January 2020, https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/443808/Iraqi-nationals-top-list-of-foreign-tourist-arrivals-in-Kordestan (25 May 2020).
3. 'HJ Seymour, British Consulate Baghdad to Mustapha Ali, Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tehran', Persia: Treatment of Foreigners 1931–937, L/PS/12/3466, PZ 6128, India Office Records, British Library (hereafter IOR).
4. F. Vejdani, 'Indo-Iranian Linguistic, Literary, and Religious Entanglements: Between Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism, ca. 1900-1940', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* Vol. 36, no. 3 (2016), p.449; A. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State, 1870-1940* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), pp.116–17.
5. E. Abrahamian, 'The Crowd in the Iranian Revolution', *Radical History Review* Vol. 105 (2009), pp.18–19; 'The Mystery Letter That Triggered The Iranian Revolution', *Radio Farda*, 6 February 2019, https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-taheri-on-iranian-revolution-mystery-letter-shah/29754850.html (20 July 2020)
6. The claim is repeated on Los Angeles-based opposition satellite channels, casual conversations in Iran, and even scrawled across public toilet walls in Tehran.
7. The name 'Khomeini' means 'of Khomein', referring to the Iranian city of his birth. His brother, meanwhile, is known as 'Hendi', meaning 'Indian', pointing to the family's connection to the Subcontinent. In 1969–70, Khomeini detailed his family's history in Kashmir in a series of letters he wrote to esteemed Kashmiri religious figure Aga Syed Yusuf Safavi, responding to the latter's invitation to settle in Kashmir following Khomeini's exile from Iran. See J. Hakim Imtiyaz Hussain, *The Shi'as of Jammu and Kashmir: the History of Shi'ism in Kashmir: 1324 to 1947* (Srinagar-Kashmir: Srinagar Publishing House, 2017), pp.600–5.
8. This process did not occur evenly. South Asians in Iran, for example, were subjected to harassment but rarely violence; in contrast, British Indians in Iraq were detained *en masse* during the First World War and were among the victims of the 1940s *Farhud* riots.
9. M. Hodgson, *Venture of Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974); M. Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2020).
10. Kia, *Persianate Selves*, pp.3, 195.
11. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran*; M. Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).
12. 'Meshed Dispatch No 64-0', Indian Pilgrim Impressions of Meshed, Persia 1929, 27 August 1929, L/PS/11/301/P 6028, IOR.
13. E&O Papers on Indian Pilgrimage to Iraq 1929-34, L/E/7/1558, IOR; Indian Pilgrim Impressions of Meshed, Persia 1929, L/PS/11/301, P 6028, IOR; Vejdani 'Indo-Iranian Entanglements', p.445.
14. Ibid.
15. S. Faroqhi, *Pilgrims and Sultans: The Hajj under the Ottomans* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), p.2.
16. E. Chambers, *Native Tours: The Anthropology of Travel and Tourism* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2010) pp. 20–2; P. Pinto, 'Pilgrimage, Commodities, and Religious Objectification: The Making of Transnational Shiism between Iran and Syria', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 27, no. 1 (Jan. 2007), p.109.
17. M. Kia, 'Limning the Land: Social Encounters and Historical Meaning in Early Nineteenth-Century Travelogues between Iran and India', in R. Micallef and S. Sharma (eds), *On the Wonders of Land and Sea: Persianate Travel Writing*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), p.61.
18. M. Koyagi, 'Drivers in the Desert: Infrastructure and Sikh Migrants in the Indo-Iranian Borderlands, 1919-31', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* Vol. 39, no. 3 (1 December 2019), pp.375–88; E. Kane, *Russian Hajj: Empire and the Pilgrimage to Mecca* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).
19. N. Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); N. Green, *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019); Koyagi, 'Drivers in the Desert', pp.375–7; 'Report of Protector of British Indian Pilgrims for 1930 and 1931', 1934 India E&O Papers on Indian Pilgrimage to Iraq, Oct. 24, 1932, L/E/7/1558, E&O 7366, IOR, 4.

20. M. Koyagi, 'Drivers in the Desert', p.375; M. Asad Ali, *Safarnama Iraq-o Iran* (Hyderabad: Matba-e Shams-ul Islam Press, 1931), p.332.
21. E. Kane, *Russian Hajj*, pp.2–3.
22. Ibid, pp.6–11.
23. A. Vassilyev, '*Palomniki iz Rossii u Shiitskiih Sviyat'in' Iraka. Konets XIX veka*' [Pilgrims from Russia's visits to the Shia Moslems' sacred places in Iraq. Late XIX century], *Oriental Archive* Vol. 1, No. 27 (2013).
24. J. Kennedy, *A Journey in Khorassan and Central Asia* (London: Hatchards, 1890).
25. M. Koyagi, 'Drivers Across the Desert', p.381; L.P. Morris, 'British Secret Service Activity in Khorassan, 1887-1908', *The Historical Journal* Vol. 27, no. 3 (Sept. 1984), p.659.
26. A.A. Afkhami, *A Modern Contagion: Imperialism and Public Health in Iran's Age of Cholera* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019).
27. T. Atabaki, 'Indian Migrant Workers in the Iranian Oil Industry 1908–1951', in T. Atabaki, E. Bini, and K. Ehsani (eds), *Working for Oil* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp.189–226.
28. S. Cronin, *Soldiers, Shahs and Subalterns in Iran: Opposition, Protest and Revolt, 1921-1941* (London: Palgrave, 2010), p.3.
29. C. Schayegh, 'Seeing Like a State: An Essay on the Historiography of Pre-Revolutionary Modern Iran', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 42 no. 1 (February 2010): pp.37–61.
30. S. Cronin, *Soldiers, Shahs, and Subalterns in Iran*.
31. See S. Cronin, *Soldiers, Shahs, and Subalterns in Iran*; T. Atabaki, 'Indian Migrant Workers in the Iranian Oil Industry 1908–1951', in T. Atabaki, E. Bini, and K. Ehsani (eds), *Working for Oil* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp.189–226; M. Koyagi, 'Drivers in the Desert'.
32. T. Atabaki, 'Introduction' in T. Atabaki (ed.), *Iran in the 20th Century Historiography and Political Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p.1.
33. L. Beck, *Nomads in Postrevolutionary Iran: the Qashqa'i in an Era of Change* (London: Routledge, 2017), p.xii.
34. H. Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (Berlin: Schocken Books, 1951), pp.267–69, 282–85.
35. Recent scholarship has explored South Asian presence in Iran, but primarily as workers in the oil industry and as drivers. See T. Atabaki, 'Indian Migrant Workers', and Koyagi, 'Drivers in the Desert'. For categories of mobility that included an understanding of belonging, see F. Adelkhah, *The Thousand and One Borders of Iran: Travel and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2016), p.60.
36. I use 'transregional' following Kia, *Persianate Selves*, p.13.
37. Despite growing interest in pilgrimage's power to acting as a binding force across far-flung distances, little attention has been paid to communities settled around shrines. See R. Bianchi, *Guests of God: Pilgrimage and Politics in the Islamic World* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); S. Faroqhi, *Pilgrims and Sultans*; E. Kane, *Russian Hajj*; L. Can, *Spiritual Subjects: Central Asian Pilgrims and the Ottoman Hajj at the End of Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); J. Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj 1865-1956* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2015).
38. E. Ho, 'Names Beyond Nations: The Making of Local Cosmopolitans', *Études Rurales* Vol. 163–64 (July–December 2002), pp.215–32; A. Appadurai, 'The Production of Locality', in R. Fardon (ed.), *Counterworks: Managing the Diversity of Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) pp.204–225; J. Clifford, 'Travelling Cultures' in. L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, and P. Treichler (eds), *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp.96–116.
39. E. Alihosseini, 'The Basti and the Refugee: Living at the Doorstep', paper presented at *Naskh va Taaleeq: Iran and Pakistan, Connections Old and New*, Lahore Biennale, Pakistan, (20 February 2020).
40. The precise story behind the Indian Shoe Locker is unclear, but a news article from Mashhad apparently based on shrine archival documents traced the name to a family of Indian origin who for five generations has volunteered at the shrine. See: '*Dastan-i Siyachihrah-i Dustdashtani-yi Hindu* [The Story of the Indian's Lovable Black Face]' *Shahrara Newspaper*, 3 Aban 1397 [25 October 2018], http://shahraraonline.ir/news/89059 (11 February 2021).
41. H. Amirzadeh, 'Asnadi az komakha-yi mali be za'iran musalman shibh qarih hind dar mashhad dar duran-i Qajar' [Documents related to financial aid to Muslim pilgrims from the Indian Subcontinent during the Qajar period], *Nashriyih-yi Elektroniki-yi Saziman Kitabkhanih'ha, muzih'ha, va marakiz asnad astan-i quds-i razavi*: Volume 4, Number 16-17 (Fall and Winter 1391 [2012/2013]), p.1.
42. Ibid, pp.1–3.
43. I take this term from J. Cole, 'Indian money' and the Shi'i shrine cities of Iraq, 1786–1850', *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 22, no. 4 (1986), pp.461–80.
44. J. Norozi and F. Moezzi. 'Mavani' va mushkelat-i haml-i jinazah-yi Shi'ian-i Hind bih Mashhad dar avakhir-i dowrih-yi Qajar' [Barriers and difficulties in transporting corpses of Indian Shiis to Mashhad in the final years of the Qajar Dynasty, *Ganjineh-i Asnad* Vol. 2, No. 6 (Summer 1396 [2017/2018]), pp.70–99.

45. The British would politicize the Oudh Bequest's funding distribution around the turn of the century, further destabilizing the clergy's independence. See M. Litvak, 'A Failed Manipulation: The British, the Oudh Bequest and the Shi'a Ulama of Najaf and Karbala', *British Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 27, no. 1 (2000), pp.69–89.
46. Y. Nakash, *The Shiʿis of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp.49–55.
47. P. Eshaghi, 'Quietness beyond Political Power', pp.493–4.
48. E. Alihosseini, 'Basti and the Refugee'; P. Eshaghi, 'Quietness Beyond Political Power: Politics of Taking Sanctuary (Bast Neshini) in the Shi'ite Shrines of Iran', *Iranian Studies* Vol. 49, no. 3 (2016), pp.493–514.
49. India Proceedings, Jul. 1871- Aug. 1873, P/674, IOR; Litvak, 'A Failed Manipulation'.
50. Y. Nakash, *The Shiʿis of Iraq*, pp.16–17.
51. E. Alihosseini, 'The Basti and the Refugee'.
52. S. Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); R.M. Eaton and P.B. Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture: Contested Sites on India's Deccan Plateau, 1300-1600* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).
53. Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*; Kia, *Persianate Selves.*
54. See K. Overton (ed.), *Iran and the Deccan: Persianate Art, Culture, and Talent in Circulation, 1400–1700* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2020).
55. '1929 Report on Work of Protector of British Indian Pilgrims', India E&O Papers on Indian Pilgrimage to Iraq (and on to Hejaz), 1931, L/E/7/1558, E&O 3477, IOR.
56. Ali, *Safarnama,* pp.118–19; S. Muslim Reza, *Ruznama Iraq-o Iran* (Hyderabad: Matba Anwar-ul Islam, 1926)*;* N. Ahmad Bahadur Yar Jang, *Bilad-e-Islamia Ki Sair* (Hyderabad: Idari-yi Isha'at, 1936).
57. See R. Mathee, 'The Safavid-Ottoman Frontier: Iraq-i 'Ajam as Seen by the Safavids', *International Journal of Turkish Studies* Vol. 9, no. 1-2 (2003), pp.157–73; S. Ateş, *The Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary, 1843–1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Y. Nakash, *The Shiʿis of Iraq*, pp.14–18, 22–5.
58. J. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722–1859* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p.29.
59. 'The Indian Community in Baghdad', India E&O Papers on Indian Pilgrimage to Iraq, 1931, L/E/7/1558, E&O 3477, IOR, 20–1.
60. J. Cole, *North Indian Shi'ism*, p.80; Y. Nakash, *The Shiʿis of Iraq*, p.30.
61. H. Amirzadeh, 'Asnadi az komakha', p.3.
62. M. Kia and A. Marashi, 'Introduction: After the Persianate', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* Vol. 36, no. 3 (Dec. 2016), pp.379–83; F. Vejdani, 'Indo-Iranian Entanglements'.
63. M. Kia, *Persianate Selves*, pp.4–5.
64. Ibid, p.11.
65. M. Szuppe, 'A Glorious Past and an Outstanding Present: Writing a Collection of Biographies in Late Persianate Central Asia' in L. Marlow (ed.), *The Rhetoric of Biography: Narrating Lives in Persianate Societies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), p.41.
66. For more on the Persianate beyond Persian, see N. Green, *The Persianate World*; A. Jabbari, 'The Making of Modernity in Persianate Literary History', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 36, No 3 (December 2016), pp.418–34.
67. 'Report on Work of Protector of British Indian Pilgrims', 1929, L/E/7/1558, E&O 3477, IOR, 1.
68. D. F. Darwent, 'Urban Growth in Relation to Socio-Economic Development and Westernization: A Case Study of the City of Mashhad, Iran', (PhD thesis, Durham University, 1965), pp.84–9; S. Muslim Reza, *Ruznama*, p.41; 'HJ Seymour, British Consulate Baghdad to Mustapha Ali, Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tehran', Persia: Treatment of Foreigners 1931–1937, L/PS/12/3466, PZ 6128, IOR.
69. S. Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and Its Trade, 1550-1900* (New York: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), pp.150–70; J. Onley, 'Indian Communities in the Persian Gulf, c. 1500–1947', p.241, in L.G. Potter (ed.), *The Persian Gulf in Modern Times: People, Ports, and History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014).
70. These numbers are quite small historically; consider that Esfahan was said to have between 10-20,000 Indian merchant residents in the late 1600s. S.F. Dale, *Indian Merchants and Eurasian Trade, 1600-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp 66–77; S. Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and Its Trade, 1550-1900* (New York: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), pp.109–10, 150–70.
71. Movements of traders went in both directions; a British report from the 1940s, for example, identified 7,500 Iranian citizens in India, approximately half of whom were Zoroastrian and the other half Muslim. Among them were dozens of Mashhadi Jewish traders resident in Peshawar, where they were active in the cloth, rug, and *karakul* trade; 'Question Whether Iranian Should Be Required to Registration Under the Registration of Foreigners Act', 1941, PR_000003013337, HOME_POLITICAL_EW_1941_NA_F-44-1, National Archives of India.
72. M. Asad Ali, *Safarnama*, p.276.

73. S. Arjomand, *Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp.59–71.
74. Ibid., pp.59–71; B. Rahimi, *Theater State and the Formation of Early Modern Public Sphere in Iran: Studies on Safavid Muharram Rituals, 1590-1641 CE* (Boston: Brill, 2001).
75. 'Persian Representatives in Iraq', Dec. 15 1927-Dec. 31-1928, CO 730/130/10, The National Archives (United Kingdom); Y. Nakash, *The Shiʿis of Iraq*, pp.102–4.
76. Y. Nakash, *The Shiʿis of Iraq*, pp.102–5.
77. 'Report of Protector of British Indian Pilgrims for 1930-31', L/E/7/1558, E&O 7366, IOR.
78. 'Report for 1932 on the Work of the Protector of British Indian Pilgrims Attached to His Majesty's Consulate, Baghdad', Feb. 13 1934, L/E/7/1558, E&O 726, IOR. Reza Shah's promotion of pilgrimage to Mashhad mirrored Safavid rulers' patronage of the city as an alternative pilgrimage after they failed to conquer Iraq. See Farhat, 'Shi'i Piety'.
79. J. Slight, *British Empire and the Hajj*; E. Kane, *Russian Hajj*.
80. J. Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shi'ite Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), p.175.
81. S. Cronin, 'Riza Shah and the Paradoxes of Military Modernization in Iran 1921-41', in S. Cronin (ed.), *Making of Modern Iran* (London; New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p.31.
82. Ibid.
83. J. Rahmani, *Hiyatha-yi Azadari dar Jam'ih-yi Iran* [Religious Mourning Associations in Iranian Society] (Tehran: Nashr-i Arma, 2018).
84. 'Report by Mr. Mallett, Counsellor at His Majesty's Legation, on Local Conditions in Khurasan, Mazenderan, Gorgan, and Isfahan', Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8, Oct. 24 1935, L/PS/12/3404, PZ 8877, IOR.
85. A. Arjomand, *Turban for the Crown*, p.82; E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).
86. S. Cronin, 'Introduction'.
87. F. Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
88. 'Meshed Dispatch No. 64-0', Indian Pilgrim Impressions of Meshed, Persia, Aug. 27 1929, L/PS/11/301, P 6028, IOR.
89. This association is described with respect to Indians in the Persian Gulf during the period but could be expanded to other parts of Iran as well. J. Onley, 'Indian Communities in the Persian Gulf, c. 1500–1947', p. 241, in L.G. Potter (ed.), *The Persian Gulf in Modern Times: People, Ports, and History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014).
90. F. Vejdani, 'Indo-Iranian Entanglements', p.445.
91. 'Meshed Dispatch No. 64-0', Indian Pilgrim Impressions of Meshed, Persia, Aug. 27 1929, L/PS/11/301, P 6028, IOR.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid.
94. It is possible that the consul may have focused on such negative impressions in his records. But ironically, the consul registered disagreement; he noted that they did not realize that 'many of the evils they observe are no novelty; and having no acquaintance with Kajar Persia they take no account of any directions in which there has been some progress'. 'Meshed Dispatch No 64-0', Indian Pilgrim Impressions of Meshed, Persia 1929, L/PS/11/31, P 6028, IOR. Negative impressions are a recurring feature of pilgrimage; expecting unity with co-religionists, pilgrims are often shocked by the untidy reality at a pilgrimage site. See J. Eade and M. Sallnow, *Contesting the Sacred*: *The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p.15.
95. *Ijad-i tashilati dar sarhad barayi zuvar khariji-yi marghad-i motahhar-i Imam Riza* [Creating Accommodations at the Border for Foreign Pilgrims to the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza] No. 240004839, Location 1AA4Ch406, 1312 Shamsi, Iran Customs Administration, Organization of the National Archives of Iran.
96. This was common among pilgrims of all nationalities; Iranians frequently brought items to trade or barter when traveling to shrine cities, and once there they stocked up on supplies and exotic gifts hard to get back home.
97. Ibid.
98. This also ties in to wider Iranian economic policies at the time, which sought to lessen dependence on Britain and Russia (and their colonial possessions) and instead strengthen relations with countries like Germany and Japan, which became Iran's main trading partners by the late 1930s.
99. H.E. Chehabi, 'Staging the Emperor's New Clothes: Dress Codes and Nation-Building under Reza Shah', *Iranian Studies* Vol. 26, nos. 3-4 (Summer-Fall, 1993), pp.209–29.
100. 'Persia: Abolition of the Pahlavi Hat -Dispatch from Mr. Knatchbull-Hugessen to Sir Samuel Hoare', Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8, Jul. 29, 1935, L/PS/12/3404, PZ 6267, IOR.

101. The veil ban is often mistakenly thought to have applied to hair coverings. In fact, it applied primarily to face veils and the long all-encompassing cloaks that women wore with them, but not hair coverings per se.
102. Persia Diaries: Meshed Consular Reports 1931–40, Jan. 1936, L/PS/12/3406, PZ 1538, IOR.
103. H.E. Chehabi, 'Staging the Emperor's New Clothes'; M.H. Farahnakian, 'Iranian Headwear in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries' in G. Vogelsan-Eastwood (ed.), *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion: Central and Southwest Asia* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2010); M. Ghaybi, *Hasht Hizar Sal-i Tarikh-i Pushak-i Aqvam-i Irani* [8000 Year History of Clothing of the Iranian Peoples] (Tehran: Hirmand, 1385 [1965]); S. Balslev, *Iranian Masculinities: Gender and Sexuality in Late Qajar and Early Pahlavi Iran* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp.207–36; M. Asad Ali, *Safarnama,* pp.239–40.
104. M.H. Farahnakian, 'Iranian Headwear'; M. Ghaybi, *Hasht Hizar Sal;* M. Ali, *Iraq-o Iran,* pp.243–44.
105. S. Cronin, 'Introduction' in S. Cronin (ed.), *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Muslim World: Gender, Modernism and the Politics of Dress* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp.5–6.
106. Ibid, p.16.
107. H.E. Chehabi, 'Staging the Emperor's New Clothes', p.222.
108. S. Cronin, 'Introduction' in S. Cronin (ed.), *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Muslim World,* pp.15–16.
109. Persia Diaries: Meshed Consular Reports, 1931–40, Jan. 1936, L/PS/12/3406, PZ 1538, IOR; 'Situation in Isfahan', Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8, Nov. 30 1936, L/PS/12/3404 PZ 1272; Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8: IOR/L/PS/12/3404, PZ 8423, IOR.
110. E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*; A. Arjomand, *Turban for the Crown*.
111. S. Cronin, 'Introduction' in S. Cronin (ed.), *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Muslim World*, pp.9–10.
112. 'Political Report on Persia by Consul Watkinson', Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8, May 11, 1936, L/PS/12/3404, PZ 5887, IOR; 'Unveiling of Women in Tabriz', Feb. 20, 1936, PZ 2740, IOR; 'Telegram from Meshed Consul General to Government of India Foreign and Political Department', PZ 4888, IOR; This has also been noted with respect to resistance to anti-veiling campaigns in Turkey. See M. Metinsoy, 'Everyday resistance to unveiling and flexible secularism in early republican Turkey', in S. Cronin (ed.), *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Muslim World*, pp.95–100.
113. 'Dispatch from Mr. Knatchbull-Hugessen to Sir Samuel Hoare', Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8, Jul. 1 1935, L/PS/12/3404, PZ 5276, IOR.
114. 'Meshed Consular Diary', Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8, Dec. 29 1930, L/PS/12/3404 - PZ 1384, IOR.
115. 'Political Report on Persia by Consul Watkinson, Ahwaz', Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8, May 11 1936, L/PS/12/3404, PZ 5887, IOR.
116. 'Political Situation in East Persia', Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8, L/PS/12/3404-PZ 5871, IOR; P. Eshaghi, 'Quietness', pp.493–94.
117. 'Telegram from Meshed Consul General to Government of India Foreign and Political Department', Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8, 1935, L/PS/12/3404 - PZ 4888, IOR.
118. E. Alihosseini, 'The Basti and the Refugee'.
119. 'Political Situation in East Persia', Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8, L/PS/12/3404, PZ 5871, IOR.
120. Ibid.
121. 'Disturbances in Meshed', Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8, L/PS/12/3404, PZ 5854, IOR. For a more thorough description of events, see Pahlavan, *Reza Shah*, pp.674–77.
122. 'Disturbances in Meshed', Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8, L/PS/12/3404, PZ 5854, IOR.
123. Ibid.
124. Persia Diaries: Meshed Consular Reports 1931–40, Oct. 1935, L/PS/12/3406, PZ 8656, IOR.
125. Persia Diaries: Meshed Consular Reports 1931–40, Dec. 1935, L/PS/12/3406, PZ 1016, IOR.
126. Ibid.
127. Ibid.
128. Persia Diaries: Meshed Consular Reports 1931–40, Oct. 1935, L/PS/12/3406, PZ 8656, IOR. Hussain's situation was of special interest to the consulate because he previously worked at the British consulate in Karbala. This itself points to the complex position of Indians in Mashhad; many had relations with colonial authorities, whether as government employees or as upper-class landowners and merchants whose success and ability to travel abroad was linked to maintaining relations with British authorities.
129. Persia Diaries: Meshed Consular Reports 1931–40, Dec. 1935, L/PS/12/3406, PZ 1016, IOR.
130. H.E. Chehabi, 'Staging the Emperor's New Clothes'.
131. A. Arjomand, *Turban for the Crown*, p.82; P.L. Baker, 'Politics of Dress: The Dress Reform Laws of 1920/30s Iran', in N. Lindisfarne-Tapper and B. Ingham (eds), *Languages of Dress in the Middle East* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1997), pp.178–92; S. Cronin (ed.), *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Muslim World.*
132. M. Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); S. Balslev, *Iranian Masculinities*; W. DeSouza, *Unveiling Men: Modern Masculinities in Twentieth-Century Iran*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2019).
133. Meshed Consular Diaries 1923–30, L/PS/10/1087, P 2866, IOR.
134. Ibid.

135. Meshed Consular Diaries 1923–30, L/PS/10/1087, P 4856, IOR.
136. M. Asad Ali, *Safarnama*, 239–40.
137. Persia Diaries: Meshed Consular Reports 1931–40, L/PS/12/3406, IOR.
138. Persia: Treatment of Foreigners 1931–7, L/PS/12/3466, PZ 872, IOR.
139. Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8, L/PS/12/3404, PZ 1271, IOR.
140. Ibid.
141. 'Letter from Legation in Tehran to Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office', Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8, L/PS/12/3404, PZ 790, IOR.
142. Persia Diaries: Meshed Consular Reports 1931–40, Feb. 1936, L/PS/12/3406, P 2519, IOR.
143. Ibid.
144. 'Enclosure 1: Consul Watkinson to Mr. Butler', Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8, L/PS/12/3404, PZ 4277, IOR. The definition of sari as 'national' dress in India was itself contentious and the result of historically contingent processes. See N. Bhatia, 'Fashioning Women in Colonial India', *Fashion Theory* Vol. 7, no. 3-4, (2003), pp.327–44.
145. Persia Diaries: Meshed Consular Reports 1931–40, Aug. 1936, L/PS/12/3406, PZ 7839, IOR.
146. Ibid.
147. The early-twentieth century Iranian *chadur* consisted of two pieces, a style now known as 'Kamari' *chadur*, in contrast to the single piece of fabric called *chadur* in contemporary Iran.
148. Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8, L/PS/12/3404, PZ 2081, IOR.
149. 'Muslim Women of Foreign Nationality Who Come to Iran for Pilgrimage', 1316, K24/P3/p.7–8, Iranian Foreign Ministry archives.
150. Ibid., p.9.
151. Ibid.
152. 'Abolition of the Chaddur', Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8, Apr. 27 1936, L/PS/12/3404, PZ 4277, IOR.
153. Persia Diaries: Meshed Consular Reports 1931–40, May 1937, L/PS/12/3406, PZ 4373, IOR.
154. 'British Consulate General in Meshhed E.H. Gastrell to OK Caroe, Esquire, Foreign and Political Department, Simla', Persia: Treatment of Foreigners 1931–7, L/PS/12/3466, PZ 8577, IOR.
155. 'From HJ Seymour, British Consulate Baghdad to Mustapha Ali, Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tehran', Persia: Treatment of Foreigners 1931–7, L/PS/12/3466, PZ 6128, IOR.
156. Ibid.
157. 'No. 121/28/36', Persia: Internal Affairs 1931–8, L/PS/12/3404, PZ 6011, IOR.
158. Persia Diaries: Meshed Consular Reports 1931–40, L/PS/12/3406, PZ 4063, IOR.
159. Persia Diaries: Meshed Consular Reports 1931–40, Oct. 1937, L/PS/12/3406, PZ 7966, IOR.
160. Ibid.
161. M. Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran.*
162. Ibid, p.xii.
163. A. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran*; H.E. Chehabi, 'Staging', p.225.
164. Chehabi, 'Staging', p.229; S. Cronin, Introduction' in S. Cronin (ed.), *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Muslim World,* pp.8–9.
165. Ibid.
166. P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p.120.
167. H.E. Chehabi, 'Staging', p.225.
168. For more on Aryan discourse in Iran, see R. Zia-Ebrahimi, 'Self-Orientalization and Dislocation: The Uses and Abuses of the "Aryan" Discourse in Iran', *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 4. pp.445–72. On race, slavery, and blackness in twentieth century Iran, see B. Baghoolizadeh, *Seeing Race And Erasing Slavery: Media And The Construction Of Blackness In Iran, 1830-1960,* PhD Dissertation (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2018). Even today, South Asians are commonly described as 'black' in contemporary Iran, regardless of actual skin tone. For example, an article in a Mashhad-based newspaper describing a family of Indian origin who for generations volunteered at the Imam Reza shrine referred to the family patriarch as being a 'foreigner' with a 'lovable black face', alongside pictures that depict light-skinned men. See 'Dastan-i Siyachihrah-i Dustdashtani-yi Hindu [The Story of the Indian's Lovable Black Face]' *Shahrara Newspaper*, 3 Aban 1397 [25 October 2018], http://shahraraonline.ir/news/89059 (11 February 2021).
169. The only exception to this was the Sikh community of Zahedan, which acquired citizenship and until today remains Iranian. See F. Okati, 'The Sikh's Society in Zahedan and their Multilingualism', *Iranian Journal of Language Issues* Vol. 1, no. 2 (2014), pp.63–82.
170. Like many of Iran's port cities, Bandar Abbas was once home to a large South Asian community. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, about one third of the city's inhabitants were said to be Indians. Abadan's Rangooni Mosque, meanwhile, catered to oil workers originally from Chittagong in British India but who were employed in the oil industry in Rangoon, present-day Myanmar. See J. Onley, 'Indian Communities in the Persian Gulf, c. 1500–1947', p.242, in L.G. Potter (ed.), *The Persian Gulf in Modern Times:*

People, Ports, and History (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014); T. Atabaki, 'Indian Migrant Workers in the Iranian Oil Industry 1908–1951', in T. Atabaki, E. Bini, and K. Ehsani (eds), *Working for Oil* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p.195.

171. Given that the Islamic Republic continued the Shah's disapproval of face veils and traditional clothing for men, ironically the current dress code in many ways resembles that promoted by Reza Shah. See J. Rostam-Kolayi and A. Matin-Asgari, 'Unveiling ambiguities: revisiting 1930s Iran's kashf-i hijab campaign', in S. Cronin (ed.), *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Muslim World: Gender, Modernism and the Politics of Dress*, p.121.
172. The site's growing popularity with Indian and Pakistani pilgrims was noted by a former Tehran city councilman and minister of culture, Ahmad Masjed-Jamei, who in early 2021 lamented the shrine's neglect by Iranian authorities and called for it to be accorded national heritage status. A. Masjed-Jamei [@ahmadmasjedjamei], 11 February 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CLHjBVbA-Ga/. (14 February 2021). For more on South Asian pilgrimage to Iran and Bibi Shahrbanu in particular, see A. Shams, 'On Persian pilgrimages, Pakistanis and Indians reconnect with Iran', *Dawn*, 6 December 2018. https://www.dawn.com/news/1449825 (1 February 2021).
173. S. Akbar, 'Pak reciters spread message of peace', *Times of India*, 21 January 2019. http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/67619142.cms (21 June 2020).
174. Based on author interviews.