

International organizations and the question of child labor in the Iranian carpet industry

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ABSTRACT

This article examines child labor in the Iranian carpet industry, from around 1890 to 1930. During this period, child labor was shaped by a combination of local and global factors, including the involvement of international organizations of various kinds. Whereas European carpet firms, under the protection of British diplomats in Iran, employed and exploited Iranian children, British missionaries attempted to alleviate the physical harm that befell child laborers and treated them in missionary hospitals. In the years following the First World War, the International Labour Organization approached the Iranian government with a direct request to curb the practice, and British diplomats supervised and reported on what they saw as an improvement in the working conditions of these children. I argue that both child labor and the attempts to curb it were intrinsically linked to children's bodies – their abilities, health, and protection. Children's supple fingers were considered ideal for carpet knotting, and the damage this labor caused young bodies was central to the discourse on improving their labor conditions. This article uses the lens of childhood history to shed light on some of the intricacies of the attempts to regulate child labor in Iran and to analyze Western observers' views on this issue.

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Introduction

This article examines the issue of child labor in the Iranian carpet industry, at the end of the 19th century and into the early decades of the 20th century. During this period, child labor was shaped by a combination of local and global factors, including the involvement of international organizations of various kinds. Whereas European carpet firms, under the protection of British diplomats in Iran, employed and exploited Iranian children, British missionaries attempted to alleviate the physical harm that befell child laborers and treated them in missionary hospitals. In the years following the First World War, the International Labour Organization (ILO), a United Nations agency, attempted to curb the practice by approaching the Iranian government. Subsequently, British diplomats supervised and reported on what they saw as an improvement in the working conditions of these children. This article identifies and examines the link between children's bodies – their abilities, health, and protection – and child labor, as well as the attempts to curb it. Children's supple fingers were considered ideal for carpet knotting, and the damage this labor caused young bodies was central to the discourse on improving their labor conditions.

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These developments can be analyzed using what Peter Stearns refers to as the ‘globalization of childhood’ (Stearns, 2005, pp. 59–61). Starting in the late 19th century, this process, by which Western standards of childhood – most notably the transition from child labor to schooling – became global, proceeded in two opposite directions. On the one hand, and as can be seen in this case study, organizations such as the ILO and later organizations, such as UNICEF (Schaub et al., 2017) and Christian missions, worked to bring the modern-Western model of childhood to non-Western societies via international conventions, philanthropic work, and diplomacy. On the other hand, the conditions of the global economy and imperial power structures drove an increase in reliance on child labor in colonial and semi-colonial societies.¹ The opposition of these forces is evident in the case of the Iranian carpet industry in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Employing the dual trajectory of childhood’s globalization that Stearn introduced and taking child labor in the Iranian carpet industry as a case study, I garner insights into the conflicting forces of globalization with regard to the adoption of modern-Western childhood standards in the Global South (Stearns, 2005, pp. 42–43). This article shows that this trajectory is discernable in Iran from as early as the late 19th century. The article opens with a section on the global causes of the Iranian carpet boom and the increasing reliance on child labor in this industry. In the second section, I analyze Western travel narratives that describe children’s working conditions, as well as a local attempt to set regulations for the industry, an attempt that European entities tried to counter. The last section of the article returns to the globalization of childhood; it examines the ILO’s efforts to persuade the new Iranian government (following Reza Khan’s 1921 coup d’état) to pass legislation setting a minimum age of employment and enforce it.

Child labor in the Iranian carpet industry has received some scholarly attention, usually in studies that focused either on the labor history of the country (Afacan, 2015; Floor, 1985, 2009; Seyf, 1990, 1993) or on the history of Iranian carpets (Helfgott, 1994; Ittig, 1985, n.d.; Moallem, 2018). This article draws much from the previous work on the topic but conducts the analysis through the lens of childhood studies and history. A recent addition to the field is Zahra Hatami’s book (published in Persian in Iran) on child labor in the carpet industry and the interactions regarding this issue between the ILO and the Iranian government (Hatami, 2021). The book, a collection of primary sources from the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, preceded by an introduction on the topic is invaluable, as it provides readers with archival evidence of the Iranian government’s perspective on child labor. In this article, I use the documents collected and presented in the book, and add another level of analysis to her research. The non-Iranian sources used in this article are more varied and include diplomatic correspondence, travel narratives, and ILO reports. The article, therefore, focuses mostly on Western attitudes toward and actions taken in response to child labor in the Iranian carpet industry; the article thus also provides insight into international organizations’ influence on Iranian actions and approaches.

Foreign companies, Western missionaries, local children – global economic trends and Iranian child laborers

Whereas the production of carpets was part and parcel of traditional Iranian crafts for centuries, several factors joined to make it an industry influenced by global economic forces, starting from the mid-19th century. The 19th century saw Iran’s increasing incorporation into the global economy mainly as an exporter of raw materials and an importer of finished products. This was the result of unequal trade agreements forced on the country following its military defeats to Russia and Great Britain, as well as the Industrial Revolution, which made Western products available at low cost in the Iranian markets. The favorable terms enjoyed by foreign traders caused the collapse of several branches of local handmade-textile production and contributed to high unemployment rates in cities that relied on textile manufacturing (Kazemi, 2017, pp. 31–32). As international trade increased during the late 19th century, local merchants as well as foreign traders located in Iran looked to augment the export of cash crops with a more stable export product.

Simultaneously, growing demand for Persian carpets in western Europe, the United States, Russia, and Iran itself brought about a 'carpet boom' era, during which carpets became a main export product of Iran. Carpets were exported from Iran in earlier periods as well, but their main destinations were India, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia, and the volume of trade was smaller (Ittig, n.d.). Between 1870 and 1914 carpet manufacturing returned to the former textile-producing area in Iran and also emerged in new localities (Helfgott, 1994, pp. 195–198; Seyf, 1993, p. 680). The growing demand for Persian carpets was itself a result of several global developments. First, international fairs exposed western audiences to oriental arts and crafts, which became popular due to a change of tastes among the bourgeoisie. Also, carpets were becoming more available and affordable thanks to the opening of the Suez Canal and a depreciation of the Iranian currency, a result of a global fall in the price of silver (Ittig, 1992, p. 108). Furthermore, the mass production of Persian carpets for the middle-class European and American home was the result of what Minoo Moallem dubs the 'transnationalization of exploitative labor', a process under which the more exploitative elements of carpet manufacturing moved from Europe to the colonial world (Moallem, 2018, pp. 74–76).

The carpet boom resulted in the establishment of a global industry in several Iranian cities. This industry included both local elite merchants as well as international companies that founded large carpet manufacturing workshops for the global market. First among these companies was the Anglo-Swiss Ziegler & Co., which established its factory in Sultanabad in 1881 and not long after expanded to Tabriz and Kashan (Helfgott, 1994, p. 200). Foreign companies were placed under the protection of foreign diplomats. Whether the owners of the company were British, German, or American subjects, the British consuls guarded their interests and negotiated for them with the local authorities. These international firms were therefore tightly integrated into the network defined by imperial structures. This was just one fact that influenced British diplomats' willingness to protect the rights of child laborers.

The bulk of the employees in these workshops were children, sometimes as young as five years old, who worked under extremely onerous conditions that had severe implications for their health and growth (Seyf, 1993, pp. 680–687). The demand for large quantities of carpets at a lower price for the middle-class consumer did not push the Persian carpet industry, in contrast to other industries, in the direction of mechanization. The value of a Persian carpet is intrinsically linked to its being handmade and labor-intensive. The turn to child labor, which was significantly cheaper and more open to exploitation, preserved this value. Western companies did not shy away from using child labor in their workshops. Indeed, Cecil Edwards, the representative of the Oriental Carpet Manufacturers company in Iran, wrote in 1911, when he was establishing the company's factory in Hamadan, 'We are promised all the boy labour that we want . . .' (quoted in Wynn, 2008, p. 58) From the laborers' side, changing economic conditions in Iran's villages and urban centers, including an increasing monetization of the economy, the turn from sustenance to cash crops, and the collapse of traditional crafts, impoverished peasant and urban families. Consequently, these families had to rely more on the extra income brought home by the wage labor of children (Helfgott, 1994, pp. 204–208).

While female and child work in the cottage carpet industry was the norm, and weaving was done usually by mothers and daughters alongside each other, or in small workshops where a master weaver (*ostaz*) oversaw several weavers, the move from cottage industry to the large workshop (or manufactory) entailed a change in the working conditions for the children involved. In the cottage industry, supervision over the quality of the product, as well as the ability to exploit the labor force to the maximum, was relatively limited. Agents would provide wool and patterns to the weavers, and set the timeframe for the completion of the rug, but children worked under the supervision of family members, allowing for more attention to be given to the child's welfare. This is part of the reason that carpet companies were moving production from the villages and into the factories at the turn of the 20th century.² This change is also pertinent to the differentiation between child work and child labor as defined by anthropologist David Lancy and others. Whereas child work is incorporated into family life, is developmental – the child learning various skills while working – and is characterized by a relative autonomy regarding work activity, child labor often entails a separation of a child from

their family, arduous and harmful working conditions, and less autonomy and opportunity to develop further skills (Lancy, 2018, pp. 3–5). The shift from cottage industry to factory meant a shift from child work to child labor.

In the Iranian carpet industry, children started work early, and youths of 14 years of age were already serving as overseers (Seyf, 1990, p. 210). Whereas in the villages and the tents of nomadic tribes, weaving was usually done by women and girls, it seems that in urban workshops much of the weaving was done by boys and girls alike. The factory system divided the elements of carpet production among various workers: dyers, designers, overseers, knotters, etc. This meant that the knotters were doing nothing but knotting, a mechanical and tedious job, for long hours each day. In the large workshops of Ziegler, weavers were required to work like machines, i.e. they were not allowed to improvise or change anything in the final product, and thus to contribute their tastes or ideas to the design (Seyf, 1990, p. 207). These work requirements stood in sharp contrast to carpet weaving among nomadic tribes, where women and girls took freedom in designing the carpets they wove, and were also different from conditions in the cottage industry, which allowed for a certain amount of improvisation, since the weavers were not supervised constantly by a factory overseer (Helfgott, 1994, pp. 246–248).

The common method of employment, which included a merchant or factory owner ‘contracting’ the child from their parents, for a period of up to several years, sometimes after paying the parents an advance sum, created the conditions of *de facto* bonded labor. Such conditions were conducive to the ill-treatment and severe exploitation of these workers. The horrifying labor conditions of young weavers are a recurring trope in Western travel narratives from the period. This is how Clara Colliver Rice (d. 1952), the wife of the missionary Walter Ayscough Rice, described this method of employment in her writings on the city of Kerman in 1916:

In that town opium-smoking parents make contracts for their children with master carpet weavers, taking money in advance if they can. So little girls of 5, 6, or 7 are bound for periods of one or two years, working daily from soon after sunrise till about sunset, in dark, ill-ventilated, dirty, mud hovels, at the hand carpet looms. [. . .] When through extreme weakness and deformity the little ones cannot walk, they are carried to and fro daily until the contract term is up. (Rice, 1916, p. 122)

Those who wrote most on the topic of the physical harm caused to children as a result of their labor in the carpet industry were missionaries and their wives. Starting in the 19th century, various missions were active in Iran, many of them working with children by establishing such institutes as schools and hospitals. In southern Iran, the British Church Mission Society (CMS) has worked since the last quarter of the 19th century (Mahdavi, 2005, p. 179). In 1901, the CMS established a hospital in Kerman that took care of children crippled by the work at the loom. The main medical conditions that doctors treated in the population of child laborers were deformities in their bone structure, resulting from late childhood rickets. The physical environment of the workshop was kept dark and humid on purpose, to protect the threads of wool and cotton from the dry air – conditions conducive of rickets. The doctors performed operations and treatments to restore deformed legs to a walking condition, as well as cesarean operations on young mothers whose pelvis bones had become malformed (Helfgott, 1994, pp. 258–262). A doctor from the hospital in Kerman attested to performing 12 such cesarean operations in a year, saving the lives of both young mothers and their babies (Linton, 1923, p. 116). Descriptions of children’s deformed bodies are most ubiquitous in eyewitness accounts of carpet factories. The harm done to their young limbs is the main cause of foreign observers’ abhorrence of this type of child labor. The description of a young weaver who had to be carried to and from the loom is recurring in several of these reports, showing the magnitude of both the physical harm caused to children and their exploitation (Linton, 1923). This is how Mary Hume-Griffiths, the wife of Dr. Albert Hume-Griffith, a British medical missionary, described the situation in Kerman in 1906:

The consequence of this abominable sweating system is that to-day there are hundreds of little children in Kerman, from eight to nine years of age, confirmed cripples from rheumatism and other diseases. From sitting so

long in one position, while still of tender years, amid such damp surroundings, their little feet and hands become knotted and deformed. They can no longer earn their daily bread, so perforce must help to swell the great multitude of beggars who throng the streets and bazaars of Kerman.

I once saw a little girl about seven years old sitting by the roadside just outside our house. On asking her why she was sitting there all alone, her reply was, 'Mother sent me to my work (carpet-weaving), but my feet hurt me so, I can't walk.' She was waiting there whilst a companion in work and sorrow ran to try and find some one who would carry her friend to the workroom. [...] In the meantime, because people want cheap Persian carpets, these little martyrs must be willing to sacrifice childhood's happy days, health, eye, and often life itself, on the altar of cheapness. (Hume-Griffith, 1909, pp. 44–46)

The reaction of these observers of children in the carpet industry was not to the idea of child labor as such, but specifically to the hazardous working conditions. This seems reasonable, as child labor in Iran at that period was the norm rather than the exception and as child labor was not uncommon among the poor in the West either (Humphries, 2003, pp. 179–180). Schools in Iran were few and served the elite, and children were expected to contribute to the family's income from as early on as possible. But whereas child labor was to be expected in such conditions, the sight of children crippled by work was far less tolerated. When children could no longer weave due to the physical harm caused by their employment, they had to contribute to the family income in the only other way available to them – begging in the streets.

Unlike missionaries who focused much on the physical damage caused to children's bodies, other western observers were often in awe when witnessing the quickness with which young weavers tied and cut the wool at the loom. It was one characteristic of the puerile body that made young children attractive as weavers – their delicate fingers were considered best suited to tie the tiny knots required for a high-quality carpet (Seyf, 1990, p. 210). Moreover, the knots themselves were fairly simple and thus easy for children to learn. Similarly awe-inspiring was the children's ability to memorize the patterns of the carpet, usually shown to them only as they started the work and not always visible in the workshop. British explorer Henry Savage Landor wrote in 1903 about his impression of a carpet factory:

Every one is familiar with the intricate and gorgeous designs of Persian carpets, and one imagines that only veteran skillful artisans can tackle such artistic work. One cannot, therefore help almost collapsing with surprise on seeing mere children from the age of six to ten working away at the looms with a quickness and ease that makes one feel very small.

In badly lighted and worse ventilated rooms, they sit perched in long rows on benches at various altitudes from the floor ... usually there is nothing for them to go by, except that a superintendent 'an older boy' sings out the stitches in a monotonous cadence. [...] The catching-up of each consecutive vertical thread ... is done so quickly by the tiny, supple fingers of the children that it is impossible to see how it is done at all until one requests them to do it slowly for one's benefit. [...] The labour involved in their manufacture is enormous, and some carpets take several years to manufacture.

The children employed are made to work very hard at the looms seldom less than twelve or fourteen hours a day and the exertion upon their memory to remember the design, which has taken them several months to learn by heart, is great. The constant strain on the eyes, which have to be kept fixed on each successive vertical thread so as not to pick up the wrong one, is very injurious to their sight. (Savage Landor, 1903, pp. 314–315)

A similar description can be found in rug expert John Kimberly Mumford's book on oriental carpets:

Lads of seven or eight years sit, half a dozen or more in a row, before giant frames, tying the knots with a swiftness and accuracy which are nothing short of phenomenal. [...] the small weavers are equipped with a knife ... It serves them in lieu of several extra fingers, and they manage it as expertly as they do their own small digits. In no land have I seen a more intelligent lot of boys than the solemn, black-eyed midgets who with big, black rimless wool caps on the backs of their close-shaven polls, sit like old men and weave the superb color panels of Tabriz. (Mumford, 1900, pp. 170–171)

Both descriptions illustrate the ease with which Iranian child weavers lost their status as children in the eyes of western observers, who saw them as 'lads' 'midgets' or 'old men'. Tellingly, it is the adult

visitor who feels himself 'very small' next to those children. In a way, young children's ability to perform the labor of knotting, and the congruity of their delicate fingers with the labor required, made them, in the eyes of such observers, suitable for such labor. Another irony of the way in which the bodies of children were both a reason for and the main victim of their labor was that rickets arrested their development, thus leaving them in the stature of young children, even as they grew older. CMS Bishop James Henry Linton and others describe how a 25-year-old weaver reached only the waist of an 11-year-old English girl, and others refer to the weavers as 'dwarfed' or as 'midgets' (Linton, 1923). Iranian child weavers, denied the protective status of children during childhood, remained with the stature of children, even as adults.

Considering the fact that in Western societies by the turn of the 20th century, the modern norms of childhood were already hegemonic (mostly among the middle and upper classes), the texts quoted here demonstrate two rhetorical mechanisms that affirm these norms for children in Western societies, while still allowing for the existence of exploitative child labor in Iran. On the one hand, observers such as Landor and Mumford imagine Iranian children as adults, because of their skill and competence. When the notion that children should not work takes hold and sometimes morphs into the perception that children cannot work, children who do work, and work like adults, are removed from the protective circle of modern childhood. According to Moallem, carpet connoisseurs and carpet sellers in the West reproduced the image of carpet weaving as female and tribal labor (yet another form of Othering) – ignoring its male, child, and urban characteristics, which were more prominent in large workshops. This association of carpet weavers with a primitive, natural, rural, and tribal state not only enhanced the aura of authenticity of the product but also made it easier for Western consumers of carpets to ignore the exploitation and child labor involved in the making of their carpets. The link 'makes the terms of labor normal, endurable, and tolerable' (Moallem, 2018, pp. 88–92).

On the other hand, writers such as Rice and Hume-Griffiths perform a different type of Othering, when positioning child weavers as 'anti-children' – victimized and deformed. According to Jamal Elias, presenting children in the Global South as anti-children is a way of affirming the modern norms of childhood through their negation. The life of poor children in the Global South 'becomes an anti-childhood rather than a different inflection or experience of a period of human life.' (Elias, 2018, p. 68). The little weavers, in this case, are not really children in Western eyes. This Othering allows consumers of Persian carpets to continue buying them while knowing the human cost of their production. It also allows Western observers of child labor in Iran to display shock or admiration without a demand for change.

The recurring trope of a visit to the Persian carpet factory, and the horrified or amazed response to the reality of child labor at such factories, were often part of a more general discussion of Persian carpets, their types, quality, price, and value within travel narratives (For a contemporary example of such writing see Murphy, 2005). One can find a critical description of child labor, following or followed by a paragraph on the proper way to discern a high-quality carpet from a carpet of inferior quality, or a paragraph on the relative prices of different types of carpets. The fact that Western observers abhorred what they saw in the carpet factories did not deter them from buying such commodities themselves, or from advising others on their purchase. On the contrary, these two viewpoints regarding children's work at the looms, as well as the third type of description found by Moallem, were part of the discourse on the quality and value of the commodity. Since a good Persian carpet was valued by the amount of work it took to produce it and by the density of the threads enabled by the work of tiny, supple fingers, the descriptions of children weaving for long hours and days enhanced the aura of luxury surrounding the carpets.

This link is clear in Linton's book, even in a section where he attempts to raise awareness to the issue. Calling unto his Westerner reader, Linton writes, Were you sighing for the price you've paid for that beautiful Persian rug? But you were only thinking of the *money* that you gave. That was far from being the whole price, if the rug was made under conditions such as I have been attempting to portray. I have tried to help you to calculate the price (Linton, 1923 italics in the origin). In this quote,

we can once again see how the value of the carpet is linked to the labor invested in its making. While undoubtedly it was not Linton's purpose to make Persian rugs even more desirable by his descriptions, a hidden message between the lines could be read: you were getting a labor-intensive luxury item for a decent price.

Carpets, companies, and consuls – the case of 1913 Kerman

In the 1920s the British government positioned itself as a custodian over Iranian child weavers' welfare, informing the ILO of the conditions in carpet factories, gathering reports on the change in these conditions, and discussing them in the British House of Lords. However, less than a decade earlier a representative of the very same government was taking an active part in preventing local measures meant to improve working conditions in the industry. This happened when the interests of foreign carpet companies were potentially at risk, as seen in the attempts at sanitary regulations in Kerman in 1913. Labor conditions in the Kerman carpet industry were notorious even compared with other localities in Iran. The city had a recent tradition of employing children as laborers in shawl weaving workshops, following the decline of this trade and an attempt to lower costs in order to compete with foreign manufacturers of shawls. Additionally, the province was impoverished due to a decline in the opium trade, which was an important cash crop. The growing popularity of opium consumption contributed to addiction among the local population, possibly explaining parents' willingness to contract their children to carpet manufacturers.³

Western carpet firms in Kerman were under the protection of the British consulate, which took it upon itself to guard the firms' financial interests.⁴ In early April 1913, the Iranian vice governor of the city attempted to put in place regulations regarding hygiene and working conditions in the carpet industry, which were most relevant to children, who comprised the mass of workers. This attempt prompted factory and workshop owners to strike and take *bast* (a sit-in) at the consulate. Our only source of information regarding this attempt is the reports of the British consul David Lorimer. These two short documents, a weekly report and a summary of the case in the yearly report of 1913, are a feat of self-justification of the official support given to factory owners, despite Lorimer's full awareness of the conditions under which children were employed, and will be analyzed in detail. Lorimer begins his weekly report (Lorimer, 1913) by writing on the cause of unrest among the city's weavers.

H.M. Consul obtained a copy of the Regulations and found that for the most part they were in themselves desirable, an opinion in which the agents of the European Carpet Firms concurred. Some of them were however scarcely practicable, and to a large extent they could only be made effective after the lapse of a reasonable period of time, which in fact they were declared operative at once. On the other hand the conditions of the trade are notoriously scandalous and highly injurious to the health and well being of the workers who are largely small children. This was also frankly admitted by the European Firms.

From the beginning, Lorimer shows awareness of the terrible working conditions in the industry and of the fact that most employees are 'small children', both in the local and in the European firms. The first argument against the regulations was that they were not practicable, or more accurately – not practicable on the short schedule set for their implementation. To this Lorimer will return eventually, when suggesting his solution to the crisis, a solution that left the situation virtually unchanged.

The situation moreover is complicated by the fact that a large proportion of the 'factories' are working solely for the European firms under contracts which may take as long as 6 months or a year to be fulfilled. Any breach of these contracts . . . would cause serious losses and inconvenience to the European Firms. (Lorimer, 1913, pp. 68–70)

The second argument against the regulations is a financial one – the losses that might befall the European carpet firms. This, in all likelihood, was the main concern of the firms, and as a result – of Lorimer. The fact that child labor was what made carpet manufacturing in Iran extremely profitable is evident also in an anecdote shared by Mary Hume-Griffiths. According to her, Major Douglas Craven Phillott, who was the acting British Consul in Kerman from 1901 to 1903, 'was so horrified at what he

saw of the state of these little sufferers, that he determined to start a loom of his own, employing men only to do the weaving. This he accordingly did, finding, of course, that the expense was enormous, as men's wages were so much higher than the children's, and also that they would not consent to such long hours.' (Hume-Griffith, 1909, pp. 44–46) Child labor, then, was necessary to the industry, and even hygienic and sanitary regulations that might have improved labor conditions at the cost of lesser profits were rejected.

A further consideration is that however speciously humanitarian the regulations might be, and, being so, difficult of attack by Europeans as the champions of humanitarianism, there were many indications that the motive impelling the Authorities was less an impulse of humanity than, as always in such cases in Persia, the desire to turn a dishonest and oppressive penny. (Lorimer, 1913, pp. 68–70)

The next move in Lorimer's report encapsulates the self-deception and arrogance needed in order to impede the improvement of children's working conditions. Lorimer still sees himself and other Europeans as 'champions of humanity' and understands the contradiction found in what he is about to do. He, therefore, resorts to a racist and condescending statement about Persian governance and character, to undermine the morality and justification of the regulations. A similar move can be found in Hume-Griffith's narrative on the failed attempt of Phillott. She writes, 'So long as children are to be had for a mere nominal wage, so long will the weavers use them, caring nothing for their sorrows, only bent on making money – the god of the Persian' (Hume-Griffith, 1909, pp. 44–46). Thus, using the stereotype regarding Persian greediness, both Lorimer and Hume-Griffith camouflage the fact that European and Iranian firms are acting in much the same way, and from the same motives. Moving on to Lorimer's concluding remarks,

H.M. Consul having reason to fear that the strikers might transfer their appeals to the Russian Consulate, which would be a disaster from everyone's point of view, lost no time in approaching the Deputy Governor . . . He found him only too anxious to draw his foot out of the mud and ready to do whatever he was asked. (Lorimer, 1913, pp. 68–70)

Lorimer's closing argument points to yet another imperial motive – the desire not to get the Russian consul involved in the situation. Here geopolitics supported economic considerations in Lorimer's decision to subvert the regulations. Once again, a sarcastic remark lets the readers believe that the Iranian vice-governor was not a 'champion of humanity', but a petty bureaucrat who was only too willing to let go of his demands for reform when pushed by the consul. Considering the power relations between Britain and Iran during this period, it is hardly surprising that the vice-governor took the British advice to heart. In the end, the regulations were withdrawn, with an understanding that they could only be reintroduced after deliberations with the Iranian government and all other parties.

Summarizing the event in his yearly report, Lorimer writes,

There is no doubt that the industry as carried on is responsible for a great deal of human misery, in deforming and arresting the development of the children, especially the girls employed in it, but official reforms in present day Persia can only be ineffective for their professed objects and a source of a hundred new abuses. A good deal is being quietly done by European merchants who use their influence to encourage the improvement of existing factories and the building of more sanitary new ones, while the Mission Hospital does what it can to relieve the misery which is caused by deformity and incomplete development. Many cripples with distorted misgrown legs obtain some relief and the lives, at least of many young would-be mothers, are saved, only, however, as a rule to be jeopardized again. (Lorimer, 1914, p. 60)

Going back to his claims regarding the impracticality of reforms in Iran, and to his assumptions regarding the abuse of such reforms, Lorimer attempts to justify ignoring the fact that European firms employ and exploit young children, arguing that these firms are working to better the sanitary conditions in their factories. The link made here between sanitary conditions and the arrested development or distortion of limbs of child workers is, however, only partially logical. The lack of ventilation or unhygienic conditions were not the only deciding factor that caused these health issues, but rather the sitting positions of the workers and their long working hours. The fact that

missionary hospitals were attempting to alleviate the harm is read here as another justification for the fact that it was Europeans who caused much of this suffering. Lorimer enters here another sarcastic remark on the lives of young girls, saved during childbirth by missionary doctors, that are usually jeopardized again – probably by Iranian pro-natalist customs. The message is the same – Western employers, missionaries (and maybe even diplomats) are trying to save Iranian children, harmed by Iranian society's greed, corruption, and ill-treatment of women. As can be seen from Lorimer's reports, both the foreign companies and the British consul were well aware of the disastrous effects that child labor in the carpet industry had on children's health. However, financial and also political interests were prioritized over humanitarian ones.

Globalizing modern childhood – the ILO, British diplomacy, and the Iranian government

It was another British diplomat who, less than a decade following these affairs, initiated an attempt in the ILO to curb minimum age regulations on Iran's carpet industry. Sir Malcolm Delevingne (d. 1950) of the British Home Office, who was Britain's delegate to several ILO conferences, wrote in late August 1920 to Lancelot Oliphant (d. 1965) of the British Foreign Office, asking for his advice on the matter of enforcing the 1919 ILO draft convention regarding child labor, in Iran. The Foreign Office's response to Delevingne was that he should bring up the topic during the meeting of the ILO council, so that the organization would address the Iranian government directly, and not through British channels (*FO 371 4926*, 1920). During the fifth session of the ILO governing body in October 1920, Delevingne raised the issue of child carpet weavers. Reading to the governing body from a letter he received, Delevingne described the horrifying conditions in Kerman, which, apparently, have not changed much since 1913 (Afacan, 2015, pp. 137–138). A similar letter, sent in May 1921 from CMS Reverend Boyland to the British Consul in Kerman mentions 47 operations performed on 'deformed carpet weavers,' all girls, who had had problems during childbirth due to malformation of their pelvis bones. Another 19 operations were performed in order to straighten crippled limbs, and many other girl weavers were suffering from rickets, paralysis, and deformities. Boyland adds, 'In the streets of this town one is constantly reminded of the iniquity [sic] of this child-labour by seeing deformed and stunted women, and occasionally men, who are no longer able to work, as their hands are often deformed as well, and are reduced to beggary' (*FO 371 6450*, 1921). Delevingne mentioned that the Iranian delegate to the 1919 conference had approved the draft convention regarding the minimum age for employment in the industry (set to 14), but that the Iranian government had not ratified the convention, and therefore all that could be done was to send 'friendly representations' on this issue. The Iranian government was probably well aware of the difficulties of implementing such a convention in the country. Furthermore, the years immediately following the First World War were a time of increased weakness of the central government, which had little control over events in the country's vast periphery.⁵ Indeed, in February 1921 a regime change took place in Iran, bringing to power Reza Khan (later Shah) Pahlavi. Delevingne added that 'the British Foreign Office was willing to give certain assistance to the International Labour Office in the matter' (1920, p. 37). Given Britain's position as the only foreign power active in the country, this assistance probably carried much weight. From its inception, international involvement on the issue was the result of cooperation between the British Imperial Government and the ILO.

On 30 October 1920, the director of the ILO, Albert Thomas (d. 1932), sent a letter, with said 'friendly representations', to the Iranian delegate to the League of Nations, Prince Arfa' al-Dowleh, pointing to the harsh working conditions of children and women in the Kerman carpet industry. The letter pointed out that the ILO's convention from 1919 prohibited the employment of children under the age of 14 in any industrial enterprise, and that since Iran was a member of the ILO and the LoN, those decisions were binding. Delevingne was happy to report to the Foreign Office about the success of his efforts (*FO 371 4926*, 1920). The ILO convention on minimum age had indeed set these limitations for work in the industry, but it was not entirely

clear whether Iran, as a country whose industrial development was minimal, was actually included in the convention. The debates regarding the minimum age of employment in the industry concluded that in countries with ‘imperfect development of industrial organization’ modifications to the convention should be allowed (Dahlén, 2007, p. 120). Thomas’ letter (and a reminder sent in July 1921) was answered by the Iranian government almost a year later, in September 1921. This belatedness was a source of embarrassment for the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which sent letters to the relevant government authorities urging them to inform the Ministry of any measures taken following the ILO’s intervention, before the organization’s conference in October 1921 (Hatami, 2021, pp. 81–88).

In addition to Thomas’ repeated inquiries, the British and the American embassies were also approaching the Iranians with similar concerns, probably following Delevingne’s promise of British assistance to the ILO (Hatami, 2021, p. 89). Throughout 1921, correspondence took place between the British Embassy in Tehran and the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs with regard to this question. In May 1921, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs informed the British Minister in Tehran that the Ministry of Public Works, Commerce, and Agriculture had sent instructions to provinces with a carpet industry and that certain measures were being taken in order to improve labor conditions. Furthermore, a commission was appointed to investigate the issue and offer regulations. The British Minister – Herman Norman (d.1955) – forwarded the information to the British consuls in Kerman and Sultanabad, and requested to be informed of the results of the commission (FO 371 6450, 1921). Such instructions were indeed sent to Kerman and Baluchistan in April 1921, asking officials to take measures in order to guarantee the health of child workers in the carpet factories. This followed the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ letter to the Office of the Prime Minister, which later sent its own directives to the provincial government of Kerman (Hatami, 2021, pp. 93–94). The measures included the improvement of hygiene in the factories, avoiding employing children under 14 years of age as much as possible, and securing better working conditions including an eight-hour workday and physical and mental recreation for the children (Hatami, 2021, p. 80).

A letter from the British consul in Kerman sent to Norman in May 1921 points to the origin of the measures that would later become official regulations of the Iranian government. The consul, Major Arthur Grey, writes that he has consulted with the representatives of the European and American carpet firms in the city, who suggested the following measures: not employing boys under eight years old and girls under ten years old, elevating the base beam of the loom from the ground, limiting daily work hours to eight, and appointing a commission to inspect said measures. Explaining why the age limit suggested by the carpet firms was significantly lower than that set by the ILO draft convention, Grey wrote:

It is urged that the fourteen year limit that is suitable in Europe is unsuitable in this country for the reason that its enforcement would entail misery if not starvation to hundreds of poor families who can exist only with the help of the earnings of their children, that children develop physically earlier in the East than they do in European countries, and that the carpet weaving industry would be ruined by the enforcement of the 14 year age limit rule which would deprive the factories of half the hands at present employed. (FO 371 6450, 1921)

The claim that children’s bodies develop earlier in the ‘East’ is brought as a contributing factor for subverting ‘European’ measures against child labor. The consultation between Grey and the representatives of Western carpet firms was followed by another meeting in which Bishop Linton of the CMS summoned factory owners and asked them to commit themselves to the above-mentioned measures. The owners agreed, but strongly rejected Linton’s suggestion of giving working children a pay raise, so that they would receive a living wage (Floor, 2009, p. 89; FO 371 7829, 1922). In a report of the meeting, Linton stressed the difficulty of setting a minimum age in the factories and relates how he managed to convince the firms to accept it:

[...] The concluding argument was:

The International Labour Bureau have [sic] taken this up. You profess to be concerned for the future of the Industry, and if the age limit is raised, you profess to fear that the industry will be damaged. But, consider, who are members of the International Labour Conference? America, France, England inter alia. If they are not satisfied with the conditions, it will be up to them to publish in these countries the conditions under which carpets are produced, and publish photographs of the same, then where will the industry be?' That brought in the waverers!

This meeting was to be followed by yet another meeting with representatives of the master weavers and then a last meeting to finalize details. Linton suggested that the consul be present at that last meeting 'so that at any rate these firms under your protection will feel bound to adhere to their conditions' (FO 371 7829, 1922). In a note he added to his book post scriptum, Linton reported in August 1922, that an agreement to this effect had been reached with the heads of carpet trading companies as well as with the guild of master weavers (Linton, 1923). It was the intricate network of international commercial, diplomatic, and missionary organizations (in addition to the ILO) that decided on working children's fate in the Iranian carpet industry.

In the Iranian report of the factory owners' meeting, the wording of their commitments is slightly, yet significantly, different from that reported by British officials. The eight-hour workday was guaranteed to salaried employees and apprentices. However, contract employees, such as most child laborers, were not included. The improvement of sanitary conditions in the factories was only required of factory owners who were able to do so, whereas others were only required to do 'as much as they could' (Hatami, 2021, pp. 95–96). Whereas the new minimum age was significant, the allowances made for some of the other items on the agreement could have left working conditions unchanged for many children.

By the end of 1921, the Iranian foreign minister informed the Iranian representative in Bern and the British legation that the authorities in Kerman had been ordered to enforce regulations that set the minimum age for employment at 10, as well as to reduce the workday to eight hours, including a lunch break, hygienic conditions in the factories, and suitable seating arrangements by the looms (Floor, 2009, p. 88; FO 371 7829, 1922). The qualifications of the agreement signed by factory owners did not find their way into this letter, and a gender-differentiated age limit of eight for boys and ten for girls became a minimum age of ten for all employees (Hatami, 2021, p. 100). The ILO was quick to publish these favorable outcomes in its official bulletin of NaN Invalid Date NaN, and a few days later, the Iranian Minister in Bern informed the ILO that the regulations were put into execution (FO 371 9030, 1923). The degree to which these regulations were in fact enforced is hard to assess. Whereas some later reports speak of improvement in the European carpet factories, no such data exist for the Iranian looms.

In December 1922 the British representative to the ILO, Harold Butler, wrote to the British Minister of Labour on an 'embarrassing situation' caused by the said publication of the Iranian regulations in the ILO official bulletin. On NaN Invalid Date NaN *the Woman's Leader* published an article describing the lives of girls in Iran, which pointed to the unchanged conditions of labor in the industry. The article, titled *The Girl's Lot in Persia* and signed by the pseudonym Dust-i Iran, appears in the inner pages of the magazine, and deals only in small part with the carpet industry. It accuses European and English carpet factory owners of severe exploitation of very young girls, which might point to the reason for the British sensitivity to the publication (Doust-i-Iran, 1922). This report, Butler suggested, could arouse suspicions as to the actual implementation of reforms in Iran 'especially as it seems to be generally held that Oriental Governments are much more ready to promise than to perform'. Butler requested the Minister of Labor to employ British diplomacy in Iran once more, by collecting necessary data on the conditions in the carpet industry in Kerman. 'As it is largely due to the friendly offices of the British Government that the [International Labour] Office has been able to do what it has done for the protection of these unfortunate people [. . .] I feel confident that I may appeal to its continued interest in their welfare,' wrote Butler (FO 371 9030, 1923).

The British Government forwarded Butler's request to Percy Loraine, the British Minister in Iran, who forwarded it not only to the consul in Kerman, but also to those of Tabriz, Hamadan, and Sultanabad. The reports received in August 1923 from the consul of Kerman and the mission's doctor

in the city concur that there was an improvement in the conditions; the consul even concluded ‘that cause of complaint no longer exists’ (FO 371 9030, 1923). Reports from other provinces were less positive. Most notably, the consul in Tabriz wrote that the conditions in those factories owned by Iranians were bad and that children were de facto slaves. He notes, though, that at the factories of the Oriental Carpet Manufacturers, in Tabriz as well as in Hamadan, conditions were good and not in need of reform. This opinion of OCM was seconded by the Hamadan consul; however, it was based not on inspection but on a report received from the factory owner. The consul added that another British firm wished to enter the carpet industry in Tabriz and that its director was a former vice-consul of Tabriz, further proof of the interlinks between the diplomatic network and the commercial firms (FO 371 9030, 1923).

If in 1913 British diplomacy was deployed in order to push back on reforms, in the 1920s it became a contributing factor in the promotion of reform. It is unclear what caused the British stance to shift. One possible explanation is the changing sensibilities to child labor following the First World War. Another might have to do with changing British economic interests in Iran. Whereas in 1913 carpet exportation was still of major financial significance, by 1919 oil was becoming more and more important. 1913 was the first year in which the Abadan refinery started volume production of oil. Oil extraction rose from merely 5 thousand barrels per day in 1913, to 33 thousand barrels in 1920 and over 115 thousand in 1929 (Mohaddes & Hashem, 2013, p. 4). Were the British more willing to protect Iranian child workers when carpets were no longer such an important export from Iran? So far, I have not found a conclusive answer to this question. Another explanation draws on the changing status of Britain in Iran following Reza Khan’s rise to power. Iran was slowly disentangling itself from British imperial control, which reached its zenith in 1919 with the Anglo-Persian Agreement. Acting on behalf of the ILO, collecting intelligence, and monitoring Iranian actions in the field of child protection gave the British Foreign Office continued power in Iran. As Marshall Beier reflects on the global Right to Protection:

It is useful here to recall critiques of protector/protected relations drawn along global North/South lines. Beyond bare hubris, the pretension to protect on the global level is not rendered benign by good intentions. In their metonymic figurations, children and childhood are deployed to facilitate political projects arising from a full spectrum of interests and intentions. (Beier, 2018, p. 180)

The Iranian government wished to bring under the new regulations children in other provinces as well. In 1922, instructions were sent to all carpet manufacturing centers in Iran (Hatami, 2021, pp. 113–116). By December 1923 the governor of Kerman, Sistan, and Baluchistan Provinces issued a decree prohibiting the employment of boys under eight years old and girls under ten years old in the carpet industry of the province, and securing several other working conditions for these young workers. These included, among others, a segregation of the weaving sheds by gender, and the provision of a female overseer for girls (Floor, 2009, pp. 89–90; FO 371 10,131, 1924). This new item might indicate that the girls employed were indeed older, necessitating gender segregation that was unnecessary for very young girls. The ILO mentioned these regulations in a report from 1924 and ascribed them to the Organization’s 1921 intervention (International Labour Office, 1924, pp. 10–11). An ILO report from 1926 repeated mostly verbatim the 1924 report, suggesting that in the two years that had passed, no new information had been gained (International Labour Office, 1926, pp. 14–15). By May 1924, the British government expressed its satisfaction with the conditions in Kerman. In a session of the British House of Lords, Lord Parmoor summarized several reports made to the Ministry of Foreign affairs and concluded that:

In the first place, they find that the workshops are excellent, and compare favourably with Persian houses, even such as are lived in by the upper classes. Secondly, the conditions in the villages are good, so far as is known. [...] Thirdly, the standard set by foreign firms of repute has been largely followed. I should like to emphasise the fact that a large factor in the development of better conditions in the native industries has been the excellent standard which most of the foreign firms have set as regards the treatment of their workpeople. Lastly, the tendency towards general improvement is expected to be progressive. (House of Lords - UK Parliament, 1924)

Lord Parmoor's presentation is taken almost verbatim from the abovementioned report written by the British consul in Kerman in August 1923, ignoring the other reports that had painted a less positive picture. No mention is made of the fact that the definition of the minimum age for employment by the Iranian government was significantly lower than that set by the ILO. In fact, the report to the House of Lords does not mention the issue of workers' age at all, just the conditions in the factories. Lord Parmoor gives his audience the impression that a large number of reports, all supporting the same conclusions, were received by the Foreign Office. As far as I have managed to discover, though, only five such reports were sent from Iran, all during 1923, with varying opinions on the topic.

The British stance, as well as that implied by the actions of the ILO, was that in countries such as Iran, where schools were few and poverty rampant, the minimum age for work was not something that could be enforced or perhaps even expected. The blame was not so much on Iran's underdeveloped industry, but on the socio-economic conditions that made child work normative. Similar to what is evident from the travel narratives quoted earlier, it was not child labor per se that was the problem, but the conditions of work that were harmful to the health and development of children. It is therefore the attention given to children's bodily needs that took center stage. The ILO saw itself as committed to the limitation of child labor in order to 'permit the continuation of their [children's] education and assure their proper physical development'(Quoted in: van Daalen & Hanson, 2019). If education was not an option for most Iranian children, then their physical development was a concern for the organization.

Despite British reassurances that the conditions in Iran had improved, it seems that in most carpet factories in Iran, conditions remained mostly unchanged. By early 1924, the regulations of the Kerman, Sistan, and Baluchistan governor were withdrawn due to resistance from employers and master weavers, a move that ended the Iranian government's involvement in this issue for several years. Approximately four years later, a government decree based on the provincial decree was issued, setting the minimum age for employment in the carpet industry throughout Iran at 10 for boys and 12 for girls. The government decree, some of whose regulations were quite radical even by European standards, seems to have become a dead letter (Floor, 1985, pp. 89–93). That same year, the prime minister's office issued further regulations concerning working conditions in the carpet industry. These regulations set the minimum age for workers at 13 and detailed the sanitary conditions that must be observed in the factories (Ali Akbari Baygi, 2002, pp. 85–86). It seems, then, that throughout the 1920s the issue was on the agenda of the Iranian government, but the degree to which this changed actual conditions in the factories is unclear.

Further measures of reform were suggested by the Kermani community of carpet manufacturers as a possible solution to the deteriorating status of the carpet industry in the city. In 1926, the Kermani *kargozar* (government agent) wrote a letter suggesting the opening of a school for children of carpet weavers, which in addition to the 'necessary studies' would also teach carpet weaving. This proposal aligned with Reza Shah's educational reform, which sought to establish a national education system. Another request was that the government aid and pay attention to hygiene and the improvement of conditions for workers in the carpet factories (Hatami, 2021, p. 155).

Under Reza Shah, the Iranian government's willingness to act upon the requests of the ILO stemmed from the attempt to present Iran as an equal and modern member of the international community. The Iranian Foreign Ministry sources suggest that the government of Iran saw its membership in the LoN and the ILO as vital to its international status. However, one gets the sense that the ILO's regulations and requests for information were often met with disregard from the Iranian side. The Iranian ambassador in Bern and the Foreign Minister repeatedly asked, with a growing sense of exasperation, the relevant ministries to provide them with information on measures taken regarding ILO demands. They stressed that failures to answer the inquiries caused the country embarrassment and that other developing countries were sending statistics to be included in the Organization's yearly reports. Alongside this sentiment, the documents also show the Iranian

government's constant rebuttal of ILO demands, on the grounds that the country's economic and industrial conditions were too undeveloped in comparison to other, mostly Western, countries.

In his memoirs, Abd al-Hosein San'atizadeh Kermani (b.1896) relays a conversation he had with prominent Iranian writer Seyyed Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh, who worked at the ILO between the years 1931–1956. Kermani writes that he talked to Jamalzadeh about the dire conditions of children in the carpet industry. Jamalzadeh told him that the ILO was well aware of the situation since, Dr. George Dodson (who did missionary medical work in Kerman between 1904 and 1937) had sent detailed reports to the organization on this topic (San'atizadeh Kermani, 1968, p. 200). This anecdote attests to the fact that at least as late as 1931, and probably later, working conditions for children in the carpet industry remained unchanged. In fact, an Iranian report sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs probably in 1933, which discussed Iran's lack of ratification of ILO conventions, clearly stated that such conventions did not fit Iran's economic conditions and therefore their implementation would be impractical. Mentioning specifically the minimum age of employment in carpet factories, the report concluded that its implementation would bring about the closure of all carpet factories in the country. The government, therefore, exempted factories from these regulations (Hatami, 2021, p. 187). Switching roles, in 1933 the Iranian government rejected setting the minimum age for carpet weavers as required by the ILO, basing their rejection on some of the same arguments used by the British consul in 1913 to reject improvement in children's terms of employment suggested by an Iranian vice governor.

It is not surprising then, that by 1934 the American legation reported that the 1923 regulations had never been implemented and that they were probably never meant to be implemented in the first place (Floor, 2009, p. 93). A Western observer who visited a carpet factory in Isfahan in 1937 reported a depressingly similar picture to the one described in the early 1900s:

The children toil from sunrise to sunset, knowing only wizened age from the very beginning. How could it be otherwise? They are dragged from the cradle to augment the meager family coffers, to eke out a drab existence, until they become weak and emaciated, with sunken narrow chests, and with no joy in life until they die. Yet little boys haunt the carpet sheds, starving for want of the nightmare of 12 to 16 hours a day which their fidgety work must mean. Many of them lose the best of their sight for life (Hay & Leslie Howard-Williams, 1937, pp. 290–291).

The Iranian labor legislation of 1938 did not impose any child-labor limits on factory owners. Laurence Elwell-Sutton mentions in his 1944 book on Iran that child work in the carpet industry is still common and that the government, rather than enforcing a minimum age of employment, prefers letting compulsory education become the factor that will limit the employment of children (Elwell-Sutton, 1944, p. 127). Indeed, when representatives of the ILO reached Iran in March 1952 to help the newly established Ministry of Labor to create a mechanism for a labor inspection service, they felt that the situation of child labor in the country necessitated special commentary, despite the fact that it was not the reason for their visit. The report reads:

In law the employment of children under age 13 is prohibited in factories with at least ten workers, but in practice the prohibition is not applied. Many people argue that child labour is necessary to supplement low family incomes and that the special operations performed by children are indispensable to certain industries, such as carpet-making . . . Moreover, in the absence of thorough research into the economic factors involved, it is not at all certain that an industry such as carpet-making is necessarily dependent upon operations carried out by children. . . . At the same time, a special inquiry should be carried out on the effects on the health of children, particularly girls, prematurely employed, in the carpet industry . . . (International Labour Office, 1952, pp. 17–18)

As shown, both the harmful employment of children in the carpet industry and the belief that children were irreplaceable in this industry, were still widespread in Iran, more than 20 years after the first labor regulations in the industry. The first state laws to limit child labor were part of the Labor Laws of 1958 and prohibited children's work under the age of 12. However, the law exempted family workshops, a move that in practice allowed child labor in some industries, including the carpet industry, to continue nearly unabated. In fact, some Iranian children from poor families were still

'rented' to carpet-weaving workshop owners, to work for long hours and under harsh conditions, at least as late as the 2000s (Jalali, 2009; Murphy, 2005).

Conclusions

Child labor in the Iranian carpet factory was far from a local affair. From the causes of exploitative employment of children in carpet factories, through the reports and actions of missionaries, and to the collaboration between international organizations and British officials in the attempts to limit this practice – Iranian child weavers stood at the center of a web of national and international links. Iranian and foreign organizations all had vested interests in the fruit of their labor, as well as in children's wellbeing, or more accurately, in the image of such wellbeing. Children crippled by exploitative work at the looms were a sight that modern sensibilities and ideals of childhood could not tolerate. However, when these sensibilities clashed with economic interests or with the desire for cheaper Persian carpets, various mechanisms were put in place that allowed for the continuation of child labor. Whether these were rhetorical devices that helped Western consumers and diplomats not to think of young carpet weavers as children and not to consider measures taken for their defense as genuine or practicable, or straightforward Iranian claims that the industry relied on child labor to such an extent that relinquishing it would mean its collapse – for decades the reality of young weavers' lives changed but little as a result of the international commotion concerning them. Pulled in the opposing directions posed by globalization, poor Iranian families and Iran as a pre-industrialized country had to rely on the revenue brought home by the labor of children, while trying to appease ILO and British demands stemming from the modern ideals of childhood. This was especially true for Iran under Reza Shah, which tried to present itself to the world as a modern nation-state, worthy of a seat in the new international bodies established following the First World War.

Since modern schooling was not widespread in Iran during the early decades of the 20th century, it was children's physical wellbeing that figured large in the arguments for limiting child labor. The harm to children's health and physical development was what caught Western observers' attention most. Encountering children reduced to begging after years of exploitative labor had crippled them and arrested their development was an important factor in missionaries' and diplomats' attempts to limit child labor. Ironically, though, children's small fingers remained pivotal in the decision of carpet manufacturers to keep employing them, despite national and international efforts to the contrary. The body of the child thus played a dual part in the history of child labor – both perpetuating and threatening this practice.

Notes

1. Stearns' claim regarding the effect of globalization on child labor is still debated among scholars, who point to the difficulties in assessing it and to the variations across countries (Cigno et al., 2002; Hunter, 2004).
2. However, after the Second World War, when the Iranian government was starting to enforce labor laws and supervise working conditions in the factories, the companies were once again moving production back to the villages (Helfgott, 1994, pp. 232–34).
3. Opium smoking became very popular in Iran during the second half of the 19th century, due to the lower costs of opium and a certain increase in the available income of peasants thanks to the production of cash crops (Helfgott, 1994 –256; pp. 254; Regavim, 2012, pp. 124–128).
4. See, for example, Lorimer's complaints about having to 'take the burden' of a Swiss subject named Bruggman's 'official quarrels' with various elements in the carpet trade (Lorimer, 1914, pp. 70–71).
5. Iran would not ratify this and other conventions in later periods as well, claiming that such laws are impractical in Iran due to the country's undeveloped economy and incomplete industrialization (See, for example, Hatami, 2021, p. 187).

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