Current histories of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905–1909) frequently begin with the basti-nado of three Tehranani merchants, on 11 December 1905, upon the orders of Tehran’s governor, to set off a chain of events that culminated in the issuance of the Constitutional decree by Muzaffar al-Din Shah on 5 August 1906. By telling a different story of these same revolutionary years, I question how these particular events have come to form Iranian collective memory of that revolution, while others have been merely forgotten.

Not only in public display of grief over common loss, but through the production of a sense of national solidarity and identity the story was effective in creating a sense of national togetherness. As the Daughters of Quchan became the daughters of the nation, our daughters, daughters of Iran, ‘we, Iranians’ became more meaningful. The dissemination of this tale acted as such a powerful focus of national identity that shortly after the opening of the new parliament in the fall of 1906, relatives of some of the captive women demonstrated in the parliament that hear their grievances and act to punish those responsible for the crime. Upon the initiative of the Majlis (the Iranian Parliament), the newly re-constituted Ministry of Justice formed a commission of investigation and put a number of people of high station on trial for their involvement in what had become a truly national affair. The investigations and the trial were the first under the new regime. They thus became constitutive of many of the new judicial institutions. The verdict issued by the Minister of Justice was brought back to the Majlis, setting off a new round of parliamentary debates and power struggles. The investigations, the trial, and their subsequent political repercussions provided the contesting terrain upon which some of the central institutions and political concepts of the constitutional regime took shape.

How did a familiar tale of rural destitution and the story of yet another Turkmân raid become a uniquely outrageous story, travel across the story in the more analytical political debates and power struggles. The investigations, the trial, and their subsequent political repercussions provided the contesting terrain upon which some of the central institutions and political concepts of the constitutional regime took shape.

The story concerns young girls and women who, in 1905, had been sold by needy peasants to pay taxes in a bad harvest year. Others had been taken as booty in a raid of a village settlement by Turkoman tribes. Neither of these events was extraordinary for its time and place. Yet, happening in 1905, upon the orders of Tehran’s governor. This in- dication for a constitution, women were interested in many issues thus far considered unimportant, mundane and quotidian, and in many instances women were recited to produce a sense of national solidarity and power, and to re-establish moral order. Men were linked with the revolution as Firaydun Adamiyat. The other events, however, were in every single history of modern Iran, as Fraydun Adamiyat. The other events, however, were in every single history of Constitutional Revolution. A story that had magically become the memorialization of the critical alliance of the clergy and the bazaar, has crafted the particular opening of the narrative.

The act of remembering the Story of the Daughters of Quchan then is a recuperative effort: recuperation of women into the national narrative and of gender into historiography. It is a proposition for writing a different kind of history of modern Iran that is interested in many issues thus far consid- ered unimportant, mundane and quotidian, which are more often than not gendered through and through. And their very gen- deredness tells us a great deal about the political culture of society. This is not simply a desire for a more accurate history of the Constitutional Revolution. More important- ly, it is an attempt at reconfiguration of na- tional memory, at producing a counter-memory, counter to a cultural setting hos- tile to a central presence of women in its im- portant cultural texts and in its political memory.