

THE ROOTS OF FEMINIST INVOCATIONS IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY IRAN

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ABSTRACT

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Studies of the transformation of Iranian society after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and its impact on the position of the Iranian woman have revealed that three and a half decades of efforts by the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) to institutionalize an archaic image of the ideal Muslim woman have produced results contrary to what was intended. The expansion of women's education in post-revolutionary Iran identified as an unintended consequence of the revolution has been empowering women against the IRI's misogynistic ideology. A feminist movement based on the evolution of female consciousness and an unprecedented solidarity among previously divided secular and religious women has emerged as another medium of resistance.

This study augments the research in this field by examining modifications in the education system following the revolution. A critical content analysis of elementary school textbooks issued by the Pahlavi and the IRI assesses the way in which each regime sought to impart its gender ideology to young girls.

The eradication of coeducation and institution of single-sex schooling at the pre-university level is investigated as a factor in combating the constraints imposed by patriarchal laws on the female population. The conclusion is offered that the IRI may have unwittingly undermined its own agenda for women in promulgating such seemingly outdated decrees.

Finally, this dissertation examines women's publications of the Pahlavi and IRI periods, emphasizing the pioneering role of one particular feminist publication in presenting a universal feminist ideology.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE The Origins of Women’s Awakening in Iran	4
CHAPTER TWO Women and Education: Paradoxical Trends and Emerging Voices.....	48
Elementary Textbooks of the Islamic Republic.....	67
Elementary Textbooks of the Pahlavi Monarchy.....	73
Analysis of Pre- and Post-Revolutionary Elementary Textbooks:	74
Education and the Veil.....	78
CHAPTER THREE Single-Sex Schools and Women’s Empowerment	87
CHAPTER FOUR Islamic Feminism and the Path for Reform	125
CONCLUSION.....	215
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	226

INTRODUCTION

The historical processes surrounding the intricate labyrinth of the “woman question” in Iran have delineated the paradoxical contours and opaque resolutions of a fallacy defrauding the female gender of its right to humanity. Over a century ago, an enlightened avant garde boldly disseminated the seeds of a feminist itinerary by protesting a deplorable status entrenched in archaic mores. In the aftermath of this era, the Pahlavi monarchy momentarily impeded the trajectory of an egregious misdiagnosis only to have it dismantled by Ayatollah Khomeini in an enigmatic tour de force reinforcing patriarchal norms in Iranian society. The abolition of the Monarchy in the late 20th century precipitated the regression of a nation perched on the threshold of modernization, extinguishing a multitude of initiatives of which a fundamental component entailed the emancipation of the Iranian woman. The legacy of a calamitous disruption has been a theocracy based on Ayatollah Khomeini’s “Islamic Government,” and a misogynistic regimen embedded in a constitution reinforcing the primacy of the shari‘a (Islamic law) over civil law and the absolute leadership of a Shi‘ite jurist over popular sovereignty. Nevertheless, three and a half decades of a concerted effort to indoctrinate the Iranian population with an antiquated portraiture of the quintessential Muslim woman, has generated results antithetical to the envisioned objective.

The transformation of Iranian society in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and its enormous impact on the overall status of women has been the focus of much scholarly assessment, exposing the conflicting undulations fueling the incessant discord among forces of tradition and modernity. The myriad of analytical literature discloses an unprecedented surge in female literacy and a burgeoning feminist movement in opposition to the established order.

The following dissertation goes beyond the current discourse by distinguishing separate components adversely impacting the socialization of young women against the dominant order. Its underlying premise maintains that the aggregate of ostensibly gender biased policies initiated during the first revolutionary phase (1979-1989) collided both with the idealistic conceptions of the preceding dynastic order (1941-1979) and with the substantive amendments of the reformist period (1997-2005), to produce the foundational principles of a unique covenant nourishing an era of monumental regeneration among the disempowered female segment of the population.

Implicit to this hypothesis are modifications in the educational arena and the role of the women's press, which will be extensively evaluated as part of the concealed components seemingly complicit in the propagation of "norms" against the boundaries of traditionalist religious prescription. Integral to this is the enigma of a revolution that was explicitly antagonistic to the modernizing initiatives of the previous order, yet had the capacity to engender a society distinguished by greater female education, the extension of powerful female voices, and at least in limited instances enhanced opportunities for the protection of women. While the overall premise of this argument may be counterintuitive from the predominant theoretical standpoint distinguishing Islamic assertion as fundamentally retrogressive, its implications nonetheless require additional research in order to discern the extent to which the spirit of the Pahlavis may have infiltrated popular class women, even as numerous laws and institutions originating with the Monarchy were eradicated by the Republic. Given that historians have exhaustively deliberated on this fascinating yet anomalous passage, empirical evidence may in fact reveal that "*plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*" (the more things change, the more they are the same), an expression aptly coined by Jean Baptiste Alphonse Karr in 1848, suggesting the "curious paradox of historical consciousness, whereby structuralism invokes

actions of the past — privileging the determination of the pre-existing order, rather than the modifications ensuing from practice....”¹

¹ Sahlins, M. *Cultural and Practical Reasons*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976, 21

CHAPTER ONE

THE ORIGINS OF WOMEN'S AWAKENING IN IRAN

This chapter provides comprehensive historical coverage of the social and political transactions impacting the ebb and flow of contradictory currents revelatory of the web of interdependence disseminating the artifacts of a “paradigm shift,” culminating in the feminist reformist movement in post-revolutionary Iran.²

In 1912, Morgan Shuster, the American Treasurer General of Persia observed:

All honor to the veiled women of Persia with the constraining traditions of the past around them; with the idea of absolute dependence upon the fancy and caprice of men ever before them; deprived of all opportunity to educate themselves along modern ideals; watched, guarded and rebuffed, they drank deep from the cup of freedoms desire and offered up their daily contribution to their country's cause.³

Despite the paucity of historical narratives documenting the position of women prior to the advent of Islam in 7th century AD, some chronicles suggest an often prestigious and revered status for them in ancient and medieval Persia.⁴ Achaemenid (550-331 BC) and Sassanid (224-650 AD) sources showcase the service of high-ranking commanders Pantea Arteshbod (559 BC) and Apranik (632 AD), and the brief reign of Queens Pourandokht and Azarmidokht over the vast Persian Empire.⁵ In this milieu, the intrinsic ideology of the predominant Zoroastrian faith

² The term “paradigm shift” is used by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in order to indicate change from one way of thinking to another. According to the author, transformations do not simply occur, but are rather induced and driven by agents of social change. Kuhn, T. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970 (1962) 10

³ Shuster, M.W. *The Strangling of Persia*. New York: The Century Co., 1912, 198-199

⁴ Brosius, M. *Women in Ancient Persia (559-331 BC)*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1996

⁵ Afshar, H. “Competing Interests: Democracy, Islamization, and Women Politicians in Iran,” in Afshar, H. (ed.) *Women and Fluid Identities: Strategic and Practical Pathways Selected by Women*. U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 172-173

accordingly reflected the equality of men and women, preserved in the divine “primal creation” of six immortal beings:

The sky, metal, and fire are male, and are never otherwise;
The water, earth, plants, and fish are female, and never otherwise;
The remaining creatures consist of male and female....⁶

“Education” during this period was strictly conceived as a ritual closely linked to the socialization process, with the family and community at large assuming the primary responsibility for the ethical and moral guidance of its youth.⁷

The Arab invasion of Persia significantly transformed the premise of egalitarian creeds, as Islam emphasized strengthening and safeguarding the family unit by assigning guardianship and authority to the male head of the household.⁸ The gradual decline of Zoroastrianism and the eventual penetration of the Muslim religion embellished many features of the social infrastructure with Islamic mores; entrusting the ulama (religious clergy) with the fundamental task of presiding over judicial, political, educational and social matters of the nation. The principal form of elementary tuition was the *maktab* system (Arabic for elementary schooling), institutions primarily funded by private contributions or religious foundations commonly affiliated with a mosque.⁹ Anchored in moral and sacred pedagogy, the instructional format

⁶ Mueller, F.M. *The Sacred Books of the East*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1880, 61

⁷ Arasteh, R. *Education and Social Awakening in Iran*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1962, 2-5

⁸ Frye, R. *The Golden Age of Persia*. London: Phoenix Press, 1975, 54-7; Frye, R. (ed.) *The Arab Conquest of Iran and its Aftermath: From the Arab Invasion to the Seljuqs* (The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 4), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 1-56

⁹ Arasteh, R. *Man and Society in Iran*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970, 23; Kolayi, J.R. “Foreign Education, the Women’s Press, and the Discourse of Scientific Domesticity in Early Twentieth-Century Iran,” in Keddie, N.R. and Mathee, R.P. (eds.) *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Politics*. Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 2002, 183.

among the middle and upper class urban youth, government officials and business owners were undertaken by a *maktab-dar* (instructor) with a limited curriculum centered on reading, writing, classical Persian prose, and basic knowledge of the Koran. The upper echelon commonly retained personal family *maktabs* for educating their own; resorting to the services provided by an in-house tutor (*mu'allim-i sari-khaneh* or *mirza*), commonly a lower ranking mullah (an educated Muslim trained in religious sciences) vested with the essential academic qualifications for undertaking this assignment.¹⁰ While conventional mores generally deprived young women of a formal education, the daughters of elite families received sporadic lessons through either paternal or private tutelage.¹¹ Individuals aspiring to advance their knowledge base were able to do so in a religious college or *madrassa*, focusing on theology, philosophy, literature and Arabic instruction. Given the unspecified nature of matriculation, the completion of studies remained the sole prerogative of the instructor who exclusively determined the duration of an intellectual journey.¹²

Despite the reigning presence of Islam, this predominant system in which women had limited opportunities was temporarily ameliorated during the 13th and 14th centuries through the presence of Turko-Mongol tribes, whose nomadic cultural tradition endowed women with rights and privileges beyond the order of confinement to the home.¹³

¹⁰ Arasteh, 1962, 6

¹¹ Sanasarian, E. *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement and Repression, From 1900 to Khomeini*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982, 12-13

¹² Daniel, E.L. *The History of Iran*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001, 77

¹³ Szuppe, M. "Status, Knowledge and Politics: Women in Sixteenth-Century Safavid Iran," in Nashat, G. & Beck, L. (eds.) *Women in Iran: From the Rise of Islam to 1800*. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982, 141

The ascension of the Safavid Dynasty (1501-1722) in the 16th century marked a significant milestone in the history of the nation. In their quest to deviate from a primarily Sunni tradition, Safavid monarchs imported ulama from Arab-speaking countries in order to enforce a juridical Shi'ite system.¹⁴ The declaration of Shiism as the official state religion undermined the spiritual protocol of the previous establishment and granted clerical authority over all affairs to the new order, this being a contractual necessity for legitimizing the ruling dynasty's claim of being the representatives of the Hidden Imam on earth.¹⁵ In this process, the interpretational policies of powerful Shi'ite theologian Shaykh ul-Islam Muhammad Baqer Majlisi (1616-1698) compiled in his manifesto *Oceans of Light (Bihar-al-Anwar)* "reoriented Twelver Shiism in the direction that it was to develop from his day on," effectively cultivating a clergy-state alliance and the foundational precepts of a patriarchal order including veiling, early marriage, polygamy and the seclusion of women.¹⁶

During this era, educational practices continued to reinforce the socialization of youth, with sacrosanct codification of practices that confined the female population to the household environs.¹⁷ In the late 18th century, the Qajars (1785-1925) sustained the dominant practices of their predecessors, which by then had become firmly embedded within the fabric of society. Iranian women remained in seclusion, crippled by entrenched mores and shackled to the writ of

¹⁴ Abisaab, R.J. *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire*. London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004; Newman, A.J. *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire*. London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006.

¹⁵ Keddie, N.R. *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981

¹⁶ Moojan, M. *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1985, 114; Turner, C. *Islam Without Allah? The Rise of Religious Externalism in Safavid Iran*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000, 148-179

¹⁷ Arasteh, 1962,15

divine legislation.¹⁸ While the early monarchs upheld clergy-state relations, the reign of Nasser al-Din Shah (1831-1896) witnessed the development of various factors leading to the Constitutional Revolution of 1906.¹⁹ Although conscientious in his religious responsibilities and obligations, the Shah's granting of foreign concessions to alleviate accrued deficits of an extravagant court accelerated the existing burdens already manufactured through a succession of defeats by Russian (1828) and British troops (1857).²⁰ While such new burdens by and large contributed to a stagnant appearance, Western penetration was instrumental in illuminating large-scale deficiencies of an undeveloped nation to a progressive constituency who embarked on arresting the destructive consequences of a deleterious status quo. Crown Prince Abbas Mirza (1789-1833), one of the earliest advocates of modernization and "possibly the only Qajar in the dynastic line devoted to self-strengthening reform," undertook numerous reforms during his governorship of Azarbaijan, including the dispatch of the first group of Iranian students for study abroad.²¹ The campaign for reform was additionally spearheaded by a handful of politicians and activists, including Mirza Malkom Khan (1833-1908), Seyyed Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897), and Prime Ministers Mirza Ali Khan Amin al-Dawla (1844-1904) and Mirza Taghi-Khan Amir Kabir (1807-1852), whose collective contributions included bureaucratic and military

¹⁸ Amanat, A. (ed.) *Taj Al-Saltaneh: Crowning Anguish. Memoirs of a Persian Princess*. Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2003.

¹⁹ Amanat, A. *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831-1896*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997; Cronin, S. *Iranian-Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions Since 1800*. London & New York: Routledge, 2013

²⁰ Keddie, 1981, 54; Zrinsky, M. "Reza Shah's Abrogation of Capitulation 1927-1928," in Cronin, S. (ed.) *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society Under Riza Shah*. London: Routledge, 2003, 81

²¹ Hunter, S.T. "Islam, Modernization and Democratization: The Case of Iran," in Hunter, S.T. and Malek, H. (eds.) *Modernization, Democracy and Islam*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2005, 259

reconstruction along western lines, and the inauguration of the *Dar al-Funun* (1851); the country's first secular educational institution of higher learning which combined technical and military instruction.²²

Under the auspices of this establishment, the translation of western books and the publication of Persian textbooks promoted a new trend contradictory to the traditional order.²³

Resistance to *Dar al-Funun*'s conception of a "modern" infrastructure came primarily from the clergy, who vehemently objected to any and all forms of education outside their jurisdiction. In order to lessen this opposition, the architects of this institution attempted to make amends by integrating prayer sessions into the curriculum, to no avail.²⁴

In retrospect the trajectory of developments highlighting the inception of enlightened change within the corridors of a guarded sanctuary were not exclusive to Iran. The pressure to modernize had already triggered the departure from a conventional social order among the nation's neighbors. The Ottoman Empire witnessed a comprehensive restructuring program through a series of modernizing initiatives entitled Tanzimat, accelerating the adoption of European practices and institutions including education, attire, and legal protocol.²⁵ Mustafa

²² Keddie, N.R. 1981, 63-72; Martin, V. *Islam and Modernism: The Iranian Revolution of 1906*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1989, 6; Akhavi, S. *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980, 32-33; Ekhtiar, M. *Modern Science, Education and Reform in Qajar Iran: The Dar al-Funun*. RoutledgeCurzon, 2003

²³ Keddie, 1981, 53-54

²⁴ Menashri, D. *Education and the Making of Modern Iran*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1992, 56

²⁵ Quataret, D. *The Ottoman Empire 1700-1922*. 2nd edition, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005; Fortna, B.C. *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2000; Evered, E.O. *Empire and Education Under the Ottomans: Politics, Reform and Resistance from the Tanzimat to the Young Turks*. London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012

Kemal Ataturk (1881-1938), founder of the Republic of Turkey, further transformed the empire into a modern nation-state through a succession of radical and ambitious changes, featuring the emancipation of the Muslim woman.²⁶ On Iran's other borders, King Amanullah of Afghanistan (1919 -1929) favored reforms that included the inauguration of secular schooling, a ban on child marriage, and discouragement of the veil.²⁷

The task of reforming iniquitous gender practices in Iran can be traced to the infamous Babi theologian Qurrat al-‘Ayn, also known as Tahirah (1817-1852), whose imprisonment and death for brazenly defying societal customs by appearing unveiled in public is perhaps all too ominous of a defect whose ripple effects continue to contaminate the soul of Iran. Venerated as the “first suffrage martyr,” the pioneering spirit of this heroine is hauntingly captured in a final rendition prior to her strangulation with a silk scarf: “You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women.”²⁸

In Iran, the Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911) implanted the embryonic stages of a women's movement amidst a cataclysmic upheaval and austere environment. Although the victory of the constitutionalists led by an alliance of service nobility, enlightened clergy and merchants against the coalition of an orthodox establishment, entitled aristocracy and prodigal monarchy dislodged the major pillars of a failing regime, it proved unable to dismantle the

²⁶ Mango, A. *Ataturk: The Biography of the Founder of Modern Turkey*. New York: Overlook Press, 1999; Kinross, P. *Ataturk: The Rebirth of a Nation*. London: Phoenix, 2001

²⁷ Nawid, S.K. *Religious Response to Social Change in Afghanistan 1919-29: King Amanullah and the Afghan Ulama*. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1999

²⁸ Effendi, S. *God Passes By*. Illinois: Bahai Publishing Trust, 1971, 75; Mottahedeh, N. “The Mutilated Body of the Modern Nation: Qurrat al-‘Ayn Tahirah's Unveiling and the Iranian Massacre of the Babi's,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia and the Middle East* (1998), 8.2, 38-50

ancient edifice altogether.²⁹ Despite the inadequate nature of the constitutionalist triumph, Abbas Amanat stipulates that the execution and assassination of leading religious figures, including Shaykh Fazlollah Nuri and Seyyed Abdollah Behbahani effectively “signaled the ulama’s political insolvency.”³⁰ Undoubtedly, the dawn of this era precipitated a gradual awakening among a minority group of women, who courageously began to challenge institutionalized customs despite fierce opposition from the masses and devout authority figures.

In the harrowing decade that ensued, the anguished voices of early critics, including Nasser al-Din Shah’s daughter Taj al-Saltaneh (1884-1936) and Bibi Khanum Astarabadi (1858-1921) planted the seeds of a new consciousness. Raised in her father’s harem, Taj’s desperate recital contained in her memoir, appraises the abysmal outlook of women restrained by the bonds of tradition:

Alas Persian women have been set aside from humankind and placed together with cattle and beasts. They live their entire lives of desperation in prison, crushed under the weight of bitter ordeals...³¹

Bibi Khanum, a pioneering figure of the early movement valiantly produced *The Vices of Men* (*Ma’ayeb al-Rejal*) as a critical response to the anonymous *The Education of Women* (*Ta’di al-Nesvan*).³² Considered to be the first declaration of women’s rights in the history of modern Iran, the document furnished a penetrating yet satirical rejoinder to the “nonsensical argument” outlining the slavish subservience of women:

²⁹ Kasravi, A. *History of the Constitutional Revolution*. (Translated by E. Seigel.) Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2006; Bayat, M. *Iran’s First Revolution: Shiism and The Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991

³⁰ Amanat, A. 2003, 71

³¹ Amanat, A. 2003, 201

³² Javadi, H. & Floor, W. *The Education of Women and the Vices of Men: Two Qajar Tracts*. (Translated from Persian.) New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010

When I perused these pages... I found that the author has put forth an unrealistic criticism, senseless and more biting than the thorn of a thistle aimed at women, I did not like the book; I threw it aside... I wrote a book in answer to this evil-natured man, so that men would know that among women there are still those who are of high standing and whose force of speech may benefit from their eloquence.³³

Her audacious delivery even extended to Muhammad Baqer Majlisi, "...the great Shi'ite theologian [who] even makes the teaching of the Koran to girls subject to censorship, leaving out the amorous story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife..."³⁴

While this premature crusade was disjointed and characterized by independent activities undertaken by women primarily raised in upper middle class and upper class families in the capital city of Tehran, it nevertheless set an important precedent against blind obedience of an imposed social order and proclaimed the vital necessity of combating this affliction through education. The words of one of today's prominent women's rights advocates, Guity Nashat, poignantly illustrates the strictly apolitical nature of women's demands:

Many of the women's activists have reached this conclusion, realizing that the greatest obstacle to removing the injustices from which women suffered was their ignorance,.... Devoting their energies to enlightening Iranian women, they began their efforts by opening schools, and hoped that a good education would teach the younger generation of women to use their minds and not waste their intelligence in the pursuit of men.³⁵

³³ Ibid, 64-65

³⁴ Ibid, 134

³⁵ Nashat, G. *Women and Revolution in Iran*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983, 23; Sanasarian, E. "Characteristics of the Women's Movement in Iran," in Fathi, A. (ed.) *Women and the Family in Iran*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985, 86-105

The inception phase of this enlightenment, beginning with women's participation in the defeat of the Tobacco Concession granted to Great Britain (1891-1892), and continuing with the nationalist struggle, created momentum for defiance against the embedded social order.³⁶

Despite this inaugural call for reform, the inferior status of women continued to be enshrined in the 1906 Constitution, which classified them under the same banner as “fraudulent, bankrupt, beggars, and all those who earn their living in a disreputable way...”³⁷ In 1911, the Speaker of the House, Shaykh Assadollah, justified this decree in the following way:

The reason for excluding women is that God has not given them the capacity for taking part in politics and electing the representation of this nation. [They are] the weaker sex, and do not have the same power of judgment that men have...³⁸

Operating against the tide of conventional customs, a handful of women founded schools for girls, women's organization and periodicals advocating their awakening after centuries of dormancy.³⁹ Morgan Shuster provides an exquisite and compassionate comment on the steadfast valor of women in the “social regeneration” of their country:

The Persian women since 1907 had become almost at a bound the most progressive, not to say radical in the world... Veiled with little or no experience,... women who had overnight become teachers, newspaper writers and founders of women's clubs. That this statement upsets centuries makes no difference. It is the fact.⁴⁰

³⁶ Bayat-Philip, M. “Women and Revolution in Iran, 1905-1911,” in Beck, L. & Keddie, N. (eds.) *Women in the Muslim World*. Cambridge, MA & London, England: Harvard University Press, 1978, 295-308; Afary, J. *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origins of Feminism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1966

³⁷ Haeri, S. “Women, Law and Social Change in Iran,” in Smith, J.I. (ed.) *Contemporary Muslim Societies*. Lewisberg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1980, 219

³⁸ Bayat-Philip, M. 1978, 301

³⁹ Bayat-Philip, M. 1991, 43

⁴⁰ Shuster, M. 1912, 191-193

In the rudimentary stages of their quest for autonomy, the new women's publications in Tehran, including *Danesh* (Knowledge, 1910) by Mrs. Kahal and *Shokoufeh* (Blossom, 1913) edited by Maryam Amid Mozayyen ol-Saltaneh, along with *Zaban-e Zanan* (Women's Voice, 1919) published in Isfahan by Sadiqeh Dowlatabadi, tirelessly campaigned for reform in academia and openly condemned the practice of early marriage and enforced veiling.⁴¹

Such radical assertions, viewed as flagrant violations of an ordained order, threatened the pillars of Islamic morality; prompting riots, threats, and at times even arrest and imprisonment. Despite such stringent repercussions, women obstinately persisted with the task at hand. *Nameh-ye Banovan* (Women's Letter, 1920), edited by Shahnaz Azad, ceased publication after merely three days, presumably for publishing the following statement in its inaugural issue:

The shroud of superstition and traditional confinement have blocked the vision of men and women in this country...⁴²

The magazine was permitted back on the scene only after it acquiesced to printing a retraction clarifying that the word "shroud" did not in any way symbolize the veil. Nevertheless, Azad and her husband were routinely harassed, arrested and even imprisoned until the magazine was shut down. Another well-known periodical, *Jahan-e Zanan* (Women's World, 1921) published by Afagh Parsa in Mashhad, faced such tremendous hostility that it was forced to close.

While most periodicals had a short life, *Alam-e Nesvan* (Women's Universe), published in Tehran (1920-1934) was possibly the longest running of its kind due to its close affiliation with the Association of the American Girls School (1914). Edited by an Iranian graduate of the school, it deliberated on a variety of issues including the value of acquired knowledge, health

⁴¹ Sanasarian, E. 1982, 32

⁴² Ibid, 33-34

and literacy. Most surprising was its ability to produce articles on the international woman's movement, a fact that captured the attention of Clara Rice, a British missionary visiting Iran who noticed this "most interesting feature," and wondered how "scraps of news concerning women in England were got hold of, translated and inserted [in the paper]."⁴³

The inauguration of schools for girls constituted yet another ambitious motion against the backdrop of virulent antagonism. Prior to the Constitutional Revolution, such institutions were exclusively foreign establishments. Educational activity had initially flourished in the early to mid-19th century, when missionaries founded and operated separate schools for boys and girls in Tehran and its surrounding provinces.⁴⁴ The first mission school was established in Tabriz in 1830. This was followed in 1836 when missionaries from the American Presbyterian Church headed by Reverend Justin Perkins opened schools in Urmia (Rezayieh); later expanding to neighboring regions with the Iran Bethel School for girls (1874) and what later became known as the Alborz College for boys in Tehran (1875).⁴⁵

The curriculum of these schools differed significantly from the traditional maktab system; with the boys' studies consisting of religion, literature, science, and English, later

⁴³ Amanat, A. 2003, 69

⁴⁴ Shahvar, S. *The Forgotten Schools: The Baha'is and Modern Education in Iran, 1899-1934*. London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009

⁴⁵ Perkins, H.M. *Life of Reverend Justin Perkins: Pioneer Missionary to Persia*. Chicago: World Presbyterian Board of Missions, 1887; Zirinsky, M. "A Presbyterian Vocation to Reform Gender Relations in Iran: The Career of Annie Stocking Boyce," in Ansari, S. & Martin, V. (eds.) *Women, Religion and Culture in Iran*. London & New York: Routledge, 2002, 51-69; Kashani-Sabet, F. *Conceiving Citizens: Women and the Politics of Motherhood in Iran*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 137

expanded to include mathematics, history and geography. The girls program combined religious studies with reading, writing and household skills.⁴⁶

The accomplishment of the American Protestant missions inspired the British, Anglican, French Catholic, and Russian Orthodox churches to dispatch their own missionaries. *Les Filles de la Charité* (Daughters of Charity, 1856), French Lazarists (1875), and *Alliance Israelite Universelle* (1899) opened establishments for boys and girls.⁴⁷

However, it was not until 1896 that a government decree allowed Muslim girls to attend these schools alongside Christians, Jews, and Armenian young women.⁴⁸

The early part of the 20th century witnessed a daring venture into academia by a host of intellectually oriented women who began to open schools for Muslim girls in Tehran. In 1906, Bibi Khanum Astarabadi founded the School for Girls (*Madreseh-ye Dooshizegan*) and in 1907 Touba Azmudeh inaugurated *Namus*. The Effatiyeh School (1910), established by Safiyeh Yazdi and Tarraqi School (1911) by Mahrokh Gowharshenas added to this picture.⁴⁹ Labeled by clerics as “centers for prostitution,” those attending faced various forms of hostility, leading concerned parents to resort to home schooling instead.⁵⁰ Despite such adverse consequences, the women’s movement forged ahead as advocates and their male counterparts continued to subsidize this radical endeavor.

⁴⁶ Shahvar, S. 2009, 28-35

⁴⁷ Ibid., 2009, 35-40

⁴⁸ Sanasarian, E. 1982, 39

⁴⁹ Shahvar, S. 2009, 56; Javadi, H. & Floor, W. 2010, xxiii; Paidar, P. *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 69, 71

⁵⁰ Afary, J. 1996, 10; Martin, V. 1989, 3

In 1918, Sadiqeh Dowlatabadi, whose father was the leader of the Babi community, opened the first school for girls in Isfahan, which was forced to close after three months. In 1922, Sadiqeh moved to Paris, where she studied at the Sorbonne, participated in the International Women's Conference, and wrote articles for European women's publications.⁵¹

Upon her return in 1927, she boldly appeared unveiled on the streets of Tehran. A venerated crusader until the end, Sadiqeh avowed on her deathbed "I will never forgive anyone who visits my grave veiled."⁵²

A vital aspect of this arduous process underscores the relevance of the persecuted Bahai community and their importance in promoting the education of young women. An intrinsic component of this belief system was its egalitarian premise and the pursuit of knowledge for all individuals regardless of gender. The abatement of restrictions towards this sect in the latter part of the 19th century prompted the establishment of a number of semi-official Baha'i schools for girls, including the well-known Tarbiyat School.⁵³

As early as 1906, the creation of women's societies (*anjomans*) became yet another instrumental avenue for deliberating and disseminating a new order. The Women's Freedom Society (*Anjoman-e Azadi-ye Zanan*, 1906), National Ladies Society (*Anjoman-e Mokhadarat-e Vatan*, 1910), and the Patriotic Women's League (*Jamiat-e Nesvan-e Vatankhah*, 1922), which also produced the magazine *Patriotic Women*, edited by Mohtaram Eskandar, were among the prominent organizations of the day.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Afary, J. 1996, 187

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Shavar, S. 2009, 46-49

⁵⁴ Sanasarian, E. 1982, 35-36; Paidar, P. 1995, 95-97

Historical accounts have additionally documented the existence of numerous clandestine societies launched and operated by women during this period:

It was well known in Tehran that there were dozens of more or less secret societies among the Persian women, with a central organization by which they were controlled. To this day I know neither the names nor the faces of the leaders of this group, but in one hundred different ways I learned from time to time that I was being aided and supported by the patriotic fervor of thousands of the weaker sex.⁵⁵

Despite the burdensome travails and unwavering dedication of resolute individuals, the overriding religious and cultural majority persevered in maintaining the status of women “behind the veil of doors, behind the curtain indoors, left out of every social function, public or private, in which men play any part, they were seldom educated, trusted, valued or respected.”⁵⁶

The coup d’etat of 1921 brought a relatively unknown commander in the Persian Cossack Brigade into this convoluted drama, leading to the deposition of Ahmad Shah, the last of the Qajar dynasty and the establishment of the Pahlavi monarchy (1925-1979). On the eve of Reza Shah’s rise to power, the country’s education system was manifestly inadequate and deference to religious codes of conduct persisted in blighting the position of women in Iran.⁵⁷ The discovery of oil in the early 20th century added considerably to the economy, enabling the inauguration of numerous socio-economic and structural enhancements. The first decade of Pahlavi rule witnessed the abrogation of treaties, dilution of British and Russian power, execution of drastic reforms including secularization and centralization, development of education along western

⁵⁵ Shuster, M. 1912, 193

⁵⁶ Colliver, Clara Rice. *Persian Women and their Ways*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1923, 38

⁵⁷ Cronin, S. (ed.) *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society Under Reza Shah, 1921-1941*. London & New York: Routledge, 2003

lines and expansion of women's role in society.⁵⁸ A fundamental component of the regime's monumental task of departing from ingrained custom was the restructuring of education, a measure deliberately aimed at fostering national identity and facilitating an unprecedented excursion into new territory through the "adoption of... western technological achievements and the selective borrowing of some western cultural values, [as well as] social, economic and political institutions."⁵⁹ The most challenging and controversial feature in founding a modern education system centered on women, viewed as pivotal to emancipating half of the nation's population who continued to be bound and shrouded by the veil of ignorance. Due to the expansive landscape of modifications undertaken in this arena, discussion of this topic will primarily focus on the essential ingredients fueling and cultivating a counter ideology after centuries of traditional domination.

Despite the rise of new schools during the previous era, illiteracy was rampant. Educational measures from the constitutional epoch, including the 1906 Education Act providing free and compulsory education through the 6th grade, the inauguration of a Ministry of Education (1910) replacing the 1898 Council for National Schools, the proliferation of public schooling, and the 1911 enactment of the Fundamental Law of Education by the Parliament (*Majlis*), terminated a cycle of indulgence that had enabled anyone to establish a school but had failed to generate lasting improvements in this sector. With Reza Shah's ascension to the throne, a mere 50,000 students were collectively matriculated in state-run and private institutions, the 1906 Education Act remained unenforced, state regulations for instructor qualification were practically non-existent, the antiquated maktab system continued to prevail, and higher education was

⁵⁸ Lenczowski, G. (ed.) *Iran Under the Pahlavis*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1978; Arasteh, R. 1970, 104-105

⁵⁹ Menashri, D. 1992, 90

significantly underdeveloped, with a mere 15 students graduating from the *Dar al-Funun* by 1922.⁶⁰ Between 1921 and 1941 drastic reforms under centralized policies of the Ministry of Education resulted in a revised and uniform syllabus for all public and private institutions, with standardized textbooks for boys and girls designed to reflect the overriding objective.⁶¹ The necessity to implant a solid foundation accelerated the launch of a six year elementary program, with a new curriculum for boys consisting of Persian (reading, writing, composition, spelling, and grammar), religious instruction, arithmetic, civics, physical education, history and elementary Arabic (terminated in 1930 when it was added to the secondary level). The girls had a less rigorous schedule augmented by sewing and drawing.⁶² In 1928 adjustments based on the French Lycee system were implemented in the high school curriculum, comprising of an initial cycle of three years followed by an additional three years for boys and two years for girls.⁶³ In 1939 modifications at this level specified five years of general and one year of specialized instruction. All foreign-operated schools were officially nationalized and required to adhere to the curriculum authorized by the Ministry, with Persian as the main language of instruction at the lower level and removal of all international monikers.⁶⁴ By 1935, against what appeared to be an unrelenting cycle of prejudice, an official decree by the Ministry led to the increased presence of young women in academia. The inauguration of new schools for girls, introduction of several coeducational facilities, a Teacher Training College, extension of primary schooling, and

⁶⁰ Sadiq, I. *Modern Persia and Her Educational System*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1931; Banani, A. *The Modernization of Iran, 1921-1941*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1961

⁶¹ Sadiq, I. 1931, 53; Banani, A. 1961, 94-95

⁶² Sadiq, I. 1931, 57-58

⁶³ Arasteh, A. 1962, 65

⁶⁴ Mathee, R. "Transforming Dangerous Nomads into Useful Artisans, Technicians, and Agriculturalists: Education in the Reza Shah Period," in Cronin, S. (ed.) 2003, 126-133

technical and vocational institutions were instrumental in accommodating this daunting transition.⁶⁵ In the same year, women were admitted for the first time to the newly established Tehran Teachers College, and within a year of its inception to the University of Tehran (1935).⁶⁶ In what constituted a cutting-edge assignment, Isa Sadiq, founding member of the University of Tehran and possibly the most influential reformer in 20th century Iran, declared:

The education for girls is an important duty (“vazife”) of the government which is likely to launch Iran on the path to westernization and progress (“tarraqi”).⁶⁷

While in 1910, there were approximately 3,500 young women matriculated in the existing schools, by 1930, they comprised 35,000 of the 150,000 students in all elementary and secondary schools throughout the country.⁶⁸ With respect to this prodigious development it becomes imperative to clarify that the majority of new schools were concentrated in urban areas, and while rural areas were, for lack of a better term, “overlooked,” impediments to remedying this were largely dictated by the lack of transportation and teacher reluctance to venture into remote areas of the country.⁶⁹

The gradual domination of educational institutions by the state, and the laws delineating strict prerequisites in opening new maktab schools led to a drastic reduction of such facilities and further loosened the reins of the clergy in this department.⁷⁰ An important notation in the overall scheme of the regime’s desire to foster national identity through education discloses a

⁶⁵ Elwell-Sutton, L.P. *Modern Iran*. London: Routledge, 1944, 139; Szyliowicz, J.S. *Education and Modernization in the Middle East*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1973, 177

⁶⁶ Banani, A. 1961, 95

⁶⁷ Sadiq, I. 1931, 115-116

⁶⁸ Mathee, R. 2003, 128

⁶⁹ Szyliowicz, J.S. 1973, Appendix B, 466

⁷⁰ Mathee, R. 2003, 133

contradiction. The enormous burden of launching, developing and expanding the planned infrastructure eventually brought to the forefront the necessity to import consultants and educators from predominantly European nations. Once again this led to an influx of schools run by foreign nationals. Given this conflict of interest, Reza Shah was reluctantly forced to accommodate expertise over his preference for excluding foreigners.⁷¹

As part of the country's growing need for skilled manpower, the practice of sending students abroad was bolstered by a government decree requiring the Ministry to dispatch a minimum number annually to Europe and the United States. During this period, a total of 640 students, out of which 50 were young women, engaged in a variety of fields abroad. However, not one of these ladies was Muslim.⁷²

Perhaps the regime's most drastic measure was the 1935 abolition of the veil, viewed as a fundamental prerequisite in facilitating female entrance into modern society. Reza Shah supported this controversial directive in declaring:

Because of our women's custom to wear the veil, due to this ignorance and illiteracy, the Europeans have always taunted and despised us. Discarding the veil and educating women would change that.⁷³

Accompanying this decree was a motion banning the chador (a kind of ankle-length shroud) in all schools, punishable by withholding diplomas and/or salaries for all pupils and instructors.⁷⁴

With the promulgation of this law, Iran became the second Muslim nation preceded only by

⁷¹ Ibid., 129-136

⁷² Menashri, D. 1992, 125-130

⁷³ Ibid., 108

⁷⁴ Woodsmall, R.F. *Muslim Women Enter a New World*. New York: Round Table Press, 1936, 47

Turkey, to officially ban the veil.⁷⁵ However, modesty and cultural prejudice prevented most conservative families from allowing their daughters to acquire an education in this newly liberated atmosphere.⁷⁶ Coercive tactics employed to ensure conformity with the state's official unveiling crusade further prevented this sector from participating in this new atmosphere.⁷⁷

In her memoir, Reza Shah's daughter, Ashraf Pahlavi, expounds on the underlying principle of her father's desire to discard this garment:

[He was] determined to westernize Persia... to bring it into the twentieth century... To do this, to make us prosperous and powerful, he could not afford to leave out women, half of Persia's population, inactive, covered.⁷⁸

Her recollections further disclose the agonizing decision of her father when he requested that his wife and daughter appear unveiled at the 1936 graduation ceremony of the women's Teacher Training College in Tehran:

This is the hardest thing I have ever had to do, but I must ask you to serve as an example for other Persian Women.⁷⁹

Authors Houshang Chehabi and Camron Michael Amin maintain that while "reaction to the state's coercive measures differed from class to class and from region to region," unveiling

⁷⁵ Pahlavi, M.R. *Mission for My Country*. London: Hutchison & Co., 1960, 231; Feldman, Noah *After Jihad: America and the Struggle for Islamic Democracy*. U.S.A. & Canada: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2004, 104

⁷⁶ Chehabi, H.E. "The Banning of the Veil and its Consequences," in Cronin, S. (ed.) *The Making of a Modern Iran: State and Society Under Reza Shah, 1921-1941*. London & New York: Routledge, 2003, 205

⁷⁷ Ibid, 198

⁷⁸ Pahlavi, A. *Faces in a Mirror: Memoirs From Exile*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall 1980, 24-25

⁷⁹ Ibid.

became “in the minds of many Iranians, the point of the women’s awakening and the cause of their resentment toward Reza Shah.”⁸⁰

Consequently, beholden to a stifling lifestyle, many women were forced to rely on their fathers, husbands, and sons while remaining secluded in the private domain.

Intensifying matters further were objections from the orthodox establishment against the state’s campaign for literacy and the enfranchisement of women, prompting the Speaker of the Parliament to declare:

Women’s studies should be in line with the tasks they are supposed to perform in society. We must ask why do we send girls to school? The answer is to enable them to take better care of their children, be better housekeepers... Why do girls have to learn mathematics? We should teach them cooking and sewing instead.⁸¹

Exacerbating matters were the introduction of legal codes based on European models. The enactment of the Marriage Law of 1931 (*Qanun-e Ezdevaj*) mandated compulsory registration of marriage and divorce in state notary offices and an increase in minimum marriage age from 13 to 15 years, all of which limited the jurisdiction of the clergy in the judicial domain.⁸² The execution of such revolutionary measures and the distinctly adverse consequences that resulted, led author Nikki Keddie to stipulate that “rapid modernization from above helped create two cultures in Iran, which became more acute in later decades.”⁸³

⁸⁰ Chehabi, H. 2003, 202; Amin, C.M. *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman: Gender, State Policy, and Popular Culture, 1865-1946*. Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 2002, 81

⁸¹ Menashri, D. 1992, 109

⁸² Mahdavi, S. “Reza Shah Pahlavi and Women,” in Cronin, S. 2003, 184; Amin, C.M. 2002, 129

⁸³ Keddie, N.R. *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003, 102

In the evaluation of inherently extremist policies, historians have maintained diverse viewpoints, with some questioning Reza Shah's religious proclivity and others rationalizing his endeavors as simply a vehement desire to desecrate a venerable yet obsolete order.⁸⁴

From an entirely different perspective, authors Shireen Mahdavi and David Menashri put forth a contrarian approach which underscores an entirely plausible assumption. Mahdavi estimates that like such venerated enlightened intellectuals as al-Afghani, Reza Shah envisioned an intrinsic compatibility of Islam with progressive conventions, while Menashri argues that the monarch appeared "more anti-clerical than anti-Islamic, but [that] such a distinction is alien to Islam, which rejects the sacredness of the temporal and the spiritual. This [in turn] implied reducing the influence of the ulama in all spheres of life and confining them to matters of faith and ritual, similar to that customary in the Christian West at the time."⁸⁵

Reza Shah's son and successor, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, authenticates the nature of this supposition in confirming that although his father "never advocated a complete break with the past, he pushed the clergy into the background because at the time many of them were hindering the country's progress."⁸⁶ However, the extensive initiatives of this era were predominantly embraced by a constituency of upper class women and reform-minded intelligentsia, while proving difficult and perhaps to some extent even unattainable for sheltered traditional women.⁸⁷ In this scenario, Eliz Sanasarian notes the difficulty in "preaching equal rights to a female

⁸⁴ Akhavi, S. 1980, 40-59; Kinzer, S. *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2008, 43; Algar, H. *Roots of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*. Oneonta, New York: Islamic Publications International, 2001, 53

⁸⁵ Mahdavi, S. in Cronin, S. (ed.) 2003, 189; Menashri, D. 1992, 90, 100

⁸⁶ Pahlavi, M.R. 1960, 47

⁸⁷ Nashat, G. "Women in Pre-Revolutionary Iran," in Nashat, G. (ed.) *Women and Revolution in Iran*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983, 28-29

population with an illiteracy rate of 95%,” while Azar Tabari provides a synopsis of an emerging shadow leading to acutely dichotomous trends in Iranian society:

The professional women of the 1920’s and 1930’s were mostly from the upper middle class.... [They] largely accepted and adapted to the changes and secularization imposed by Reza Shah. [They] emerged from the social layers that identified with general notions of social progress and modernization associated with European civilization and endorsed by the modernists and reformers of the Constitutionalist movement...⁸⁸

In elucidating the course of events, Reza Arasteh recites the poignant case of an authority figure who wished to remain anonymous:

Paradoxically, the modernization of Persia was accomplished by a man who could hardly be called cultured — a man who recognized his own limitations by insisting that he was just a soldier. Unlike the upper class Persian, he did not feel the spell of many centuries of civilization; free of the fetters of the past, he could institute reforms and thrust obstacles aside with ruthlessness and rude vigor... eradicating usages and practices that had seemed part of the very issue of Persian life. He transformed institutions and uprooted convictions which had been held sacred.⁸⁹

A number of independent women’s publications continued to flourish in the immediate aftermath of Reza Shah’s rise to power, with *Alam-e Nesvan* (1920-1934) serving as the frontrunner in supporting the state’s female agenda:

Are we aware that whenever they want to, men can throw their wives out of the house? Are we aware that women’s illiteracy, lack of knowledge, and superstitions are harmful to society, the country, and the family? Do we know that in villages people illegally marry off a ten-year-old girl to a sixty-year-old man? Today, we have a government that listens to sensible argument and protects women and children.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Sanasarian, E. 1982, 70; Tabari, A. “The Enigma of the Veiled Iranian Woman,” *MERIP Report*, Feb. 1982, 24

⁸⁹ Arasteh, A. 1970, 103

⁹⁰ Rostami-Kolayi, J. “Expanding Agendas for the New Iranian Woman,” in Cronin, S. (ed.) 2003, 157-159

Throughout its years in operation, *Alam* outlined various “respected” professions well suited for the unveiled woman, along with a plethora of European archetypes as sources of emulation. A bi-monthly publication with a semi-independent status, it was the longest running women’s journal until it was abruptly terminated in 1934 for unspecified reasons. Over the years, there have been a variety of speculations regarding the closure of this magazine, with a final verdict leaning in the direction of an article published in 1933, one that perhaps all too ominously denounced the unveiling of women as a superficial emblem of emancipation:

A group of people including myself believe that the removal of the chador [veil] will not create freedom nor will hejab [veil] prevent moral corruption...⁹¹

In fact, once Reza Shah was firmly in power, all women’s independent activities were curbed and by royal command directed and regulated into a single organization. In 1935 *Kanoon Banovan* (Ladies Center) became the primary vehicle in fortifying the underpinnings of the regime’s preferred image for the “modern” Iranian woman. In 1937 Sadiqeh Dowlatabadi was appointed president of this organization, though with Reza Shah’s abdication in 1941, it began to decline amidst the receding tide of his administration.⁹² Paradoxically, the women’s movement that had gained momentum in the dawn of the century declined on numerous fronts with the advent of the Pahlavi monarchy, and while the early crusade did in fact suffer from a lack of cohesion and was scattered among a cluster of upper class women, Reza Shah’s appearance ultimately marked the conclusion of all autonomous initiatives in this newly burgeoning atmosphere.

⁹¹ Ibid., 169

⁹² Sanasarian, E. 1982, 67-71

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1941-1979) came to power after the invasion of allied forces during World War II and continued “the vigorous reform program inaugurated by his father.”⁹³

In reality, the reforms of the preceding leadership had primarily impacted the urban sector, with a predominantly cultured and privileged few capitalizing on the new employment and educational opportunities. While such developments were for all intents and purposes invisible to the more conservative strata, they amassed resentment towards a ruling regime perceived as obstructing the sacred codes of Islamic mores.

With Reza Shah’s departure, a nominal 1% of Iran’s entire population were matriculated in elementary schools, and aside from the problems already mentioned, a multitude of additional factors handicapped educational progress among a rural community spread over 50,000 villages. The pursuit of knowledge did not constitute a priority as parents continued to view their children as part of the family’s work force. Geographical hindrances, the lack of transportation and modern amenities, and the shortage of instructors intensified by economic insufficiencies became insurmountable obstacles over the short duration of Reza Shah’s rule.⁹⁴ The spirit of building on the footsteps of an inherited platform persisted with an equally ambitious heir whose extraordinary reign was characterized by rapid urbanization, banning of the Communist Tudeh Party, nationalization of Iranian oil, development of a modern military, expansion of the existing educational infrastructure, and considerable emphasis on reforms for women.⁹⁵ The devastation of the war years had driven the Shah to seek assistance from the U.S., which as part of the allied

⁹³ Pahlavi, M.R. 1960, 255

⁹⁴ Menashri, D. 1992, 178-182

⁹⁵ Lenczowski, G. 1978; Kinzer, S. 2008; Ansari, A.M. *Modern Iran Since 1921: The Pahlavis and After*. London & New York: Pearson Education Limited, 2003; Abrahamian, E. *A History of Modern Iran*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008

war effort had begun to take on a more active role in alleviating the ravages of a damaged nation. The post-war phase resulted in the temporary revival of British involvement in Iran which had significantly subsided during the previous reign, leading to assistance by the governments of both countries in resurrecting Iran's faltering economy.⁹⁶ Over the next decade, U.S. involvement surpassed the British as the 1941 Lend-Lease Act and the 1949 Point Four Program provided aid and technical support mainly in agriculture, public health, and education through contacts with U.S. business and educational institutions.⁹⁷ A fundamental component of this program entailed "participant training" which allowed foreign nationals to receive advanced preparation abroad. The bulk of this instruction took place in the United States, enabling colleges and universities who held assistance contracts to provide overseas administrative and social instruction.⁹⁸ In subscribing to the principle that "all modernizing nations need a plan of action," the regime resorted to the services provided by American consultants in the "formulation" and "launching" of the country's First Seven-Year Plan (1948-1955).⁹⁹ The plan, which covered

⁹⁶ Pahlavi, M.R. 1960, 79-81

⁹⁷ The Lend-Lease Act, a proposed plan passed in March 11, 1941, allowed the United States to provide needed supplies to any country whose security was vital to its defense. For a detailed description of this plan, consult Rubin, B. *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience in Iran*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980. In 1949, President Truman proposed a worldwide policy of economic aid and technical assistance for underprivileged nations, which came to be known as The Point Four Program. For a more concise documentation refer to Warne, W.E. *Mission for Peace: Point 4 in Iran*. USA: Ibex, 1999

⁹⁸ Ruttan, V. *U.S. Development Assistance Policy: The Domestic Policies of Foreign Economic Aid*. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996; Butterfield, S.H. *U.S. Development Aid — An Historic First: Achievement and Failures in the Twentieth Century*. Westport, CT & London: Praeger Publishers, 2004

⁹⁹ Pahlavi, M.R. 1960, 89, 138, 181. The history of development planning in Iran dates back to the mid-1920s, when Reza Shah's government formulated its industrialization policy mainly with contributions from the British Anglo-Iranian Oil Co. (AIOC). The plan was ambiguous, with narrow focus on the public sector and inadequate enumeration of concrete policy objectives. Development projects came to a standstill with the Allied invasion and occupation of Iran (1941) and the subsequent abdication of Reza Shah. "Actual" planning in Iran began in 1948, when the

every field including programs in health, agriculture, education, mining, and oil production was an instant “failure,” due to the shortage of funds, administrative constraints, and political disruptions stemming from the Mossadeq era.¹⁰⁰

With the gradual rise in oil revenues, the government embarked on implementing the Second Seven-Year Plan (1955-1962), which once again proved ineffective due to its “vagueness” and “absence of specific time-targets.”¹⁰¹ In 1957, a “planning unit” supported by the Harvard Advisory Group was incorporated within the Plan Organization, leading to the country’s Third National Development Plan (1962-1968). This plan combined investment programs with forecasts in the public and private sector and specific tasks for ministerial and government agencies, in addition to a twenty-year collaborative program with international experts providing specialized attention in the field of education.¹⁰² In the Fourth National Development Plan (1968-1972), qualitative enhancements and structural changes outlined in the “principles” and “objectives” of education specified compatibility of this infrastructure with

government of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi began to rebuild and expand its industries through the initiation of two consecutive seven-year cycles. For a more detailed summary, consult: Looney, R. “Origins of Pre-Revolutionary Development Strategy,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 1986, Vol. 22, No. 1, 104-119, and Daftary, F. “Development Planning in Iran: A Historical Survey,” *Iranian Studies*, 6:4, 176-228

¹⁰⁰ Pahlavi, M.R. 1960, 138-139. Mohammad Mossadegh was the democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran (1951-1953) who was overthrown in the 1953 MI6 and CIA orchestrated coup d’etat. For additional details on the Mossadegh era, consult: Gaslorowski, J. & Byrne, M. *Mohammad Mossadegh and the 1953 Coup in Iran*. Syracuse & New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004

¹⁰¹ Pahlavi, M.R. 1960, 181

¹⁰² Bostick, F. & Jones, G. *Planning and Power in Iran: Ebtehaj and Economic Development Under the Shah*. England: Frank Cass & Co., 1987, 122, 143; Baldwin, G. *Planning and Development in Iran*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967, viii, 50; Third National Development Plan (1962-1968), Plan Organization. Tehran: Office Press Inc.

“modern scientific and educational progress and the requirements of modern times.”¹⁰³ A significant component of this agenda entailed specialized teacher training programs for girls, specifically since “the total number of girls in Iranian schools did not exceed 1/3 of the total number of pupils.” It effectively led to reduced illiteracy and an increase in the number of students at the primary and secondary levels.¹⁰⁴ The Pahlavi era’s Fifth and final National Development Plan (1973-1978), enacted during a decade when the quadrupling of oil prices amplified the scope of educational and social development including “trained manpower, equalizing opportunities between the rich and poor, raising the levels of female education, and expanding research to eradicate illiteracy,” along with a forecasted projection of a “Sixth Plan,” for “increasing the country’s educational system, utilizing foreign professionals and experts, expansion of educational buildings, and improvements in educational standards,” paved the way for “higher education to respond more rapidly to the country’s requirements.”¹⁰⁵

In the art of “nation building,” analysts and economists all over the world “regard education as an investment rather than a consumer item. As one of the most important sectors of the social services, education is highly regarded as a long-term investment, catering to the needs of society.”¹⁰⁶ Shortly after ascending the throne, the Shah declared “that only education could steer the national ship (*kashti-ye vatan*) towards the shores of progress (*sahel-e tarraqi*).”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Fourth National Development Plan(1968-1972), Plan Organization. Tehran: Office Press Inc., 263

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 262-265

¹⁰⁵ Fifth National Development Plan (1973-1978), Plan Organization. Tehran: Office Press Inc., 199-215

¹⁰⁶ Fourth National Development Plan, 259

¹⁰⁷ Menashri, D. 1992, 164

A major impediment in developing and expanding this edifice was the dearth of qualified educators, prompting the Shah to further proclaim "...if a university professor knows nothing about scientific methods, how can he teach this to his students?"¹⁰⁸ While in 1943 the government had ratified a law providing free and compulsory education for all citizens, its enforcement was inconceivable given the scarcity of facilities and instructors, particularly in rural and tribal areas.¹⁰⁹ In this monumental task, U.S. assistance once again proved instrumental as working in close proximity with their professors created yet another invaluable opportunity for professional trainees. In bringing this assignment to fruition, the Department of Research and Curriculum Planning worked in partnership with a team of U.S. advisors to modify all elementary and secondary programs, enabling students to engage in a variety of skills in conjunction with the set curriculum.¹¹⁰ Brigham Young University, Utah State Agricultural College, and University of Nebraska executed extensive agricultural programs throughout the country, and in the process developed a system of movable tent schools for the nomadic tribal population.¹¹¹ Supplementary measures featuring the cooperation of the Ministry of Education and UNESCO resulted in the establishment of specialized departments to administer vocational and agricultural schools throughout the provinces.

¹⁰⁸ Pahlavi, M.R. 1960, 259

¹⁰⁹ Sabahi, F. *The Literacy Corps in Pahlavi Iran (1963-1979): Political, Social, and Literary Implications*. Ph.D., School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, 2002, 220-222; Menashri, D. 1992, 173; Arasteh, R. *Education and Social Awakening in Iran. 1850-1968* Netherlands: Leiden, E.J. Brill 1969, 191

¹¹⁰ Arasteh, R. 1962, 70

¹¹¹ Bean, J.E., Deryessa, M.J., Bradford, R.H., Brown, J.R., Clarke, J.A., Mcaffee, J.H., Morrill, A.R. Peterson, D.A., Young, K.H. *Technical Aid — An Investment in People: The Point 4 Program in Iran*. Brigham Young University, 1960

By 1959 all 8000 state-run primary schools and 1100 secondary schools offered instruction in the English language.¹¹²

Educated in Switzerland, both the Shah and his western educated Minister Isa Sadiq were acutely aware of the enormous benefits of this vastly improved landscape.¹¹³ In the following passage, Sadiq captures this exceptional value:

First, the shackles of tradition (“sonnat”) and the past were removed from my hands and ankles. Before traveling to the U.S., all customs, habits, practices, laws, institutions, seemed to me unchangeable. In the U.S., I learned that tradition can be changed, and they were created in the first place for the utility and progress of society. If they do not benefit the community, it is possible to adapt them to to the needs of a different time and place.¹¹⁴

In 1960, the Shah expressed his desire to “establish a university modeled on American lines, with a primarily American staff” which would help meet the requirements of the “thousands of young people who at present go to study abroad.¹¹⁵” In making his vision a reality, a team of advisors from the University of Pennsylvania in cooperation with Iran’s educational elite embarked on the task of developing the Pahlavi University in Shiraz.¹¹⁶ Officially inaugurated in 1963 the university was largely staffed by American graduates with English as the primary language of instruction, and a curriculum based on institutions of higher education in the U.S. The “Penn Team” was responsible for composing an integrated core curriculum centered on a liberal arts education, developing the faculty of arts and sciences, and launching The Asia

¹¹² Pahlavi, M.R. 1960, 242-245

¹¹³ Isa Sadiq served as Minister of Education from 1941-1961. He studied in London and Paris between 1911-1915; earning his Ph.D. from Teachers College, Columbia University in 1931

¹¹⁴ Menashri, D. 1992, 139

¹¹⁵ Pahlavi, M.R. 1960,262

¹¹⁶ Doerr, A. “An Assessment of Educational Development: The Case Study of Pahlavi University in Iran,” *The Middle East Journal* No.3, 200-213

Institute to house the Iranian Studies Program under the directorship of the distinguished Iranologist Richard Frye.¹¹⁷

In subscribing to his father's ideology, the Shah announced "I should personally like to see further advances in broadening the opportunities for our women... my aim being that our women should enjoy the same basic rights as men... If a woman wants to become a physicist, she should have the opportunity to do so, regardless of sex..."¹¹⁸ In reference to the veil, however, he deviated from the previous enforced mandate as he "preferred to see a more natural progression towards this endeavor."¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, despite all the travails leading to increased female access to educational institutions and substantial efforts to extend schooling throughout the provinces, striking regional variations persisted between rural and urban areas. According to official government statistics only 17% of villages had schools, and out of the nominal 10% of girls between the ages of 12 and 18 years attending secondary schools, the vast majority were concentrated in the capital city of Tehran.¹²⁰ The Shah therefore came to the conclusion that "no basic solution to the country's educational problems were possible by ordinary methods, and [in order] to transform these circumstances, rapid and effective war on illiteracy by revolutionary and unusual means were necessary..."¹²¹ In 1962, The White Revolution (*Engelab-e Sefid*), also known as The Revolution of the Shah and the People (*Engelab-e Shah va Mardom*), was

¹¹⁷ Frye, R. *Greater Iran: A 20th Century Odyssey*. 2nd edition. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2011. Richard Frye is an American Scholar of Iran and Central Asian Studies and is the Agha Khan Professor Emeritus at Harvard University.

¹¹⁸ Pahlavi, M.R. 1960, 236

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 232

¹²⁰ Woodsmall, F. R. *Women and the New East*. Washington, DC: The Middle East Institute 1960, 84

¹²¹ Pahlavi, M.R. *The White Revolution of Iran*. Teheran: The Imperial Pahlavi Library, Keyhan Press, May 1967, 109

launched. This multi-dimensional package of policy guidelines, designed to facilitate the transition from an agrarian to an industrial economy, was viewed by the Shah as “essentially an Iranian revolution compatible with the spirit and tradition of the Iranian people.”¹²² Although land reform was its principal objective, a primary ingredient of this “new” and “progressive” enterprise “replacing the old backward system,” was the enfranchisement of women, “so that they would no longer be included with lunatics and criminals and those who earn their living in disreputable ways...”¹²³ The Shah decisively believed that this decree would “free women of their age-long captivity, and put an end to a social disgrace [which is] contrary to the real spirit of Islam.” He then justified the sanctity of this prodigious feat in the following context:

How can a man give rights to himself yet deprive his mother and sister of the same rights? How can a man say that his mother who has given him his very life, is in the same category as lunatics? This argument is against nature, humanity and civilization.¹²⁴

The realization of this objective would be entirely dependent on a complete transformation, embedded within the program’s 19 articles, which included free and compulsory education for children of all ages, and the establishment of the Literacy, Health and Reconstruction Development Corps designed to improve quality of life throughout the provinces, raise productivity, eradicate illiteracy and facilitate the transition from an outdated system to a market economy.¹²⁵ The Literacy Corps (“Sepah-e Danesh”) designed to combat the rampant illiteracy in rural areas, was composed of urban middle class high school graduates who were given the option of serving as instructors in lieu of a two year mandatory military service, which as it

¹²² Pahlavi, M.R. 1967, 22

¹²³ Ibid., 91-101,134

¹²⁴ Ibid., 99

¹²⁵ Ibid., 103-125; Watson, K. “The Shah’s White Revolution: Education and Reform in Iran,” *Comparative Education*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 23-36

turned out presented a far more appealing alternative for the majority of participating youth. The corpsmen's duties were not specifically limited to instruction, and included proper health, hygiene and large-scale development projects throughout the provinces.¹²⁶ In 1968, enactment of the Women's Social Services (*Khadamat-e Ejtemai-ye Zanan*) led to the formation of the Female Literacy Corps; whereby young urban women were recruited for advising and instructing the rural female population. The donning of European military attire by the corps women additionally became part of a new clothing policy reinforcing a westernized vision.¹²⁷ While the Corps became instrumental in the regime's quest for establishing a modern nation state, they proved incapable of altering a conventional mind-set. Therefore, despite the fact that official government statistics reflected increased facilities and enrollment, a considerable number of families beholden to traditional norms, continued to feel it inappropriate to leave girls past the age of ten or eleven in schools that had, along with institutions of higher education, become coeducational.¹²⁸

Cognizant of this fact, the corps members resorted to various strategies ranging from Koranic recitations and daily prayers to the separation of boys and girls in the classroom, but to

¹²⁶ Sabahi, F. 2002, 212-224; Prigmore, C. *Social Work in Iran Since the White Revolution*. Alabama: The University of Alabama Press 1976, 24-37

¹²⁷ Sanghvi, R. German, C. & Missen, D. *The Revolution of the Shah and the People: The Literacy Corps*. London: Transorient, 1967; Sabahi, F. "Gender and the Army of Knowledge in Pahlavi Iran, 1968-1979," in Ansari, S. & Martin, V. (eds.) 2002, 99-126

¹²⁸ Discrepancies found in researching the mandate for coeducational facilities during this period prompted confirmation with Abdolmajid Majidi, who served as Minister of State for Agricultural and Consumer Affairs (1968), Minister of Labor (1969-1972), and Minister of State and Director of The Plan and Budget Organization (1972-1977). In an interview conducted in Sausalito, California, on Jan. 8, 2013, Dr. Majidi confirmed that in the aftermath of the White Revolution and the mandate for free and compulsory education, it simply became economically more feasible to have an integrated school system.

no avail.¹²⁹ In direct contrast, the impact of radical reform became exceedingly apparent among the urban female population where the percentage of girls attending primary school increased from 34% in 1966 to 42% in 1977.¹³⁰

During what constituted an era of unprecedented transformations, the implementation of the new measures increasingly provoked the wrath of the clergy who regarded such trespasses on their authority as unconstitutional and a violation of the principles of the shari‘a. In the early 1960’s, a relatively unknown Shi’ite cleric named Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini voiced opposition to the enfranchisement of women and denounced the monarchy as a pagan institution (*taqut*) incompatible with the true nature of Islam. This flagrant display of antagonism led to his 1964 exile to Turkey and subsequently to Iraq.¹³¹

By the early 1970s, the accelerated pace of reforms at all levels of the educational infrastructure prompted Iran’s first female minister Farokhroo Parsa (1968-1979), daughter of women’s rights advocate Afagh Parsa, to label the entire school system as “very antiquated, and in no way capable of serving present needs...”¹³² Prior to this final restructuring, the system was based on the French model consisting of two cycles of six years each. In 1957, on the recommendation of U.S. consultants, secondary education was divided into two halves, making it equivalent to the American junior and senior high schools. In the aftermath of the White Revolution, the Ministry implemented a three-tiered structure consisting of five years of

¹²⁹ Sabahi, 2002, 177-195

¹³⁰ Economic Report of The Central Bank of Teheran, 1978

¹³¹ Milani, A. *Eminent Persians: The Men and Women of Modern Iran, 1941-1979*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008, 120; Paidar, P. 1985, 145-146

¹³² Menashri, D. 1992, 195

elementary, three years of intermediate, and four years of high school.¹³³ The move towards inculcating an increasingly western philosophy through the academic system necessitated revisions in primary and secondary textbooks. Upon completion, reformulation in both text and image showcased the portrait of a distinctly modern-day society, with diminished religious features.¹³⁴

Study abroad continued to climb, with a considerable number of young women opting to pursue their higher education in foreign countries. While with Reza Shah's administration, practically all students returned to the homeland, thousands elected not to come back during this period despite government attempts to create favorable conditions. According to the U.S. "Open Doors" statistics obtained directly from the Institute of International Education offices in New York City, there were approximately 3,000 Iranians studying in the United States in 1962, of which 240 were women. By 1974, there were more than 9,000, 900 of whom were women. By 1979, there were over 50,000 Iranians matriculated in institutions of higher education in the United States alone. Such expansion partially stemmed from the formation of technical and vocational institutions and provisions encouraging the pursuit of knowledge for underprivileged youth. The inception of the Department of Student Affairs (*Daftar-e Omur-e Daneshgahi*) within the Ministry to coordinate student affairs and all matters relating to financial assistance, with similar offices instituted at all universities providing the option of attending evening classes and/or receiving a variety of loans and grants, augmented the scope of this educational growth.¹³⁵

¹³³ Hamadheidari, S. "Education During the Reign of the Pahlavi Dynasty (1941-1979)," *Teaching in Higher Education*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Feb. 2008, 17-28

¹³⁴ Higgins, P.J. & Shoar-Ghaffari, P. "Sex-Role Socialization in Iranian Textbooks," *NWSA Journal* Vol. 3, No.2 (Spring 1991), 213-232

¹³⁵ Menashri, D. 1992, 196-205; Pahlavi, 1967, 100-101

Abatement of earlier decrees imposed on foreign schools led simultaneously to the establishment of a myriad of International schools catering to both local students and foreign expatriates.”¹³⁶

The country’s political stability and improvements in education led to the “changing role of the urbanite woman.”¹³⁷ A surge in the number of women in higher education enhanced opportunities in the employment sector, with modern labor laws providing “equal pay for equal work.”¹³⁸ The percentage of employed literate women grew from 30% in 1966 to 65% in 1976, with women comprising 28% of civil servants, 30% of secondary school teachers, 54% of elementary teachers, and 100% of kindergarten teachers.¹³⁹ Increased autonomy and the removal of restrictions in marriage, divorce, and child custody matters promulgated with the 1967 Family Protection Act were augmented in 1975 with supplementary social and professional privileges including a complete ban on polygamous practices.¹⁴⁰

While during the initial phase of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s rule (1941-1953) political parties and women’s associations freely entered the public arena, the aftermath of the 1953 coup heralded an era of systematic control terminating all “oppositional and independent political parties and organizations,” with the government integrating leadership and depoliticizing the nature of all mandates.¹⁴¹ By 1959, all women’s organizations were brought under the umbrella of the Federation of Women’s Organization (*Shoraye-ali-ye Jamiat-e Zan*), later transformed

¹³⁶ Pahlavi, M.R. 1960, 225

¹³⁷ Arasteh, R. 1962, 48-49

¹³⁸ Pahlavi, M.R. 1960, 236

¹³⁹ Abrahamian, E. *Iran Between Two Revolutions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982, 434

¹⁴⁰ Pahlavi, A. 1980, 155-156

¹⁴¹ Sanasarian, E. 1982, 73-79; Woodsmall, F. 1960, 80-83; Vakili, S. *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*. London & New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011, 35

into the High Council of Iranian Women's Association (*Shoraye Jamiat-e Zanan-e Irani*), with the Shah's twin sister, Ashraf Pahlavi, serving as honorary president.¹⁴² This entity, which predominantly focused on charitable functions and promoted the education of women, was replaced in 1966 by the Women's Organization of Iran (WOI) (*Sazeman-e Zanan-e Iran*). Inaugurated by Ashraf Pahlavi who served as President, the WOI flourished with over 400 branches and 120 centers providing literacy classes, vocational training, and legal advice. A forceful contender for equal rights, this organization was instrumental for employing women as judges, mayors, cabinet officers and diplomats.¹⁴³ The centralized protocol of the regime accordingly presented itself at the forefront of its two most prominent women's publications. *Ettela'at-e Banovan* (Ladies' Information, 1957) and *Zan-e Ruz* (Today's Woman, 1964), owned and operated by the country's largest publishing houses, further contributed to the propagation of the westernized woman in Iran.¹⁴⁴

In assessing the direction of the women's movement during this extraordinary period, Eliz Sanasarian maintains that although the compass was distinctly pointed towards "an institutionalized and legitimate sphere of activity in which demands were still made upon the authorities... In this instance the changes for women were quite compatible with government

¹⁴² Paidar, P. 1985, 137-149

¹⁴³ Pahlavi, M.R. 1980, 154; Paidar, P. 1985, 150-211; Sanasarian, E. 1982, 83-85; Afkhami, M. "The Women's Organization of Iran: Evolutionary Politics and Revolutionary Change," in Beck, L. & Nashat, G. (eds.) *Women in Iran: From 1800 to The Islamic Republic*. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004, 107-135

¹⁴⁴ Poya, M. *Women, Work and Islamism: Ideology and Resistance in Iran*. London & New York: Zed Books 1999, 70, 80, 139-140

standards ... and in accordance with the ones received. In other words, the women's organization did not make demands that could not or would not be met...¹⁴⁵

By 1979 large-scale social and political discontent had brought about the dissolution of a monarchy and the institution of the Islamic Republic of Iran by Ayatollah Khomeini, exiled since 1964. While the mobilization of various dislocated groups around a common platform ensured the revolution's victory, the baffling mass participation of women in this process perhaps constituted its most shocking aspect.¹⁴⁶ For Guity Nashat, the paradox herein lies in the fact that "women in general, including the most Westernized individuals and groups, came out strongly against a regime that purportedly was helping free them from the bonds of oppression."¹⁴⁷ Draped in the "flag of the revolution," women from diverse backgrounds contributed to a change that many Iranians had assumed would lead to "national independence" and a return to cultural authenticity embedded in the true spirit of Shi'ite Islam.¹⁴⁸ Ali Ansari is among the distinguished group of scholars who maintain that indeed the "ambiguous" nature of the revolution was instrumental in safeguarding its success, a success that ultimately guaranteed the sovereignty of Islamic factions and the revival of a clergy-state alliance in Iran.¹⁴⁹ Ansari's reference to the cryptic message of this upheaval becomes particularly relevant in the overall assessment of the patronage provided by accomplished women who had gained much with the Pahlavis progressive

¹⁴⁵ Sanasarian, E. 1982, 73

¹⁴⁶ Ansari, A.M. 2003, 219; Matin-Asgari, A. *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah*. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2001

¹⁴⁷ Nashat, G. 1983, 1

¹⁴⁸ In 1979, Khomeini referred to the veil as "the flag of the revolution." Cited in Sciolino, E. *Persian Mirrors: The Elusive Face of Iran*. New York: The Free Press, 2000, 134; Azari, F. "Islam's Appeal to Women in Iran: Illusions and Reality," in Azari, F. (ed.) *Women of Iran: The Conflict with Fundamentalist Islam*. London: Ithaca Press, 1983; Ansari, 2003, 222-223

¹⁴⁹ Ansari, A.M. 2003, 219-221

dictates. A close examination of Khomeini's early pronouncements reveals an often vague, if not misleading rhetoric, which could be misconstrued as egalitarian in context.

In 1978 the Ayatollah stated, in a message delivered to Iranian women from France:

We are proud that our women, young and old, are active in the educational and economic field... forwarding the goals of Islam and the Holy Koran. Any nation that has women like the women of Iran will surely be victorious.¹⁵⁰

In an interview given to a German publication in that same year, he further declared:

In an Islamic Republic, women have complete freedom in everything they do, just as men are free — in everything.¹⁵¹

And in a correspondence with the *Guardian* newspaper in Paris, he again reiterated:

Women are free in the Islamic Republic — in the selection of their activities, in their future, and their clothing...¹⁵²

However, upon establishing his "Republic" Khomeini shifted his previous disposition:

The women who contributed to the revolution, were and are in Islamic dress, not elegant women at all, made up like you, who go around dragging behind the tail of men. Those who put on makeup and go into the street showing off their necks, their hair... did not fight against the Shah. They never did anything good — Not those! They do not know how to be useful, neither socially, nor politically, nor professionally.¹⁵³

In fact, *A Clarification of Questions*, Khomeini's reigning discourse on the conduct of the devout, categorically testifies to his personal ideology regarding the position of women:

¹⁵⁰ Shavarini, M.K. "The Feminization of Iranian Higher Education," *Review of Education* (2005) 51: 329-347

¹⁵¹ *Der Spiegel*, Nov. 7, 1979, interview conducted in Paris, France, with Ayatollah Khomeini

¹⁵² Ayatollah Khomeini in an interview with the *Guardian* newspaper, Paris, November 6, 1978

¹⁵³ *Time*, October 22, 1979, "Iran: Khomeini and the Veiled Lady," interview with Italian journalist Orianna Fallaci

A woman who has been contracted permanently must not leave the house without the husband's permission and must surrender herself for any pleasure that he wants.... If she obeys the husband... the provision of her food, clothing and dwelling is obligatory for the husband. If the wife does not obey her husband,... she is a sinner and has no right to clothing, food and shelter...¹⁵⁴

In retrospect, such candid remarks should not be viewed as completely unexpected, as Khomeini had in fact always subscribed to such principles, as evidenced by his opposition to women's enfranchisement and other liberating measures initiated in the course of the White Revolution.

With his triumphant comeback, the Ayatollah designated himself Iran's Supreme Leader, a position incorporated into the Constitution and regarded as the highest political and religious authority of the nation. While in exile, the formulation of *Velayat-e Faqih* (Guardianship of the jurist) stipulated governance according to the principles of the shari'a, and ushered in a "new and virtuous order in which temporal affairs would conform to divine mandates."¹⁵⁵

In this process, the regime's modus operandi centered on correcting a contractual breach with declarations against the "great Satan" accompanied by the slogan "death to America" (*marg bar amrika*).¹⁵⁶ Unquestionably, the enormous impact of this climate change was felt in the overall status of women, who once again became entangled in a restored treatise declaring a

¹⁵⁴ Khomeini, Ayatollah Seyyed Ruhollah Mousavi. "Precepts of a Permanent Contract," in *A Clarification of Questions*. Unabridged translation by J. Boroujerdi. Boulder & London: Westview Press, 1984, 318

¹⁵⁵ Brumberg, D. *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran*. Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 2001, 154; *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (1941-1980)*. Translated and annotated by Hamid Algar. U.S.: Mizan Press, 1981; Akhavi, S. 1980, 64-166; Takeyh, R. & Gvosdev, N.K. *The Receding Shadow of the Prophet: The Rise and Fall of Radical Islam*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004 (quote appears on p. 24)

¹⁵⁶ In November 5, 1979, Khomeini referred to the United States as the "great satan... the wounded snake; cited in the *New York Times*, "1979: Iran's Islamic Revolution," May 27, 2007; De Zoysa, R. "America's Foreign Policy: Manifest Destiny or Great Satan," *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 11, Issue 2-3, 2005, 133-156

doctrinal justification for diminished capacity. The initial phase was essentially characterized by rapid Islamization reinforcing patriarchal distinctions within a legalized framework, and while the regime hailed women as custodians of the private sphere, it simultaneously defrauded them through a plethora of debilitating decrees including the abolition of the Family Protection Laws, reduction of the minimum marriage age to 13 (changed in 1991 to 15), reinstatement of temporary marriage (*mut'a*) and the Islamic Retribution Laws (*Qesas*) stipulating that the “blood money” (*diyeh*) for women is half that of men, as is their share of inheritance.¹⁵⁷ Commands prohibiting women from the presidency and judgeships, combined with compulsory veiling and gender segregation in communal arenas to seal the fate of the female population, “restoring them to their primary role in society: domestic responsibility.”¹⁵⁸ In the overriding quest to Islamicize the nation, one of the Republic’s highest priorities entailed transformation of the country’s “westernized” education system.¹⁵⁹

Shortly after the revolution’s victory, Khomeini declared:

¹⁵⁷ Halper, L. “Law and Women’s Agency in Post-Revolutionary Iran,” *Harvard Journal of Law and Gender*, 28, 2005, 85-138; Moghissi, H. “Public Life and Women’s Resistance,” in Rahnema, S. & Behdad, S. *Iran after the Revolution: Crisis of an Islamic State*. New York & London: I.B. Tauris, 1996, 251-267; Mir-Hosseini, Z. “Women and Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran: Divorce, Veiling and Emerging Voices,” in Afshar, H. *Women and Politics in the Third World*, London: Routledge, 1996, 145-173; Ramazani, N. “Women in Iran: The Revolutionary Ebb and Flow,” *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 1993, 409-428; Haeri, S. “Temporary Marriage: An Islamic Discourse on Female Sexuality in Iran,” in Moghissi, H. *Women and Islam: Critical Concepts in Sociology*. New York: Routledge, 2005, 166-183

¹⁵⁸ In 1980, veiling was enforced in the public domain, with any deviation punishable by 74 lashes. For additional information regarding this mandate, consult Nashat, G. 1983, 121-123. The quotation appears in Nashat, G., 1983, p. 195. Mir-Hosseini, Z. *Islam and Gender*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999, 61; Vakili, S. 2011, 51-52

¹⁵⁹ Rucker, R. “Trends in Post-Revolutionary Iranian Education,” *University of Nevada Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 21:4, 1991, 455-468; Mohsendouri, B. “Philosophy of Education in Post-Revolutionary Iran,” *Comparative Educational Review*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1988, 76-86

Our universities are westoxicated... Many of our universities are at the service of the West. They brainwash our youth ...¹⁶⁰

The official launch of the Cultural Revolution (*Enqelab-e Farhangi*, 1980-1984) accelerated the task of systematic cleansing (*paksazi*) in all spheres including the professional and educational landscape.¹⁶¹ In 1980, the Council for Cultural Revolution, a seven-member task force selected by the Ayatollah, began dismissing all “non-believers” including professionals, administrators, students, professors, and supporters of the *ancien regime*. All universities were shut down for a period of four years (1980-1983) in order to disseminate the foundations of an Islamic education. During this time, the Center for Textbooks, composed mainly of clerics, produced some 3,000 college-level textbooks in conformity with “Islamic criteria.”¹⁶² When the universities reopened, they had been “purged” of all dissident faculty and pupils with a revised canon mandating “ideological testing” for recruitment and admission. The “purification” procedure resulted in the departure of the country’s finest and most educated, “striking a major

¹⁶⁰ Behdad, S. “The Islamization of Economics in Iranian Universities,” *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 27, 1995, 193. The term “westoxication” (*gharbzadegi*) was coined in 1961 by Jalal al-I Ahmad in his book *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*. Translated by R. Campbell with an Introduction by Hamid Algar. Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1984

¹⁶¹ Sobhe, K. “Education in Review: Iran’s Cultural Revolution Duplicating the Chinese Cultural Revolution?” *Comparative Education* 18(3), 1982, 271-280; Barlow, Rebecca “Women’s Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Contribution of Secular-Oriented Feminism,” in Akbarzadeh, S. & Macqueen, B. (eds.) *Islam and Human Rights in Practice: Perspectives Across the Ummah*. U.S. & Canada: Routledge, 2008, 42

¹⁶² Godagzar, H. “Islamic Ideology and Its Formative Influence on Education in Contemporary Iran,” *Economia, Sociedad y Territorio*, Vol. 3, Numero 10, 2001, 321-326; Bakhash, S. *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 1984, 110-114

blow to Iran's intellectual life and achievement.... the loss of job skills and capital..."¹⁶³

Khomeini's response to the escalating "brain drain" was the following:

They say there is a brain drain. Let these decaying brains flee and be replaced by more appropriate brains. These brains are of no use to us. If you know this is not the place for you, you should flee...¹⁶⁴

Consequently, given the regime's aversion to foreign ideologies, the practice of studying abroad was almost entirely eliminated, with the Undersecretary of Culture and Higher Education declaring:

Students seeking qualifications that could be acquired in Iran need not travel abroad; for those seeking to advance knowledge in accordance with Islamic principles, studying abroad is not useful...¹⁶⁵

According to statistics from the United States Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, while there were some 50,000 students matriculated in institutions all over the United States at the cusp of the revolution, the numbers diminished to 14,000 in 1985 and to barely 4,900 in 1992.

In its fervent effort to dismantle the previously embedded trends, the regime attempted to produce an "Islamic economic framework," allocating substantial funds towards the expansion of education and the extension of urban amenities to rural areas.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Sedgewick, R. "Education in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *World Education News and Reviews*, 13(3), 2000, 128-139; Mohsendouri, B. 1988, 76-86; Entessar, N. "Educational Reform in Iran: Cultural Revolution or Anti-Intellectualism?" *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 8 1984, 47-64

¹⁶⁴ Ayatollah Khomeini interview with *Ettela'at*, October, 1979, "Ayatollah Khomeini in an Interview with Committee Members of the Ettela'at Newspaper," (*Ayatollah Khomeini Dar Molaghat Ba Azaye Komiteh-ye Rooznameh-ye Ettela'at*)

¹⁶⁵ Menashri, D. 1992, 32

¹⁶⁶ Amuzegar, J. *Iran's Economy Under The Islamic Republic*. London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 1993, 125

The First Republican Plan (1983-1988), presented under the banner of “changed priorities” and “new policies,” underscored the importance of this exodus in its opening statement:

In Islam, education is a form of worship and the search for knowledge a jihad for Allah. Education is not just a social necessity, but a Holy Duty.¹⁶⁷

By 1984, the Council for the Cultural Revolution, renamed the Supreme Council for the Cultural Revolution (SCCR, *Shoray-e Enqelab-e Farhangi*) and described as “the highest body for making policies and decisions in connection with all cultural, educational, and research activities within the framework of the general policies of the system...” had evolved to having 17 members with more than 20 satellite institutions.¹⁶⁸ Headed by the country’s President and accountable only to the Supreme Leader, this entity was composed of high-ranking Shi’ite clerics and powerful government figures as well as the Women’s Social and Cultural Council (WSSC), the Republic’s first organization on women’s affairs established in 1988 within the SCCR to ensure conformity with Islamic principles by the female population at large.¹⁶⁹

With Ayatollah Khomeini’s death in 1989, his successor Ayatollah Ali Hosseini Khamenei, who served as the Council’s chairman, continued to uphold the sacredness of divine authority and supreme leadership of the nation.

¹⁶⁷ The First Economic, Social and Cultural Development Plan of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1983-1988). Teheran: Planning and Budget Organization, 1983 (*Barname-ye Aval Tose‘eh-e Eqtesadi-ye Ejtemai ‘i-e Farhangi Jomhuri-ye Islami-ye Iran*)

¹⁶⁸ “Objectives of The SCCR”

¹⁶⁹ Paidar, P. 1985,320-321; SCCR: Goals and Duties/Principles of the Cultural Policies

“Women are the victims of this patriarchal culture, but they are also its carriers. Let us keep in mind that every oppressive man was raised in the confines of his mother’s home.” — Shīrīn Ebādī

CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN AND EDUCATION: PARADOXICAL TRENDS AND EMERGING VOICES

The Islamic Republic inherited the monarchy’s system of education, extensively revising and cleansing the embedded apparatus in order to foster a solid Islamic identity. The pursuit of knowledge was characterized by a close relationship with religious principles, and although textbooks were significantly altered to incorporate the dogma of the regime, many of the same subjects, including modern sciences, continued to be taught, albeit with significant reductions in ancient Persian narratives and an increase in early Islamic history.¹⁷⁰

A number of well-known “modern” establishments, renamed to reflect the sacred climate of the era, were accordingly infused with a potpourri of religious practices including daily prayers, Koranic studies, and the presence of a “moral education” (*morrabi-ye tarbiat*) teacher well-versed in Islam presiding over all religious functions. Persian became the primary language of instruction, and although English and other foreign languages were initially banned, they were resuscitated in later years.¹⁷¹ Given the preeminent objective of eradicating all western influence, all logical assumptions would dictate a reversion to the traditional maktab system. What is perhaps most puzzling in this scenario is that for unspecified reasons the Republic elected to

¹⁷⁰ Menashri, D. 1992, 301; Godagzar, H. *The Impact of Religious Factors on Educational Change in Iran: Islam in Policy and Islam in Practice*. U.K.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008

¹⁷¹ Menashri, D. 1992, 319; Riazi, A.M. “The Four Language Stages in The History of Iran,” in Lin, Angel M.Y. & Martin, P.W. (eds.) *Decolonization, Globalization, Language in Education Policy and Practice*. U.K. & Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2005, 100-116; Farhady, H., Sajadi, H. & Hedayati, H. “Reflections on Foreign Language Education in Iran,” in *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language*, 2010, 13(4) 1-18

retain the infrastructure implanted by a reviled Pahlavi order. Author David Menashri estimates that this unusual course of action clearly indicates a more or less superficial cleansing by the Republic, the retention being indicative of the fact that the Republic had “inherited a working institution... which was readily available for (its) use.”¹⁷² This *faux pas* likewise extended to the execution of their planning process, which Jamshid Amuzegar maintains was “exclusively derived from the previous regime,” with refurbishments applicable to the “economic independence, social welfare, and propagation of the Islamic culture.”¹⁷³ An alternate perspective could simply be a question of sheer miscalculation and/or an abject failure to cogently manipulate the existing framework. In considering this baffling yet recurring theme, the structural conservation of Pahlavi institutions could potentially indicate a lack of expertise in the art of “nation building” by the architects of a newly constructed Republic. In retrospect, despite such tacit oversights, the late Ayatollah’s emphasis on education was quite extraordinary. According to him “training and purification is prior to instruction” and education at all levels must “reflect the independent nature of Islamic thought, and cleanse itself from all western values and influence” as the previous leadership was “contaminated and controlled by the superpowers....”¹⁷⁴ In accordance with this stipulation, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic decisively articulated the government’s responsibility for providing all citizens with “free education through secondary school and to expand higher education to the extent required by the country for attaining self-sufficiency.”¹⁷⁵ The Ministry of Education accordingly defined the county’s educational agenda in the following context:

¹⁷² Menashri, D. 1992, 302

¹⁷³ Amuzegar, J. 1993, 125

¹⁷⁴ Ayatollah Khomeini Interview with *Keyhan Newspaper* December, 18, 1980

¹⁷⁵ Article 30, Constitution of The Islamic Republic of Iran

Explanation of the principles, instructions, and decrees of Islam and Shi‘ism based on the book of tradition of the Prophet and the infallible Imams, and the development of moral virtues on the basis of piety and faith in God.¹⁷⁶

In this “purified” landscape future generations would be taught and reared to internalize the ordained value system effectively leading to the cultivation and “creation of a new Islamic person.”¹⁷⁷ In this process the Literacy Movement Organization (LMO) replaced the Literacy Corps of the Pahlavi era and diligently tackled illiteracy and the training of qualified personnel committed to the doctrine of *Velayat-e Faqih*.¹⁷⁸ However, amidst a meticulous format embracing an abundance of measures endorsing education for “all citizens,” the position of young women was shrouded in restrictions, with patriarchal pronouncements ingrained in the Civil Code and the Constitution of the Islamic Republic.

Article 21 of the Islamic Constitution ensured “the rights of women in all aspects in conformity with Islamic criteria;” implying that the laws applicable to the female population were subject to religious interpretation, and Article 105 specified that “in a relationship between a man and a woman, the man is responsible as head of the family.” Article 1117 of the Civil Code incorporated stipulations such as “a husband may ban his wife from any technical profession that conflicts with family life or her character.” The preamble to the Constitution further highlighted the separateness of “male” and/or “female” attributes specifically where the previous regime strove to omit such distinctions:

¹⁷⁶ Mehran, G. “Ideology and Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1990, 58

¹⁷⁷ Mehran, G. “Socialization of Schoolchildren in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” *Iranian Studies*, 22:1, 1989, 35

¹⁷⁸ Literacy Movement of Iran, *The Activities of the Literacy Movement (Fa’aliyatha-ye Nehzat-e Savad-e Amuzi)*, Teheran: Office of Planning and Statistics, 1987; Mehran, G. “The Paradox of Tradition and Modernity in Female Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” *Comparative Education Review* Vol. 47, No. 3, 2003, 269-286

The family is the fundamental unit of society and the main center for the growth and edification of human beings... The view of the family unit delivers women from being regarded as an object or instrument in the service of promoting consumerism and exploitation. Not only does a woman recover thereby her momentous and precious function of motherhood and rearing ideologically committed human beings, she also assumes a pioneering social role... Given the weighty responsibilities that a woman thus assumes, she is accorded in Islam great value and nobility.¹⁷⁹

In compliance with the regime's mandates, the SCCR safeguarded "gender appropriateness" within academia, prohibiting married women from studying abroad unless accompanied by their husbands and restricting their enrollment in a variety of typically male oriented disciplines including mining, technology, animal husbandry and agriculture¹⁸⁰ These restrictions adhered to the guidelines of gender tutelage prescribed in The Principles of the System of Education decreed by the Ministry of Education, placing "education for girls and women" within the framework of "recognizing the identity of women and her role within the family and society on the basis of Islam," and "planning for the content and method of her schooling accordingly."¹⁸¹ The Plan additionally stipulated that the "educational guidance of girls should be based on their capabilities and interests and their vocational guidance should take into consideration the kind of occupations needed by and best fulfilled by women given their role and responsibility within the family... with curriculum development emphasizing the sanctity and stability of the family by introducing the different role of men and women in marital life."¹⁸² This ideological outline

¹⁷⁹ Constitution of The Islamic Republic of Iran

¹⁸⁰ Aryan, K. "The Boom in Women's Education," in Povey, T. & Povey, E.R. (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2012, 41; IRI Ministry of Culture and Higher Education – Guide for the Selection of Fields in Higher Education, 1986 (*Rahname-ye Reshteha-ye Tahseelee Baraye Daneshgaha va Moassasate Aliyeye Keshvar*)

¹⁸¹ IRI – The General Plan of the System of Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1988

¹⁸² Teheran, Ministry of Education, 1988; The First Economic, Social, and Cultural Development Plan of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1983-1988) 277, 37, 66, 72

became manifest in the multitude of laws enforcing mandatory veiling, assignment of female teachers to girls (although not exclusively at first due to a shortage of what the Republic deemed “qualified” instructors), and the ban of coeducation at the pre-university level.¹⁸³

In the decades following the revolution, a gender-biased disposition continued to reverberate in the habitual declarations of leading authority figures. Ayatollah Khamenei announced that ‘the real value of a woman is measured by how much she makes the family environment for her husband and children like a paradise...and the fundamental job assigned to a woman is marriage and motherhood.’¹⁸⁴

In July 1997 he further dismissed the notion of women’s equal partnership in society as “negative, primitive and childish.”¹⁸⁵ In an interview given to *Hamshahri* newspaper on January 10, 1997, Hojatul-islam Hashemi Rafsanjani voiced his dissatisfaction regarding the pressure to limit women’s access to universities:

They asked why women should study if they are not going to work? And even some radical representatives from the tribune of the *Majlis* (Parliament) are questioning why we should give the seats in universities to women, who, when they finish their education must go home and take care of their children. I said, if we have one educated mother without a job, she will be effective in society because of the children that she will educate.

Such candid affirmations, combined with mandates applicable to the country’s female population, leads to the conclusion that their “education” requires compatibility with their “role” and “responsibility” within the family, as it appears they have been entrusted with raising the

(“*Barnameye Avaaliye To’she Eqtesadi Ejtemai va Farhangi-ye Iran*”)

¹⁸³ Vakili, S. 2011, 51-52

¹⁸⁴ Iranian State Television February 18, 1988

¹⁸⁵ Ayatollah Khamenei Interview with the *Daily Salaam Newspaper* July 21, 1997

next generation of “true believers.” The curriculum itself must be at the forefront of preparing and communicating the ordained ideology to the younger cadre who will thereby be able to implement it. In this process, it is important to note that although women were not prohibited from pursuing a career, the numerous exclusionary laws profoundly handicapped their autonomy in society. Research on this matter conducted by Parvin Paidar concludes that the regime was confident that their traditional gender policies would reflect the portrait of a virtuous community, which in turn would consolidate women’s continuous support. However, the guidelines were also based on the expectation that women’s participation in the public arena would be offset with regressive mandates and legal adjustments reinforcing the family unit.¹⁸⁶ The ideological premise of the Republic was in stark contrast to that of the Pahlavi regime, wherein educational objectives avoided gender specific formulations and were presented in the context of “providing equal opportunity for all Iranian men and women, in all classes of the population; urban or rural...”¹⁸⁷ The moral educational goals were additionally specified within the framework of cultivating “human qualities and virtues inspired by spiritual principles, while making judicious use of social rights...[as] members of a free and progressive society...”¹⁸⁸ A delineation of “religious instruction” was noticeably absent within the defined objectives and ethos of the Pahlavi educational establishment.

While the implementation of the Republic’s ideology led to the eradication of the Pahlavis emancipatory agenda and dismantled the underpinnings of secular women in Iran, it inadvertently energized a traditional constituency who began to assert themselves in a newly

¹⁸⁶ Paidar, P. “Feminism and Islam in Iran,” in Kandiyoti, D. (ed.) *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1996, 51-68

¹⁸⁷ UNESCO – World Survey of Education V: Educational Policy, Legislation and Administration, 1971

¹⁸⁸ Ibid

chaste educational atmosphere. One of the most dramatic reactions occurred when young women began entering the educational mainstream in droves.¹⁸⁹ In retrospect, while this betrayal of Iran's female population was indeed inadequate compensation for their support of the revolution, deviations from the cardinal doctrine unexpectedly produced favorable conditions for women's education that partially ameliorated the backward looking views of the revolutionary leaders.

In the three decades and a half since the annihilation of the Pahlavi monarchy, higher educational attainment by women has been distinguished by a substantial rise in virtually all levels of academia. On the eve of the revolution the overall literacy rate for the female population stood at 35.5%. In 2007 this figure had escalated to an astonishing 80.34%.¹⁹⁰ Today, Iran exhibits one of the highest female to male ratios at the primary level among all sovereign nations. In 2006 the gender gap in Iranian universities had effectively closed reflecting a 50/50 ratio, and by the 2007/2008 academic year this proportion had shifted in favor of women.¹⁹¹ The trend towards the "feminization" of higher education continues as women have begun to outnumber men at the tertiary level by a ratio of 127:100.¹⁹² A 2006 BBC article poignantly captures the obvious surplus of women in Iranian facilities:

Twenty post-graduate students are sitting in a plush classroom listening to a lecture on environmental management at the Islamic Azad University — a private institution with

¹⁸⁹ Rashti-Rezai, G. "Women and Education in The Islamic Republic of Iran," *Legatum Institute*, November 2012; Shahidian, H. "The Education of Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 2, No.2, Winter 1997, 6-38

¹⁹⁰ UNESCO Statistical Yearbook and World Survey of Education

¹⁹¹ Statistical Center of Iran, 2007

¹⁹² Shavarini, M.K. "The Feminization of Iranian Higher Education," *Review of Education* 51, 2005, 329-347; World Bank "The Road Travelled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa, 2008

1.6 million students across Iran. Three quarters of the students in the classroom are women. The five men in the class are huddled together in a corner.¹⁹³

This unique and unprecedented trend in Iranian society has been distinguished as a major stimulus fueling women's empowerment to resist and combat their ideological status, with an abundance of scholarly accolades distinctly identifying this development as obstructing the construction of the "ideal Muslim woman."¹⁹⁴ However, with respect to this monumental occurrence the dearth of systematic dissections of curricular content, particularly at the elementary level, identified as a pre-adolescent's initial foray outside of the family environment, invites additional inquiry as one of the educational arenas inadequately manipulated by the Republic. Indeed, while numerous studies have focused on women's education, they have insufficiently examined the elementary curriculum and the extent to which the regime may have disregarded it in pursuing their own preferred mandate.

One is compelled to reflect on the capacity of a nation that has legally incapacitated half of its population to systematically generate a society that is noted for its surplus of female literacy, complemented by women's spirited and unrestrained calls for reform. Hamideh Sedghi remarks that with their presence in the education system "women have begun to pose indirect challenges to the political and social taboos that uphold womanhood and wifehood as a woman's

¹⁹³ Harrison, F. "Women Graduates Challenge Iran," BBC News September 19, 2006

¹⁹⁴ Paidar, P. "Gender of Democracy: The Encounter Between Feminism and Reformism in Contemporary Iran," Program Paper No. 6, Democracy, Governance and Human Rights, U.N. Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), October 2001, 1-47; Mehran, G. "Doing and Undoing Gender: Female Higher Education in The Islamic Republic of Iran." *International Review of Education*, 2009, 55:541-599; Mehran, G. "The Paradox of Tradition and Modernity," *Comparative Education Review* 47, No. 3, 2003, 269-286; Mehran, G. "Lifelong Learning: New Opportunities for Women in a Muslim Country," *Comparative Education*, 35: 2, 201-215, 1999

primary responsibility.”¹⁹⁵ It becomes essential to examine whether Ayatollah Khomeini and his immediate successors enunciated and carried out radically new policies or whether they reproduced and continued many of the Monarchy’s mandates with respect to the set curriculum. Is it possible that the Republic adhered to Mohammad Reza Shah’s imported infrastructure and only superficially saturated it with Islamic dogma as part of an attempt to create the exemplary citizen?

The remainder of this chapter takes a multifaceted approach in disclosing the undetected components within the “purified” blueprint of a reconstructed elementary curriculum responsible for undermining the goals of the conservative ideologues. An overview of educational modifications impacting the role of the “State” as an agent of social change will identify key components of pre- and post-revolutionary gender precepts and the extent to which they may have replicated and/or deviated from the reigning ideology of respective regimes. The examination will further address the possibility that compulsory veiling and segregation laws may have combined with a westernized medium to produce favorable conditions for educating the traditional segment of the female population. The Islamic regime’s outdated decrees, resisted and resented by the emancipated Iranian woman, may in fact be viewed as a fortuitous and liberating measure empowering women’s venture into previously uncharted territory. Did the enforcement of such alterations mandated for ideological purposes effectively undermine the primary subordinate role designated for women and combine to produce results contrary to those originally forecast by revolutionary leaders?

¹⁹⁵ Sedghi, H. 2007, 222

While an array of studies have assessed post-revolutionary textbooks ranging from the primary to the secondary levels, none have extensively compared them to those employed in the Pahlavi era, specifically as they correspond to the gender images of each period. The underlying objective in most educational systems mirrors the ideology of the ruling class presumably as they seek instill the principal doctrines in the population at large in order to ensure conformity with regime goals. The State is charged with socializing the younger generation within the framework of a fixed and coherent set of beliefs, whereby the educational system is ideally and routinely employed to reflect the state's core principles.¹⁹⁶

Elementary textbooks of the Monarchical and Republican periods are considered to be one of the hallmarks of socialization. Numerous studies have corroborated that despite a fervent quest to abolish all western inroads into academia, primary, secondary, and higher education practices continued to be maintained, albeit with Islamic additions.¹⁹⁷

This study will examine the elementary school textbooks (grades 1-5) employed during the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and during the Islamic Republic, with specific attention to the gender ideology put forward by each regime in order to promote their respective visions of either a “westernized,” and/or “traditional” Muslim woman. “Gender ideology” refers to attitudes regarding the appropriate and expected roles and obligations of men and women in a given society whereby gender role expectations in particular societies often reflect the doctrines

¹⁹⁶ Shepard, J.M. *Sociology*. 10th edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2010, 89-115; Ballantine, J.H. & Hammack, F.M. *The Sociology of Education: A Systematic Analysis*. 6th edition. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education, 2009

¹⁹⁷ Godagzar, H. 2008; Menashri, D. 1992; Higgins, P.J. & Shoar-Ghaffari, P. “Sex-Role Socialization in Iranian Textbooks,” *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 3, No.2, 1991, 213-232; Mehran, G. “Ideology and Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” *Comparative Education Review* 20, No.1, 1990, 53-65

of the ruling regime.¹⁹⁸ A “traditional” gender ideology emphasizes the distinctive roles assigned to both sexes based on presumed innate differences, with men fulfilling their primary duty as breadwinners and women as homemakers and principal caregivers within the family unit. In direct contrast, an “egalitarian” philosophy regarding the family endorses shared gender responsibility both in the private and public domain.¹⁹⁹ Sociologists and social psychologists view the socialization arena as indispensable in the identity formation and development of all individuals regardless of gender, culture and geographical station, and integral to the attainment of social and cultural continuity in the dissemination of norms, customs, and ideologies necessary for perpetuating the existing order.²⁰⁰ The available literature on early childhood education indicates that by the end of the elementary years children have acquired the foundations for expected conventions in the classroom, family, and community at large. Sociologist Daniel Coleman confirms that within this process the preadolescent years (7-12 years) are crucial as children begin to exhibit “more realistic views of life as opposed to the intense fantasy oriented world of earliest childhood,” fortified by a more mature, sensible and

¹⁹⁸ Kroska, A. “Conceptualizing and Measuring Ideology as an Identity,” in *Gender and Society*. Vol. 14, No. 3, June 2000, 368-394; Ritzer, G. & Ryan, J.M *The Concise Encyclopedia of Sociology*. U.S. & U.K.: Blackwell Publishing, 2011, 249.

¹⁹⁹ Davis, S.N. “Gender Ideology: Components, Predictions and Consequences,” in *Annual Review of Sociology*. Vol. 35, August 2009, 87-105; Kaufman, G. “Do Gender Role Attitudes Matter? Family Formation and Dissolution Among Traditional and Egalitarian Men and Women,” in *Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 21, No. 1, January 2000, 128-144; Cameron, J.E. & Lalonde, R.L. “Social Identification and Gender Related Ideology in Men and Women,” in *British Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 40, No. 1, March 2001, 59-77; Kramer, L. *The Sociology of Gender: A Brief Introduction*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011

²⁰⁰ Maccoby, E. “Historical Overview of Socialization Research and Theory,” in Grusec, J.E. & Hastings, P.D. (eds.) *Handbook of Socialization: Theory and Research*. New York & London: The Guilford Press, 2007, 13-41; Schaefer, R.T. & Lamm, R.P. *Sociology*. 5th edition. New York & London: McGraw-Hill 1995, 91-117; Macionis, J.J. *Sociology*. 14th edition. New York & London: Pearson 2012, 102-115

realistic perception of behavioral conduct.²⁰¹ This juncture has been distinguished as the initial stage when a child begins to develop a pronounced sense of the future along with an increased moral compass in the formation of self-identity.²⁰²

The rationale for focusing on the formative stage as an intrinsic component of this process is validated in the following statement:

The early childhood years are ideal...as children acquire the foundations of knowledge, values, and attitudes during the important elementary years...²⁰³

Children at this level are capable of cognitive thought and formulation of values and standards, principally through the family unit and school system, essentially comprising the cardinal socializing agents with the former predominating during the first five years and the latter occupying a significant space during the pre-adolescent years.²⁰⁴ Within this spectrum the structured learning environment of elementary schooling is regarded as a transitional episode and viewed as the child's earliest perspective beyond the realm of his or her household.²⁰⁵

Normative gender roles and depictions of culturally and socially "acceptable" male and/or female responsibilities are communicated by the ruling entity via the educational

²⁰¹ Coleman, D. *Emotional Intelligence*. New York & London: Bantam Books 2005, 193-194

²⁰² Santrock, J.W. *Adolescence*. 14th edition. New York: McGraw Hill, 2010, 128-161; Edwards, C.P. *Promoting Social and Moral Development in Young Children*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University 1986

²⁰³ Social Studies For Early Childhood and Elementary School Children: Preparing for the 21st Century. A Report from NCSS (National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies) Task Force on Early Childhood/Elementary Social Studies. June 1988; Downey, M. "Teaching the History of Childhood," in *Social Education* 50, April/May 1986, 262-267

²⁰⁴ Kehily, M.J. *Introduction to Childhood Studies*. London, England: Open University Press 2004; Kassem, D. Murphy, L. & Taylor, E. *Key Issues in Childhood and Youth Studies*. U.S. & Canada: Routledge, 2010

²⁰⁵ Handel, G., Cahill, S.E., Elkin, F. *Children and Society: The Sociology of Children and Childhood Socialization*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 131-182

infrastructure.²⁰⁶ Textbooks employed during this cycle are one of the major tools in the educational process conveying pertinent information regarding the ethics, codes of conduct and behavioral guidelines endorsed by the prevailing order. The curricular content is an important indicator of gender socialization among the younger generation as future participants in the society at large.²⁰⁷ Sociologists Jerome Karabel and A.H. Halsey maintain “revolutions do not merely make educational change possible, they require it...”²⁰⁸ The academic arena must therefore be transformed and harmonized to correspond to the newly institutionalized criteria of the ruling regime. Failure to undertake this passage may undermine the revolution, “for it is the education system that is responsible for the molding of future generations...”²⁰⁹

Emile Durkheim the father of sociology and architect of modern social sciences underscores the vital necessity of education in securing the longevity of controlling entities, with socialization initiated within the family at birth becoming systematic during the instructional years.²¹⁰ Durkheim, who specifically focused his studies on the socialization of the younger generation in the school system, concluded the following:

²⁰⁶ Arnett, J.J. “Socialization in Emerging Adulthood: From Family to the Wider World, from Socialization to Self-Socialization,” in Grusec, J.E. & Hastings, P.D (eds.) *Handbook of Socialization: Theory and Research*. New York: Guilford Press, 2007, 208-231

²⁰⁷ Santrock, J.W. 2012, 162-182; Bidwell, C.E. “School as Context and Construction: A Social Psychological Approach to the Study of Schooling,” in Hallinan, M.T. (ed.) *Handbook of the Sociology of Education*. U.S.: Springer Science and Business Media 2006, 15-35; McEneaney, E.H. & Meyer, J.W. “The Content of the Curriculum: An Institutional Perspective,” in Hallinan, M.T. (ed.) 2006, 189-211; Schneider, B. “Social Systems and Norms: A Coleman Approach,” in Hallinan, M.T. (ed.), 2006, 365-386

²⁰⁸ Karabel, J. & Halsey, A.H. *Power and Ideology in Education*. U.S.: Oxford University Press, 1977, 551

²⁰⁹ Ibid; Shepard, J. 2010, 345-356

²¹⁰ Calhoun, C. Gerteis J. Moody, J., Pfaff, S. & Virk, I. *Classical Sociological Theory*. 2nd edition Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2007, 131-135; Allan, K. *Explorations in Classical*

We thus arrive at the following definition: Education is the action exercised by the adult generation over those that are not yet ready for social life. Its purpose is to arouse and develop in the child a certain number of intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him by both the political society as a whole and by the specific environment for which he is particularly destined. It emerges from the foregoing definition that education consists of a methodical socialization of the younger generation.²¹¹

Underlying the fundamental objective of the learning process is the “hidden curriculum” defined as the “subterranean informal and unofficial aspects of culture that children are taught in preparation for their lives within the larger society.”²¹²

This concealed dimension contributes to the socialization of children by transmitting a variety of “non-academic” standards and customs outside of the assigned disciplines.²¹³

It is essential to examine the “impressionable” pre-adolescent phase within the framework of what sociologist James Henslin contends constitutes a crucial component of the socialization mechanism, relevant to the acquisition of culturally and socially defined gender roles.²¹⁴

The inherited western infrastructure of the Pahlavi era was in effect expediently retained for rearing a new generation according to Islamic principles, with emphasis on female education presumably designed to vest future mothers with knowledge of how to properly instruct and raise

Sociological Theory: Seeing the Social World. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005
101-138

²¹¹ Durkheim, E. *Les Regles de la Monde Sociologique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1992, 95; Durkheim, E. *Education et Sociologie*. Paris: Librairie Felix Alcan, 1922, 51; Durkheim, E. *Moral Education*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications Inc.2002, 223-251

²¹² Shepard, 2010, 103, 353

²¹³ Basow, S. “The Hidden Curriculum in the Classroom,” in Paludi, M.A. (ed.) *Guide to the Psychology of Gender*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004, 117-130

²¹⁴ Henslin, J. M. *Sociology: A Down-to-Earth Approach*. 11th edition. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson, 2010, 85, 373

their children according to the ideals of the reigning authority.²¹⁵ The Pahlavi era's progressive policies, designed to elevate the status of women through their deliberate inclusion outside of the domestic sphere, were compromised by being transplanted from the West, effectively leading the vast majority of traditional Iranians to react against this intrusion. The religious environment of the post-revolutionary era unexpectedly reversed this situation. There is no doubt that Ayatollah Khomeini regarded education as a pioneering force in the cultivation of the ideal person (*ensanha-ye nemuneh*) to be accomplished through transformation of the educational system into "training" institutions (*tarbiyyat*).²¹⁶ Golnar Mehran, who has written extensively on this subject, confirms that "the goal was to clear them [the educational infrastructure] of the misguidance and decadence of the despotic former regime," and Jalal Matini concludes that in this effort "...no detail skipped the eye of the censors."²¹⁷

The relatively few studies comparing pre- and post-revolutionary elementary schoolbooks have noted the infusion of copious religious content. However, research in the realm of identity formation by way of a reconfigured elementary curriculum remains a relatively unexplored field, specifically as it applies to long-term implications for women. Although the

²¹⁵ Rashti-Rezai, G. "Exploring Women's Experience of Higher Education and the Changing Nature of Gender Relations in Iran," in Baharmitash, R. & Hougland, E. (eds.) *Gender In Contemporary Iran: Pushing the Boundaries*. New York & London: Routledge, 2011 45-62; Shaditalab, J. "Iranian Women Rising Expectations," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 14(1) 2005, 35-55; Higgins, P.J. & Shoar-Ghaffari, P. "Women's Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran," in Afkhami, M. & Friedl, E. (eds.) *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran*. London & New York: I.B. Tauris 1994, 19-43; Aryan, K. "The Boom in Women's Education," in Povey, T. & Rostami-Povey, E. (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*. London: Ashgate, 2012, 35-52

²¹⁶ Speech by Ayatollah Khomeini cited in Rajaei, F. *Islamic Values and World View: Khomeini on Man, the State, and International Politics*, Vol. XIII, Lanham: University Press of America, 1984, 36

²¹⁷ Mehran, 1989, 36; Matini, J. "*Ketabha-ye Darsi-ye Jumhuri-ye Islami-ye Iran*," (The School Books of The Islamic Republic of Iran) Iran Nameh 3, Fall 1984, 6

existing scholarship provides invaluable insight into this complex field, the final verdict on women's phenomenal awakening via the educational mainstream remains largely inconclusive. The overall conclusions that emerge indicate limited assessment of "male" and/or "female" roles, contrasting the Pahlavi textbooks with those of the Republic by noting the exclusion or inclusion of Islamic insignia. The cumulative surveys highlight the fundamental role of education in the socialization process of youth and unveil the explicit goals of the Monarchy and Islamic ideologues towards the indoctrination of young people by objectifying their unique brand of a model citizen.²¹⁸ Visuals and textual examples from the monarchical textbooks juxtaposed against the drastic modifications undertaken by the Republic, highlight modest and provincial attire, prayer rituals, fasting, pilgrimages martyrdom, and the principles of sacred morality. Historian Mehrdad Haghayeghi estimates that such distinctions are indicative of the overriding quest to redirect the masses into a populist Islamic ideology, while author Haggay Ram's recognition of the Republic's conformity to the "pre-revolutionary nationalistic ideals and conception of an immemorial nation," reinforces the regime's adherence to the Pahlavi curricular

²¹⁸ Mehran, G. 1989, 1990, 1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2009; Mehran, G. "Gender and Education in Iran," Background paper prepared for the Education for all Global Monitoring Report, 2003/2004, 1-25; Matini, J. "The Impact of the Islamic Revolution on Education in Iran," in Badran, A. (ed.) *At the Crossroads: Education in the Middle East*. New York: Paragon House, 1989, 43-55; Ferdows, A. "Gender Roles in Iranian School Textbooks," in Farsoun, S.K. & Mashayekhi, M. (eds.) *Iran: Political Culture in the Islamic Republic*. London & New York: Routledge, 1994, 325-336; Haghayeghi, M. "Politics and ideology in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 1993, 29: 36-52; Higgins, P.J. & Shoar-Ghaffari, P. 1991, 1994; Shorish, M. "The Islamic Revolution and Education in Iran," *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 32 No. 1, Feb. 1988, 58-75; Ram, H. "The Immemorial Iranian Nation? School Textbooks and Historical Memory in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Department of Middle East Studies*, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Nations & Nationalism 6(1), 2000, 67-90; Rezai-Rashti, G.M. & James, S. "Women and Higher Education in Post-Revolutionary Iran: Unsettling Policies and Unanticipated Outcomes," in *Comparative Education and Policy Research* Vol. 6, 2009, 45-58; Toubia, J. R. "Cultural Effects on Sex Role Images in Elementary School Books in Iran: A Content Analysis After the Revolution," *International Journal of Sociology and the Family* Vol. 17, 1987, 143-158; Paivandi, S. *Discrimination and Intolerance in Iran's Textbooks* NY & Washington DC: Freedom House, 2008, Menashri, 1992; Godagzar, 2008

design.²¹⁹ Golnar Mehran further recognizes the importance of elementary schooling in the identity construction of the younger generation, in the process holding the “gender sensitive school curriculum that portrays stereotypical images of men and women in textbooks” accountable for perpetuating the traditional mentality in Iranian society by outlining “a strict division of labor based on traditional male and female occupations:”²²⁰

A content analysis of the post-revolutionary textbooks reveals that in elementary school textbooks, where the most manifest form of socialization takes place, the father is introduced as the one who usually works outside the home and provides food, shelter, and clothing for his family. Meanwhile, the mother is presented as the internal manager who cooks, cleans, and raises the children. In addition, she helps them with their school work and introduces them to Islam and religious studies.

Her critique extends to “compulsory veiling of female students” and explicit typecasting guiding female students toward “feminine specialization deemed appropriate for women.”²²¹ However, in reaching this verdict the author refrains from citing corroborating passages and/or illustrations.

Saeed Paivandi’s extensive report based on a detailed evaluation of Republican textbooks explores a wide range of topics ranging from segregation of the sexes in image and content to the presence of women in social and professional settings. In practically every specified instance the author emphatically condemns the “prevalence of gender inequality” in the Islamic curriculum for “systematically denigrating the importance of women as individuals.” This statement is supported by numerous references to the veil and /or head covering and the absence of “female images related to work, military, and other social environments,” and an imbalance in male/female portraiture favoring men.²²² Yet the author neglects to incorporate Pahlavi era

²¹⁹ Haghayeghi, M. 1993; Ram, H. 2000, 68, 85

²²⁰ Mehran, G. 1999, 207

²²¹ Mehran, G. 2003, 278

²²² Paivandi, S. 2006, 1, 19-29

textbooks as an accurate barometer of new trends. This oversight is not only applicable to Paivandi, but extends to the multitude of studies citing the prevalence of “gender stereotyping” in textbooks. As an added example Jacqueline Touba’s inquiry of gender role transmission in elementary textbooks confirms the narrow scope of investigations in this arena, with an all too cursory evaluation leading to the following conclusion:

The Islamic Republic has done away with egalitarian norms... The Patriarchal orientation of the present regime has been incorporated into the elementary textbooks, thus reinforcing traditional values concerning women’s role in society.²²³

Yet Touba herself acknowledges the omission of Pahlavi era textbooks in her study, stating that “they were not readily available for use.”²²⁴

In the following pages, a theoretical evaluation of the pre- and post-revolutionary elementary textbooks will be undertaken. The overall composition of texts and images will be inspected through the lens of interrelated sociological and historical nuances relevant to the fundamental social, political, and cultural outlooks of both periods. Textbook topics, themes and storylines will be accessed for gender visibility, professional and domestic undertakings, performance of stereotypical and/ or non-stereotypical tasks, in order to ascertain the message internalized by children of the revolution regarding the appropriate male and female assignment, and the degree to which the curriculum itself reflects the gender ideology of the ruling entities. The research methodology will include a qualitative and quantitative content analysis as part of a mission to decipher the extent to which the Monarchy and the Republic’s vision has been anchored in the prescribed syllabus. The following criteria will be employed:

²²³ Touba, J. 1987, 145

²²⁴ Ibid, 146

- Portrayal of men and women in the public and private sphere
- Gender relevance with respect to textual content
- Childrearing and related domestic duties and responsibilities
- Professional undertakings of both sexes
- Activities and functions attributed to men and women
- Proportion of male and female images

This study examines 36 elementary textbooks (grades 1-5) employed in the first decade of the Islamic Republic and 25 elementary textbooks (grades 1-5) utilized in the last decade of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's reign. For the purpose of this evaluation all schoolbooks have been translated from their original Farsi language.

The following subjects from the Islamic Republic's primary cycle were incorporated as part of this investigation:

GRADE 1

Reading and Writing Farsi
 Writing Farsi (Workbook)
 Mathematics
 Science
 Koranic Studies

GRADE 2

Reading and Writing Farsi
 Writing Farsi (Workbook)
 Mathematics
 Science
 Koranic Studies
 Gifts From Heaven (Religious Studies textbook introduced at this level)
 Gifts From Heaven (Workbook)

GRADE 3

Reading and Writing Farsi

Writing Farsi (Workbook)

Mathematics

Science

Koranic Studies

Gifts From Heaven

Gifts From Heaven (Workbook)

Social Studies (Introduced at this level, including History and Geography)

GRADE 4

Reading and Writing Farsi

Writing Farsi (Workbook)

Mathematics

Science

Koranic Studies

Gifts From Heaven

Gifts From Heaven (Workbook)

Social Studies

GRADE 5

Reading and Writing Farsi

Writing Farsi (Workbook)

Mathematics

Science

Koranic Studies

Gifts From Heaven

Gifts From Heaven (Workbook)

Social Studies

ELEMENTARY TEXTBOOKS OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC

In the analysis of the Reading and Writing Farsi textbooks (grades 1-5) (*Khandan va Neveshtan-e Farsi*) of the Islamic Republic, this study found men, women, and children to be cloaked in somber attire, with the female population conforming to the veiling laws of the

regime. Women are portrayed as “mothers,” “wives,” teachers and physicians.²²⁵ They are additionally shown undertaking numerous rural tasks and engaged in various professional occupations in the urban community at large.²²⁶ There are relatively few passages and/or illustrations presenting women in the typically “blue collar” occupations. Those cited and/or exhibited include “factory worker” and “seamstress.”²²⁷

The men are depicted as “fathers,” “husbands,” soldiers, pilots, farmers, physicians, and teachers.²²⁸ Moreover, they are pictured in diversified blue-collar fields including construction worker, mailman, grocer, and cobbler.²²⁹ Aside from their portrayal in the medical, education and aviation industries, the male population is conspicuously non-existent in excerpts and/or images representing them in any other occupational capacity. The absence of women from manual and technical labor is countered by their presence in an array of white-collar vocations exemplified by their portrayal in medical and healthcare facilities and an assortment of professional office settings.²³⁰ This study did not find the lack of women in the specified unskilled trades to be highly unusual, especially in view of the fact that the delineated tasks tend to be performed by men in most traditional and western societies.

In surveying the textbooks for the frequency of content reflecting the mandate for public segregation of men and women, this report found that their separation was solely visible in

²²⁵ IRI. Reading and Writing Farsi (*Khandan va Neveshtan-e Farsi*) Grade 1, Tehran Ministry of Education, 1986, 3,13,39; Reading Farsi - Grade 2, Tehran Ministry of Education, 1988, 68

²²⁶ IRI. Reading and Writing Farsi (*Khandan va Neveshtan-e Farsi*) Grade 5, Tehran Ministry of Education, 1988, 155, 199

²²⁷ IRI. Reading Farsi - Grade 2, Tehran Ministry of Education, 1988, 157

²²⁸ Ibid., Grade 1, pages 2,4,38, 49, 68, 76; Ibid, Grade 2, pages 25,31; Ibid, Grade 3, page 14

²²⁹ Ibid., Grade 1, pages 27,46,83; Ibid, Grade 2, page 5

²³⁰ Ibid., Grade 2, pages 155,157

classroom settings and mosque prayer scenes.²³¹ Female instructors are shown teaching girls, while male instructors are exclusively situated in the boys classroom.²³² Every other public or private domain showcases the integration of the sexes, with boys and girls frequently displayed together in various leisurely activities. Sketches of mothers, fathers, and children interacting as a family unit, both within the household and in the community at large are abundantly visible throughout the pages of all schoolbooks.

The following passages and illustrations reflect scenes highlighting public and private interaction with the opposite sex, in addition to a shared responsibility in performing domestic chores and parental cooperation in child rearing:

- Recreational activities (parks, zoos, picnics, beach, camping)²³³
- Mothers and fathers reading, playing and studying with their children²³⁴
- Indoor and outdoor excursions with the family²³⁵
- Walking children to and from school²³⁶
- Men, women, and children engaged in farm labor²³⁷
- Kitchen Scene. The content and image of this particular lesson demonstrates the collective effort of all family members in undertaking household duties:
 - Azadeh (young girl) fills the sugar bowl
 - Mother washes the spoons and plates

²³¹ Ibid., Grade1, page 24; Ibid, Grade 3, page 72

²³² Ibid., Grade 2, page 10; Ibid, Grade 3, page 14

²³³ Ibid., Grade 1, pages 17, 22

²³⁴ Ibid., 2

²³⁵ Ibid., 13, 14; Ibid, Grade 2, page 135

²³⁶ Ibid., Grade 1, page 7

²³⁷ Ibid., 71

- Father carries the serving tray of teapot and teacups²³⁸
- Mothers and fathers shopping with their children in the bazaars²³⁹
- Boys and girls walking together to and from school, sharing picture books, playing in the snow, and building a snowman²⁴⁰
- Narrative of a young girl simultaneously comforted by her father and mother²⁴¹
- Passage about a father tenderly and lovingly dispensing advice to his daughter²⁴²

In researching the Social Studies (*Taalimat-e Ejtemai*), Mathematics (*Riazi*), and Science (*Ulum-e Tajrobi*) curriculum, this report did not find any evidence relating to stereotypical chores performed by the female population. The social studies books were essentially comprised of geography lessons and extensive narratives on revered Islamic figures and ancient Persian rulers. Except for classroom scenes, men, women, and children continued to be shown in “mixed” settings participating in a variety of indoor and outdoor activities.

The mathematics and science books substantially replicate those from the late Pahlavi period, with an overall balanced depiction of boys and girls engaged in coloring activities, laboratory experiments, and field assignments. Both sexes adorn the cover pages of most textbooks, and are likewise illustrated in a multitude of coeducational settings in the scientific arena.²⁴³ Men and women continue to be engaged in a variety of leisurely activities and continue to be shown as “mothers,” “fathers,” instructors, and physicians.

²³⁸ Ibid., 6

²³⁹ Ibid., 26

²⁴⁰ Ibid., cover page, 63,64,119; Ibid, Grade 5, page 147

²⁴¹ Ibid., Grade 2, page 23

²⁴² Ibid., 154

²⁴³ IRI. Science (*Ulum-e Tajrobi*) Grade 1, Tehran, Ministry of Education, 1988, 8, 35

In a photograph of children playing in the park, some of the girls are surprisingly shown without their headscarves.²⁴⁴ This may have been a snapshot inadvertently incorporated from the Pahlavi period, and an obvious *faux pas* by the architects of this medium in neglecting to make the necessary adjustment.

The newly devised addition of “Gifts from Heaven,” (*Hediye-hay-e Asemani*) introduced in the 2nd grade is analogous to a religious manual of sorts, enumerating God’s illustrious attributes and his venerated gifts to mankind. Extensive coverage of sacred Islamic customs and time-honored celebrations, narratives about the Prophet Muhammad and members of his immediate family, as well as descriptions of major world religions complete the overall program of this guidebook.

In reference to gender depictions, this study found only three sections in the entire series describing the role and responsibility of men and women in the family.

The following passages highlight the importance of marital partnership in an “Islamic” community:

Mr. Mahmoud Hashemi (husband/father) works in the post office, and Tahereh Khanum (wife/mother) is a homemaker. In this family everyone is obligated to help one another. When Mr. Hashemi leaves work, he shops for the family on his way home. In addition to housework, Tahereh Kanum works as a seamstress so that she is able to contribute to the household expenses with the money she earns.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 12

²⁴⁵ IRI. Gifts From Heaven (*Hediye-hay-e Asemani*) Grade 4, Tehran Ministry of Education, 1988, 2

We are all members of the same family. Mothers and fathers provide us with food, clothing, and shelter. They take care of us and when we are sick they take us to the doctor. Mothers and fathers are kind and they make sacrifices for our comfort.²⁴⁶

Every member of the family has a responsibility. Usually the father works outside of the house. In some families, the mother works outside of the house as well. In villages, women work in agriculture and carpet weaving. In cities, some women work in schools, hospitals, factories, and offices.²⁴⁷

These excerpts are not altogether indicative of a traditional division of labor, nor do they exclusively delegate domestic and childcare responsibilities to the female head of the household. More importantly, they do not reflect the myriad of gender-biased declarations of Islamic leaders, nor do they endorse any of the laws designed to divert and/or redirect women into the private sphere.

The Koranic Studies (*Amuzesh-e Koran*) curriculum is strictly based on religious guidance and discipline. The content and images are comparable to the Reading and Writing Farsi textbooks in their depiction of gender roles in the household and community at large. Segregation of boys and girls is exclusively reserved for prayer sessions in mosques and all instructional spaces. Families are exhibited in a host of outdoor recreational ventures, with a noticeable absence of specific references to male/female functions and any citations of religious justifications for gender stereotyping.

The following subjects from the Pahlavi era's primary cycle were incorporated as part of this investigation:

²⁴⁶ Ibid, Grade 4, pages 108,109

²⁴⁷ Ibid, 111,112

GRADE 1

Farsi
 Mathematics
 Science
 Social Studies
 Religious Studies

GRADES 2-5: Same as above

ELEMENTARY TEXTBOOKS OF THE PAHLAVI MONARCHY

In the analysis of the Farsi textbooks (grades 1-5) from the late Pahlavi period, the study found men, women and children predominantly presented in western attire in a distinctly urban environment. The majority of classroom illustrations are coeducational and presided over by both male and female instructors. Men and women are portrayed as “mothers/wives,” “father/husbands,” and teachers. Aside from such distinctions and sporadic images related to manual farm labor, there is a dearth of passages and sketches depicting men and women in any specific skilled and/or unskilled professions. Women and young girls are shown performing a variety of domestic-related chores, and in some settings both sons and daughters are shown washing dishes together in the kitchen.²⁴⁸ The portfolio of family affairs and mutual cooperation of parents contains a deluge of photographs and descriptions including communal shopping, park outings, walking to and from school, and museum excursions.²⁴⁹ In the majority of settings, boys and girls appear to be engaged in common activities, and in rare instances they are playing with gender specific toys such as dolls or trucks.²⁵⁰ In addition to the intermittent rural images of

²⁴⁸ Farsi Grade 1 Tehran, Ministry of Education, 1974, 4,42,52

²⁴⁹ Ibid. 51, 58, 59, 81

²⁵⁰ Ibid. 73, 74

women in village attire, there are random displays of segregated classrooms and the occasional elderly woman wearing a headscarf.²⁵¹

The Religious Studies text (*Taalimat-e Dini*) consists of instructional booklets concerning religion as a belief system, incorporating sacred texts accentuating God's miracles, in addition to basic prayer recitations cited from the Koran.

The Mathematics (*Hesab va Hendeseh*), Social Studies (*Tarikh va Goghrafi*), and Science (*Ulum*) textbooks completely refrain from distinguishing specific male and/or female domestic or professional obligations. The mathematics textbooks include instructions on numerical equations, while the social studies books essentially glorify Iran's monarchical past. The science curriculum displays a potpourri of colorful texts and images of boys and girls immersed in a variety of fieldwork and scientific experiments.

ANALYSIS OF PRE- AND POST-REVOLUTIONARY ELEMENTARY TEXTBOOKS

This survey of the revised post-revolutionary elementary textbooks confirms that at this level the primary focus was on the indoctrination of the Republic's religious ideology in Iranian school children. The secular curriculum of the Monarchy was indeed entirely transformed as part of the overriding mission to cultivate and nurture the ideal citizen, with the overall role assigned to this level being to blend Islamic principles into the body of the instructional system. The religious ensemble incorporated as part of the regime's extensive purification process is abundantly evident in a myriad of examples depicting a humble, modest, and pious twentieth century Islamic community. With the exception of the academic environs and random prayer scenes, the integration of the sexes is manifested in a multitude of leisure venues, which in effect

²⁵¹ Ibid., 47; Ibid., Grade 2, pages 1,72

neither endorse nor reflect the Republic's mandate for the public segregation of men and women outside of the private sphere. Furthermore, the books often praise, acknowledge, and are appreciative of contributions made by all family members, and therefore do not typically portray a society that discriminates against women. It is possible to recognize, therefore, a distinctly inadequate effort to socialize the female population within the Republic's "preferred" vision of a newly resurrected Islamic society. That is, aside from being shrouded in the Islamic veil and/or headscarf and being segregated in the classroom, women are presented as autonomous beings, relatively unfettered by household burdens and childcare. While they have not altogether taken on the characteristics of emancipated individuals in the Western sense, neither had they done so in textbooks reflecting the progressive ideology of the Pahlavi era. In this respect, it can be concluded that the elementary curriculum in both periods may not have been entirely successful in systematically and sufficiently socializing young women to embrace the respective gender ideologies of either the Monarchical or the Republican template. Textbooks in both phases do not exhibit an aversion to women's employment, nor do they appear to view their economic activities as secondary to domestic and maternal obligations. The Monarchy's scant deference to Iran's rural community and its traditional population is evidenced by the occasional insertion of the older generation in such settings, perhaps as part of a subliminal message that such images are exclusive to Iran's past. On the other hand, while Islamic textbooks display a wide array of professions for the male and female population at large, those from the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi simply underscore familial and instructional roles; omitting the plethora of potential occupations applicable to a progressive ensemble.

In the analysis of gender visibility, this study found that there was an overall balanced representation of men, women, and children throughout all textbooks. The Monarchy inherently

glorifies an urban setting largely distinguished by modern attire, while the Republic pays homage to the provincial community and showcases city dwellers wearing the veil and/or the traditional Islamic manteaux and headscarf. Young girls are almost always shown wearing ornate and colorful clothing, with displays of doves and other beautiful feathered creatures on their floral headscarves.²⁵² In this communal projection, men are not “suited,” nor clothed in casual western attire, but primarily shown in somber apparel, wearing long dark-colored pants and buttoned up plain collared shirts with long sleeves.

Male role models of the Republican era are primarily prominent figures associated with leading world religions and distinguished Islamic individuals revered for their humility and compassion. Female role models are practically non-existent and mainly comprise of teachers, mothers and close relatives of the Prophet Muhammad. His mother Amina and daughters Fatima and Zeinab are honored for their maternal sacrifice and distinguished as paragons of integrity and virtue.²⁵³ All male and female religious mentors are abundantly praised for their valor, generosity, modest disposition, honesty, benevolence, and humble origins. Secular exemplars featured in post-revolutionary material are virtually identical to those of the Pahlavi era. Renowned Persian poets Hafez, Saadi, and Ferdowsi are praised for their classical prose, and noteworthy inventions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Alexander Graham Bell, the Wright brothers, and Thomas Edison are extolled and recounted. The celebrated physicians Muhammad Zakariya Razi (864-930 AD) and Avicenna (c.980-1037), representing the Golden Age of Persia, are acknowledged for their humanitarian contributions, and ancient Persian Dynasties and their rulers are eulogized for their conquests. Likewise, elementary

²⁵² IRI. Reading and Writing Farsi, Grade 3, Tehran, Ministry of Education, 1988, 3

²⁵³ IRI. Gifts From Heaven, Grade 3, Tehran, Ministry of Education, 1988, 47; Gifts From Heaven, Grade 4, 62

textbooks of the Pahlavi period refrain from citing female role models other than mothers, teachers and the *Shahbanou* (Empress) of Iran and wife of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.²⁵⁴ The recurring theme of “motherhood” in particular, is one that is exhibited in a multitude of passages in Farsi textbooks of both eras. Women as mothers are uniformly exalted in poems entitled “Kinder Than Mother” and “Mother” — commemorative tributes of their nurturance, empathy and devotion to the younger generation.²⁵⁵

In conclusion, it can be argued that both regimes have fundamentally presented the world from an overtly male perspective in their omission of a plethora of worthy contributions made by women in numerous fields. However, one cannot discount the fact that many of the non-religious notables in both periods constitute a significant part of Iran’s cultural heritage, while others are representative of some of the extraordinary inventions known to man.

While the Republic’s bias in presenting copious numbers of male religious figures does mirror and correspond to their overall mandate to socialize young minds within the parameters of a patriarchal ideology, it significantly proves inadequate in socializing the pre-adolescent female population during their most impressionable years to conform to the designated female criteria, defined and incorporated within the framework of the Islamic Constitution and the Principles of the System of Education. Renowned sociologists, including Emile Durkheim, testify to the considerable power of religion as a legitimizing force in society where “the moral forces expressed by religious symbols are real forces with which we must reckon and with which we cannot do what we will... They are necessary for the well working of our moral life as our food

²⁵⁴ Farsi ,Grade 5, Tehran, Ministry of Education, 1974, 18

²⁵⁵ IRI. Reading and Writing Farsi, Grade 1, Tehran, Ministry of Education, 1988, 37; Farsi Grade 2, Tehran, Ministry of Education, 1974, 53

is for the maintenance of our physical life, for it is through them that the group affirms and maintains itself, and we know the point to which this is indispensable for the individual.”²⁵⁶ Part of this dominant structure is male domination of women as professed by most leading world religions, no doubt a defective notion not exclusive to Islam, and one which according to the feminist perspective persists with the blatant sexism connoted by the “assumed maleness of the Supreme Being.”²⁵⁷ In fact conservative sects of Judaism and Christianity perpetuate the mythical perception of an eternal female subordination presumably legitimized by God-given gender differences. In the orthodox Jewish faith, men express their gratitude to the Almighty Creator for not being born female, and in the story of creation, Eve is admonished for eating the forbidden fruit leading to a punishment decreed for all eternity:

In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children, and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee....²⁵⁸

EDUCATION AND THE VEIL

The mysterious yet curious phenomenon of a chador (a kind of ankle-length shroud) assumed by many to be synonymous with an inferior status, is for many outsiders symbolic of the radical gender policies of Iran’s revolutionary leaders. In the context of the Iranian woman, the issue of this black covering needs to be framed within the vestiges of a fundamentally conservative society and its prohibition considered as part and parcel of the stringent early policies implemented by Reza Shah in his pursuit of a progressive agenda. Although his son abandoned the enforcement of this prohibition, its scars had effectively distorted and tainted the

²⁵⁶ Durkheim, E. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. New York: Dover Publications, 2008, 382

²⁵⁷ Shepard, J. 2010, 412

²⁵⁸ The Holy Bible, *Genesis* 3:16

process of westernization. The overthrow of the Monarchy and the subsequent restoration of the veil empowered a traditional sentiment willingly embracing what secular women shunned as an emblem of servitude and bondage to a regressive order, an “Islamic custom” which Bibi Khanum Astarabadi dared to challenge in the early part of the twentieth century when the Iranian woman was chained “behind closed doors...and considered as the slave and servant of her husband.”²⁵⁹ However, the Islamic Republic’s outlook did not automatically lead to compliance by women, nor did it inhibit them from articulating their contempt against a burdensome custom. Nevertheless, mandatory veiling was welcomed by millions of women who appreciated the integrity and modesty symbolized by this liberating milestone. Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi vividly recalls:

Girls went to class in their hejabs – Rehabilitated! Healthy! A generation of women whose mothers had been tethered to the house found themselves in cities, reading books.....There was no pretext left for the patriarchs to keep their daughters out of school. Slowly, it became fashionable for the daughters of traditional families to attend college.²⁶⁰

Ebadi goes on to explain the manner in which the imposition of this decree paradoxically empowered women who despite rampant discrimination became more active in public life:

The Islamic Republic had inadvertently championed traditional women.... For they had been given a new awareness of their rights, but only crude tools to advance them.²⁶¹

For this segment of the female population, the black cloak reinstated as a means to rectify a cultural violation, that is, Pahlavi westernization, was not analogous to confinement nor did it

²⁵⁹ Sedghi, H. 2007, 25-58

²⁶⁰ Ebadi, S. & Moaveni, A. 2006, 106

²⁶¹ Ibid. 109

symbolize a retrogressive ideology, but in essence became a powerful device used to penetrate previously impermeable boundaries.

Yet for all of its fervor, adoption of this emblem of virtue continued to fuel the conflict between the voices of tradition and modernity in the early years of orthodox domination. Marjaneh Satrapi's graphic memoir provides a compelling account of complexities stemming from the Islamic chador, with her candid depiction of women on the left side of a panel reciting the words: "THE VEIL! THE VEIL! THE VEIL!" contrasted with women on the right chanting "FREEDOM! FREEDOM! FREEDOM!"

The author's own narrative regarding this caption reads:

EVERYWHERE IN THE STREETS THERE WERE DEMONSTRATIONS FOR
AND AGAINST THE VEIL!²⁶²

In deliberating the ramifications arising from conflicting tendencies, an all-important premise regarding a departure from the new and a return to the old is brought to the forefront. While a deluge of progressive-minded women elected to leave the country during the initial stage of adjustments, those reluctantly remaining did not choose to isolate themselves, as had the masses of contrarians from the previous era. In fact, the secular woman who radically opposed the veil grudgingly conceded to cover herself with what she perceived to be a degrading standard.

In her memoir, Azar Nafisi recalls returning to work as a university professor in the years following the revolution:

It was not that piece of cloth that I rejected... It was the transformation being imposed upon me that made me look in the mirror and hate the stranger I had become.... that my

²⁶² Satrapi, M. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*. U.S: Pantheon Books, 2003, 5

integrity as a teacher and a woman was being compromised by its insistence that I wear the veil under false pretenses....²⁶³

Today the veil remains a complex insignia, signifying the divergent approaches as its enforcement continues to be as liberating as its restriction, oftentimes resulting in the shrewd interplay of vulnerability and protection.

In the three and a half decades since the revolution re-veiling has proven to be the ultimate salvation for a vast majority, expediting a journey into the westernized educational infrastructure implanted by the Monarchy. The magnitude of this counterintuitive reality has manifested itself within the walls of an inherently patriarchal system whereby many women are beholden to this covering for their personal sovereignty. This unanticipated course of action fortuitously bolstered in an ironic twist of fate by the sheer rejection of western dominance, has categorically “empowered those it was meant to restrain.”²⁶⁴

In the aftermath of the Iran Iraq War (1980-1988), extensive lobbying and resistance by women from all walks of life and the Women’s Social and Cultural Council (WSCC) forced the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution (SCCR) to abolish all restrictions on female admissions to the prohibited disciplines at the university level.²⁶⁵

The overall status of women in higher education in the decades following the war years reflects increased concentration in the fields of medicine, education, and human sciences. The 1998/1999 academic year marks a significant turning point with 48% female enrolment in the

²⁶³ Nafisi, A. *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*. New York: Random House 2003, 101, 165

²⁶⁴ El-Guindi, F. *Veil: Modesty and Resistance*. New York & Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1999, 176

²⁶⁵ Rezai-Rashti, G.M. & James, S. 2009, 53; Moghadam, V.: *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*. 2nd edition U.S. & U.K.: Lynne Reiner Publishers, 2003, 203; Shavarini, M.K. 2005, 335

Humanities, 52% in the Experimental Sciences, 63% in Medicine, 68% in the Arts, 38% in Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine, and 15% in Engineering.²⁶⁶ With the closure and subsequent reversal of the gender gap in favor of female matriculation, and the danger of this expressed by some Parliament members, the Iranian government has taken steps in recent years to curb this trend by imposing a 30% quota for entering men and women in all fields, with the remaining 40% chosen competitively based on individual scores.²⁶⁷

Prior to this stipulation, the government had established a 50% quota for university entrance in the fields of medicine, dentistry, and pharmacology, all areas where female enrollment exceeded that of males by considerable numbers.²⁶⁸ In view of this, it can be argued that conservative lawmakers were attempting to curb this accelerated pace and circumvent female domination in areas where the gender imbalance was most prevalent. However, despite the removal of limitations and statistics reflecting a steady rise in the number of women in many of the culturally approved fields, their stagnating presence in the traditionally male-dominated sectors continues to linger. This stark gender disparity has been brought to the forefront by a limited number of female scholars in the physical sciences, mathematics, and engineering departments.²⁶⁹ The low rate of female enrollment in these arenas has been attributed to “strong cultural overtones,” and gender stereotyping in primary school textbooks held responsible for “continuing to present a traditional division of labor in the private and public realm.”²⁷⁰ The field of engineering in particular has come to be regarded as a bastion of masculinity with men

²⁶⁶ Iran Statistical Center, 2007; Mehran, G., 2003, 282

²⁶⁷ 2008 World Bank Central Database, Mehran, G.2009, 553; *Khallej Times* “Iran Plans University Gender Quotas,” February 25, 2008

²⁶⁸ Ibid

²⁶⁹ Mehran, 2009, 552, 556; Mehran, 2003, 282; Rezai-Rashti & James, 2009, 54

²⁷⁰ Ibid; Higgins, P.J. & Shoar-Ghaffari, P. 1991, 220

comprising 85% of all students in this department.²⁷¹ In reference to this high concentration, the underlying studies are resolute in their conclusion that “men have kept their traditional stronghold in the field of engineering!”²⁷²

Although this is a valuable observation, its accuracy needs to be measured and deciphered in relation to other nations in order to categorically determine whether this drastic demarcation is culture and/or gender related? In exploring this significant disparity, this study found that the underrepresentation of Iranian women in the male-dominated field of engineering is not exclusive to Iran or caused by its patriarchal and traditional tendencies. In fact, the plethora of research undertaken in this domain conclusively demonstrates that “women tend to gravitate towards the fields of study where they can have a positive social impact.”²⁷³ This holds for the majority of western nations, where an extremely high number of women continue to be drawn to the “traditionally appropriate” fields, which largely explains their staggering presence in healthcare and education in the United States.²⁷⁴ Progressive countries such as Canada, England, and the United States who typically refrain from overt gender practices, similarly display a low percentage of women in the engineering division. According to the United States Department of Education, 85% of all engineering students in the U.S. are men with over 60% of women dominating the traditionally “soft” majors including English literature, liberal arts, social sciences, and healthcare.²⁷⁵ In 2005, 82% of all elementary school teachers and 92% of all

²⁷¹ Mehran, G. 2009, 552

²⁷² Ibid., 556

²⁷³ Tulshyan, R. “Top 10 College Majors for Women,” *Forbes* March 2, 2010

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ NCRW (National Council for Research on Women) “Balancing the Equation: Where Are Women and Girls in Science, Engineering and Technology?” Policy Notes — Addressing Achievement Gaps: The Progress and Challenges of Women and Girls in Education and Work,

registered nurses in the U.S. were women, who by comparison accounted for merely 13% of civil engineers, 7% of electrical engineers, and 3% of flight engineers.²⁷⁶

Various studies have concluded that gender-role socialization essential to an individual's sense of identity, influences boys and girls alike in their future occupational choices and significantly explains "the underrepresentation of women in engineering in all stages of the educational pipeline."²⁷⁷ The term "gender" in this context refers to a different set of limitations subconsciously imposed by society simply because of general misconceptions in viewing categories as "male" or "female." Gender labels often generate different patterns of behavior by parents as well as other individuals towards children during the early years, extensively contributing in later years to a striking imbalance in the engineering and mathematical sectors in particular.²⁷⁸ Such preconceived ingrained societal biases are primarily responsible for affecting

Policy Evaluation and Research Center, Vol. 13, No. 2, Fall 2005; Almanac of Post-secondary Education, Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), 2010; Harrison, M. "Jobs and Growth: The Importance of Engineering Skills to the U.K. Economy," Royal Academy of Engineering, September 2012 ; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement "The Educational Progress of Women," National Center for Education Statistics, 1995

²⁷⁶ 2005 National Center for Education Statistics – Digest of Education Statistics; The American Association of University Women (AAUW), 2005

²⁷⁷ Pendleton, G.L. *Profiles of Persistence: A Qualitative Study of Undergraduate Women in Engineering* – PhD dissertation submitted to the faculty of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA, April 1997, page 2

²⁷⁸ AAUW, 1992; Patt, M.B. & McBride, B.A. "Gender Equity in Picture Books in Preschool Classrooms: An Exploratory Study." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Research Association, Atlanta, GA, April 12-18, 1993; Schiebinger, L. Klinge, I. Arlow, A. & Newman, S. "Gendered Innovations: Mainstreaming Sex and Gender Analysis into Basic and Applied Research," *Meta-analysis of Gender and Science Research – Topic Report 2010*

individual attitudes and in turn deterring a large segment of the male and female population from exploring their potential in certain disciplines.²⁷⁹

Young women in general tend to feel that their perceptions of personality do not adequately fit into an engineering environment. Among college students surveyed in England, engineering followed by physics, chemistry, and mathematics, was rated as “the most masculine” of all subjects.²⁸⁰ Over 86% of undergraduate women in the science and engineering departments feel that the intense competitive atmosphere and their lack of contact with female peers profoundly accounts for their low enrollments in these departments.²⁸¹ A lack of female role models is cited as yet another deterrent in this arena. Consequently, the majority of women who initially may gravitate towards this department have a change of heart sometime between their late freshmen to early sophomore years. Another inhibiting factor in this scenario is that women have typically reported lower levels of self-confidence than men when it comes to their scientific and mathematical abilities, which in turn discourages many of them from pursuing a major in these fields.²⁸²

While no in-depth studies have been conducted vis-à-vis Iranian women and their underrepresentation in the specified disciplines, the findings cited may very well be applicable and indicative of their reluctance to venture into the traditionally “male-dominated” fields as

²⁷⁹ AAUW, 2010; Cooper, S.E. & Robinson, D.A.G. “The Influence of Gender and Anxiety on Mathematics Performance,” *Journal of College Student Development* 30, 1989b, 459-461

²⁸⁰ Davis, R. “Women Students Stick to Traditional Subjects.” *The Guardian*, July 12, 2010

²⁸¹ Cosgrove, C., Blaisdell, S. & Anderson, M. “A Climate Survey and Needs Assessment,” Women in Engineering Conference Proceedings/ Women in Engineering Program Advocate Network, 1994; Baisdell, S. “Factors in the Underrepresentation of Women in Engineering: A Review of the Literature, Working Paper, 1995, 1-31

²⁸² Chesler, N.C. & Chesler, M.A. “Gender-Informed Mentoring Strategies for Women Engineering Scholars: On Establishing a Caring Community,” *Journal of Engineering Education*, January 2002, 49-55

well. Would it therefore be erroneous, and on some level even realistic to conclude that while the post-revolutionary climate may to some extent be responsible for this outcome, the low percentage of women in the enumerated departments is by and large unrelated to the gender ideology of the Islamic leaders? Can it additionally be presumed that Iranian women, much like their western female counterparts tend to gravitate towards the conventionally more “feminine” fields that are intrinsically more compatible with their innate feminine characteristics, especially given the fact that statistically speaking, there are no alarming discrepancies between women in the most progressive nations and those in Iran?

In this respect, it becomes important to refer to the studies mentioned earlier which conclusively hold gender stereotyping in Iran’s post-revolutionary curriculum accountable for perpetuating the traditional division of labor between the sexes, and for re-orienting women towards the typically feminine arenas. The enumerated statistics provide evidence that lends credibility to the assumption that Iranian women, despite the routine declarations of conservative authorities and the promulgation of a multitude of gender biased laws, are being indirectly socialized via the all important elementary curriculum to essentially unsubscribe to the stereotypical assumptions endorsing the primary role of women as caregivers, nurturers, and homemakers.

In conclusion, the aforementioned data, revealing the universal dearth of women in engineering, makes the achievement of Iranian women in this field all the more remarkable, given the numerous obstacles and the reigning ideology of the ruling entity.

“I do not wish for women to have power over men, but over themselves.”
 — *Mary Wollstonecraft*

CHAPTER THREE

SINGLE-SEX SCHOOLS AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

The implementation of segregation policies in the aftermath of the Republic’s establishment regulated gender relations in all communal spheres, further reinforcing the bonds of a traditional culture of modesty and conservatism in Iranian society. In February 1979, just four months after the collapse of the Pahlavi regime, the Ministry of Education banned coeducation in academia as part of the measures instituted “to bring back a glorious tradition of what it perceived to be ‘true’ Islam.”²⁸³ By 1982, all levels except for higher education were effectively transformed into single-sex institutions, expediting the entry of conservative women into the educational system.²⁸⁴

Perhaps the Republic’s greatest triumph in taking this measure was an influx of rural women into education.²⁸⁵ According to the 1976 census, a mere 10% of all women residing in provincial regions were literate. In 1986, this figure stood at 37%. In 1996 it was 78%, and by 2006 it had increased to well over 90%.²⁸⁶ Although this remarkable phenomenon in and of itself reflects the evolving nature of Iranian society and the power of Islam for traditional families, it is important to note that while during the late Pahlavi period over half of Iran’s population dwelt in

²⁸³ Khiabany, G. & Sreberny, A. “The Women’s Press in Contemporary Iran: Engendering the Public Sphere,” in Sakr, N. (ed.) *Women and Media in the Middle East: Power through Self-Expression*. London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007, 21-23

²⁸⁴ Sedghi, H. 2007, 315; Sedgewick, R. 2002, 128-139

²⁸⁵ Mehran, G., 2003, 268-286

²⁸⁶ Vakili, S. 2011, 111; Higgins, P.J. & Shoar-Ghaffari, P. “Women’s Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” in Afkhami, M. & Friedl, E. (eds.) 1994, 24-25

the provinces, by 1996 over 60% had already migrated to urban areas.²⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the combined force of veiling and gender segregation became for many a welcome alternative to the previous order. Even so, for women deeply and spiritually connected to religious customs, this Islamicized education has, over the years, led to the rejection of the state's gender ideology and produced results contrary to those anticipated by the Republic. During the last decade in particular, Iranian women have been pursuing a "more liberal lifestyle and shunning the traditional mores" by combining their educational gains with delays in childbearing and marriage.²⁸⁸ According to the 2008 World Bank Central Database, Iran has experienced a dramatic fertility decline, with the most startling drop occurring among young women in rural areas. This unusual occurrence has been attributed to a combination of the Republic's reversal of its pro-natal policy in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War and to extraordinary advances by women in the academic arena, leading the government to resort to a variety of measures aimed at curtailing further change in this direction²⁸⁹. The imposition of quotas for entering men and women in specific fields of study mentioned in the previous chapter has been one avenue for curbing female matriculation in higher education. In addition, college administrators have begun vigorously endorsing and promoting the institution of marriage for female students through an annual celebration entitled *jashne-e izdevaji-i daneshjuyan* (the marriage celebration of college students). In 2003, the 6,000 students who participated in this mass ceremony were compensated

²⁸⁷ Sedghi, H. 2007, 225

²⁸⁸ "Will Iran's Marriage Crisis Bring Down Ahmadinejad?" *Time*, June 9, 2009; Salehi-Esfahani, D. "Human Resources in Iran: Potentials and Challenges," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 2005, 117-147

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

with gold coins, household appliances, and furniture.²⁹⁰ In 2010, President Ahmadinejad called on women to have larger families and to “perform their most important duty: raising the next generation!”²⁹¹ To encourage this new directive, the Iranian government implemented a policy whereby it would pay families a sum of \$950 for every newborn, with an additional \$95 annually until the child reaches 18 years of age.²⁹² These measures reflect the inconsistent attitudes of religious leaders who took steps to reduce the enormous population burden in the immediate post-war years after a decade of encouraging the masses to procreate.²⁹³ In this contradictory record, despite women’s educational advancement, which is normally viewed as an avenue towards economic independence, official labor statistics continue to reflect a relatively low number of employed women in relation to their surplus in the academic arena. This puzzling spectacle has led various observers to note the Republic’s success in redirecting educated women back into the private domain.²⁹⁴ However, the existence of “a large informal labor market”

²⁹⁰ Shavarini, M. “The Feminization of Iranian Higher Education,” *Review of Education*, 5(4) 2005, 341

²⁹¹ “Iran Leader Introduces Plan to Encourage Population Growth by Paying Families,” *New York Times*, July 27, 2010

²⁹² “Ahmadinejad Offers Iranian Couples Cash to Have Babies,” *BBC News*, July 28, 2010

²⁹³ With the victory of the revolutionaries, Ayatollah Khomeini encouraged procreation and denounced the Monarchy’s Family Planning Program by issuing a fatwa against all forms of contraception. He further disparaged all day-care centers for working mothers as “a western conspiracy,” designed to deprive children of maternal affection and an Islamic upbringing. For additional information refer to Roudi-Fahimi, F. “Iran’s Revolutionary Approach to Family Planning,” *Population Today*, 27 (7), 1999; Afshar, H. “Women, State and Ideology in Iran,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 256-278; Mehryar, A.H. “Ideological Basis of Fertility in Post-Revolutionary Iran: Shi‘ite Teachings vs. Pragmatic Considerations,” Tehran: Institute for Research Planning and Development, 2000, 18

²⁹⁴ Moghadam, V. “Women, Work, and Ideology in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1988, 221-243; Moghadam, V. “Women’s Employment Issues in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Problems and Prospects in the 1990’s,” *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 28, Nos. 3-4, 1995, 175-202; Nomani, F. & Behdad, S. *Class and Labor in Iran: Did the Revolution Matter?* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006, 126-134

among women from various walks of life casts doubt on this conclusion.²⁹⁵ Census data do not take into consideration self-employed rural women engaged in low-income family work, and urban middle-class professionals conducting business ventures from the privacy of their homes. Furthermore, many independent wage earners underreport their labor activities for a variety of reasons ranging from tax evasion to avoiding legal complications.²⁹⁶

What has become apparent in the three and a half decades since the revolution is that Iranian women have routinely profited from their “religious education” in ways that were not anticipated by conservative lawmakers. In countless ways it appears that despite its best laid plans, the Republic’s cultivation of an “Islamicized” version of the Pahlavi regime’s western education system has empowered women to challenge their inferior status through a deliberate and concerted effort to construct a new identity, one which embodies neither a “traditional” nor a “western” image.

The Persian woman of today may be exemplified in the words of sociologist and revered Iranian revolutionary Ali Shariati, whose reinterpretation of Islam in modern sociological terms almost four decades prior to the revolution included a definition of the archetypal Muslim woman.²⁹⁷ Shariati’s version of the female exemplar borrowed from the writings of the prominent Iranian intellectual Jalal Al-i Ahmad, who is most famous for coining the term *gharbzadegi* (westoxication) in his book, *Occidentosis: A Plague From the West*. Published in 1962, the author’s critique of the West highlights the loss of cultural identity in Iran and the

²⁹⁵ Etemad-Moghadam, “Undercounting Women’s Work in Iran,” *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 3

²⁹⁶ Etemad Moghadam, F. “Iran’s Missing Working Women,” in Bahramitash, R. & Salehi-Esfahani, H. (eds.) *Veiled Employment: Islamism and the Political Economy of Women’s Employment*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011, 256-272

²⁹⁷ Shariati, A. *Fatima is Fatima*. Tehran: Shariati Foundation, 1982

insoluble contradictions arising from foreign trespasses in Iranian society. Al-i Ahmad maintains that this trespassing has transformed Iranians into “aliens with unfamiliar customs,” for whom the “emancipation” of women has been equated with “swelling an army of lipstick and powder consumers....”²⁹⁸ While Al-i Ahmad envisioned a return to cultural roots as the antidote for succumbing to the plague from the West, Shariati condemned orthodox Islam for reducing “women to the level of a washing machine,” and “her personality to that of a breeding machine.”²⁹⁹ In addressing the dilemmas faced by the contemporary Muslim woman, the author argues that “social realities are such that if we do not open doors for them, they will spring out from the windows...”³⁰⁰ In his rejection of both traditional and western models, the author identifies Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad and the wife of Imam Ali, as the epitome of the ideal wife, mother, and “political fighter.”³⁰¹ The post-revolutionary Iranian woman has in many ways evolved to resemble the classic prototype advocated by Shariati: a new persona, which departs from both the subordinate and the emancipated woman in that she does not reject Islam entirely but rather is critical of conservative gender principles. In formulating their own particular brand, these women are serving as role models for an entire generation, who have come to recognize and embrace the value of acquiring an education as a means for accelerating their quest for equality.

As early as 1961, author Amin Banani inquired whether the impact of the West on Iran threatened a complete disruption of the country’s social and cultural foundation. In evaluating the societal reforms of the Pahlavi monarchy, the author concluded: “One must pay equal

²⁹⁸ Al-i Ahmad, J. *Occidentosis: A Plague From the West*. Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1984, 64,70

²⁹⁹ Shariati, A. 1982, 223

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 225

attention to the new things accomplished and the old things discarded,” including the Pahlavis attempt to raise the consciousness of women and facilitate their integration into a rapidly evolving modern society.³⁰² Coeducation instituted as one of the numerous emancipatory measures was in reality largely unfamiliar, and even an offensive concept for conservative families who for centuries conceived of women within the cultural confines of humility and seclusion. In fact, the Pahlavi system itself was not altogether oblivious to the challenges of transforming conventional norms and altering traditional mindsets. In 1975, the Shah’s Premier, Amir Abbas Hoveyda, cautiously declared: “Women’s emancipation does not mean estrangement from the family; to the contrary it means the deepening of her roots in the family.”³⁰³ Yet, despite a guarded approach, religion continued to retain a strong influence especially among those residing in rural areas.³⁰⁴

In her memoir published shortly after the revolution, the Shah’s twin sister, Princess Ashraf Pahlavi, a powerful advocate of women’s rights in Iran, contemplated whether this class could ever have identified with the newly adopted Western standards:

Persia’s backward conditions were relics of social traditions... and the women for that matter weren’t ready to exchange the protection they had traditionally enjoyed for the unknowns of a new social status.³⁰⁵

In contemplating the insurmountable task of implementing such excessive alterations, she candidly admits:

³⁰² Banani, A. *The Modernization of Iran: 1921-1941*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1961, 2, 111

³⁰³ Sedghi, H. 2007, 110

³⁰⁴ Rucker, R. “Trends in Post-Revolutionary Iranian Education,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 21:4, 1991, 455-468,

³⁰⁵ Pahlavi, A. 1980, 25-26

It is equally obvious and it became clear... that no ruler can legislate a social revolution. He can implement the outward form of social change, but he cannot legislate change in the minds of the people. Stable and lasting change has to evolve slowly and gradually over a period of many generations.³⁰⁶

She writes that “what signaled the beginning of the end ... was the radical modernization program which virtually affected every aspect of Iranian life... [including] the sweeping emancipation of women, which moved as it were 13 centuries in the course of three decades.”³⁰⁷

This, she concludes, led Iranians to see “all modernization as a sacrifice of old values in exchange for those of the decadent godless West.”³⁰⁸

In her final departure from Iran at the cusp of the revolutionary upheaval, the reality of such extremes painfully unfolded before her very eyes:

As I flew over, I saw that one corner was completely dark. A moment later I realized this black mass was a mass of Iranian women — women who had achieved the highest levels of emancipation in the Middle East. Here they were in the mournful black chador [veil] their grandmothers had worn. My God, I thought. Is this how it ends?³⁰⁹

In retrospect, it took very little time for the post-revolutionary euphoria to subside. Misconceptions about the revolution were addressed by Shirin Ebadi, who despite having benefitted enormously from the Pahlavis’ emancipatory measures, found herself supporting an Islamic platform:

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 27

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 194

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 195

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 205

It took scarcely a month for me to realize that, in fact I had willingly and enthusiastically participated in my own demise. I was a woman, and this revolution demanded my defeat... My naiveté astounds me.³¹⁰

Today, Ebadi is one of the countless female activists who since 2006 have staged the One Million Signatures Campaign, a grassroots movement aimed at ending legalized discrimination against women in Iran. While these women are not always triumphant, they continue to forge ahead, longing to recapture the remnants of the rights once bestowed and then lost through their very best efforts.

In a country in which a man's life is worth twice that of a woman's, a new generation has experienced a new gender consciousness. Ebadi believes that "sometimes, consciousness emerges slowly,... and instead of banging my head against a closed door, I'll become like water and run under the door."³¹¹

There is no doubt that the education of young women involves a mélange of Western motifs and Islamic ingredients. While the Pahlavi era was in many ways a magnificent period in Iranian history, it can also be seen as a brief interlude disrupting the operation of embedded customs. Shiism was adopted as the official state religion by the Safavids in the 16th century and became deeply woven into the fabric of society. It was the dominant force shaping the identity and status of the Iranian women. The Pahlavi dynasty disrupted centuries of social and religious complexities, but this disruption was carried out in a cursory and abrupt manner. The release of the female population from bondage to time-honored scriptures was a remarkable feat in terms of civil liberties and social awakening, but it proved too ephemeral to permanently instill a

³¹⁰ Ebadi, S. & Moaveni, A. *Iran Awakening — From Prison to Peace Prize: One Woman's Struggle at the Crossroads of History*. Canada: Random House, 2006, 38,43

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 71,106

progressive vision. The residue of the traditional precepts it sought to escape continues to reverberate in the Republic's manipulation of a conservative "revised" elementary curriculum.

The previous chapter demonstrated the failure of educators to implement the conservative ideology. This one will investigate other aspects of the Republic's educational policies to show how they worked against the official ideology. The Republic's notions of appropriate gender roles failed on numerous counts to conform to the specifications outlined in the Education Plan designed to:

- A. "Introduce the different roles of men and women in marital life"
- B. "Plan for the content and method of [her] schooling accordingly"
- C. "Recognize the identity of women and her role in the family on the basis of Islam"
- D. "Take into consideration the kind of occupations needed by and best fulfilled by women given their role and responsibility within the family"

Deviations from this Plan led to an inadequate socialization of pre-adolescents into the prescribed gender regimen. For example, mandatory veiling may have unintentionally created opportunities for women to function outside their assigned roles.

The following discussion proceeds on the assumption that the revolution itself inadvertently provided opportunities to frustrate draconian religious requirements tailored by the guardians of morality.

Studies on Iranian women provide invaluable assessments of conventional and contemporary norms. Numerous scholars have identified the religious and cultural elements responsible for sequestering women, the conflicting frameworks applicable to various classes, and the manner in which distinctive groups were adversely impacted by steps taken in pre- and

post-revolutionary times.³¹² The aftermath of the revolution and the growth of women's education has been documented as a crucial avenue empowering women to challenge gender constraints, complete with an abundance of testimonials confirming the changing dynamics of customary social and familial relations and the "potency of the power of the disempowered and modest" in confronting cultural taboos.³¹³ The emergence of gender consciousness appears as a catalyst for the birth of a newfound collaboration in rejecting the most fundamental pillars of the state.³¹⁴

Prominent author Haideh Moghissi believes that while social and cultural obstacles continue to prevail, women have become increasingly adroit in maximizing certain opportunities enhanced by the unexpected interplay of traditional and progressive measures. Moghissi states

³¹² Shavarini, M. "Misconceptions about Islam and Women's Education: Lessons from the IRI," *International Education*, 33 (1), 2003, 40-50; Mehran, G. "The Creation of a New Muslim Woman: Female Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Convergence*, 24, No. 4, 2003, 42-50; Najmabadi, A. "Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran," in Kandiyoti, D. (ed.) *Women, Islam, and the State*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991, 48-76; Tabari, A. "The Enigma of the Veiled Iranian Woman," *MERIP*, Report 103, Feb. 1982, 22-27

³¹³ Sedghi, H, 2007 (quotation appears on p. 271); Kian, A. "Women and Politics in Post-revolutionary Iran: The Gender Conscious Drive to Change," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 24(1), 1997, 75-96. Mir-Hosseini, Z. *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999; Mehran, G. "A Study of the Facilitating Factors in Girls' Education in Post-Revolutionary Iran," in *True and False Images of Islam in Cultural Frictions*. Tokyo: National Institute for Research Advancement, 2000, 107-123; Mehran, G. "A Study of the Achievements and Remaining Challenges in Female Education," *Al-Zahra University*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2006, 11-31

³¹⁴ Vakili, S. 2011, 92; Paidar, P. 1995; Ebadi, S. & Moaveni, A. 2006; Howard, J. *Inside Iran: Women's Lives*. Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2002; Moghadam, V. "The Reproduction of Gender Inequality in Muslim Societies: A Case Study of Iran in the 1980's," *World Development* 19, No. 10, 1991, 1335-1349; Ramazani, N. "The Revolutionary Ebb and Flow," *Middle East Journal*, 47(3), 1993, 409-428; Haeri, S. "Women, Law and Social Change in Iran," in Smith, J.I. (ed.) *Women in Contemporary Muslim Societies*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1978, 209-234

that a popular theme in the aftermath of the revolution has been the “observation that the Islamic Republic has not opened the gates... But that women are jumping over the fences.”³¹⁵

Author Nikki Keddie, a pioneer in the field of Middle Eastern women’s studies, believes that “activism, encouraged by internal contradictions brings change and often creates a new synthesis which is not, however, permanent, but is continually altered by its own activities and contradictions.”³¹⁶ Such comments underscore the burgeoning of a feminist movement within the traditional ranks, not necessarily in the Western sense, but within the boundaries of prevailing cultural values and calling for the renegotiation of women’s subordinate status. Author Golnar Mehran, who has written extensively on women and education, considers the post-revolutionary “paradoxical trend” in female education to stem from the combination of discriminatory factors that contribute to the “empowerment of young women,” by either “directly (and/or) indirectly providing the consciousness and the ability needed to question gender inequalities.”³¹⁷

In considering such unprecedented developments, author Mitra K. Shavarini, a specialist on gender and education, concludes: “To ask that they go back to being content as subservient housewives is to underestimate the power of their educational experience.”³¹⁸ However, the dynamics of women’s educational experience referred by Shavarini and others have in many ways been inadequately addressed, particularly in relation to the numerous assertions reporting the birth of a “collective consciousness” among traditional women in the decades following the revolution. The evolution of Iran’s female population requires a consideration of additional criteria applicable to their experience in academic affairs. The decree for gender segregation

³¹⁵ Moghissi, H. *Populism and Feminism in Iran*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996, 183

³¹⁶ Keddie, N. “Women in Iran Since 1979,” *Social Research*, 67(2), 2002, 411

³¹⁷ Mehran, G. 2003, 271

³¹⁸ Shavarini, M.K. 2005, 344

imposed for ideological reasons has been broadly cited over the years as responsible for luring young women from modest families into attending school. However, the social and academic climate created by segregation may, in and of itself have the ability to enhance the framework of learning for traditional women. The eradication of coeducation, which was seen as incompatible with the intrinsic nature of Iranian society, may not have been altogether regressive. In fact, it may have contributed to the liberation of many women by inadvertently providing a social context for the emergence of new gender ethos. Although the state during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah had by no means abolished the veil, and the men and women of the Literacy Corps adopted strategies ranging from Koran recitations to the separation of boys and girls within the classroom, the obvious inability of the conservative classes to adjust to a rapidly changing environment ultimately derailed them from fully participating in the Pahlavi educational program.

Among Western nations since the early 1990s, a number of analyses testify to the benefits associated with adolescent young women acquiring an education in single-sex schools. These studies may explain the subtle forces playing into the gender reconstruction of the Iranian female population, as opposed to seeing it simply as a monumental failure of the Republic or the sheer determination of the disempowered to escape their subordinate status. The social and academic advantages associated with single sex institutions, as brought to the forefront of educational thinking specifically over the last two decades, have not been addressed in light of colossal achievements in Iranian women's education.

The following inquiry examines the advantages of acquiring an education in a segregated environment for the adolescent female population, as a likely avenue to their empowerment and collective consciousness in the face of adversity. Research applicable to Iranian women and their

experience in single-sex institutions is virtually non-existent, as no studies to date have considered or taken into account its potential benefits as a means for counteracting the antiquated dictates of a patriarchal society. Indeed an actual assessment of this aspect of Iranian single-sex education is difficult given the eradication of Pahlavi era coeducation, which could have been used for comparison. Studies conducted in other countries, however, suggest concealed ways in which Iranian women may have been inadvertently socialized to depart from the regime's preferred gender ideology. We will focus primarily on a systematic review of the most relevant studies conducted on single-sex institutions in the United States, as the results of some noteworthy discoveries have given rise to the "new segregation debate" contesting customary coeducational practices. We will also discuss reports from other western nations as part of an overall analysis of the various empirical data relevant to this debate.

The extensive literature on single-sex schools consolidates a wide range of theoretical evaluations, often taking into account a variety of historical, sociological, psychological, and legal perspectives. To date, there are over two thousand empirical studies in the United States alone, applicable to the debate on single-sex education.³¹⁹ Sociological and biological data derived from studies undertaken in other nations may help understand how girls could "unsubscribe" to this Republic's female agenda. While the studies in this realm range from elementary through higher education, our analysis of gender and education will primarily focus on the adolescent years, as educators, sociologists, and social psychologists have acknowledged that "the preconditions for educational quality, equity, and efficiency" are particularly

³¹⁹ U.S. Department of Education "*Single-Sex vs. Coeducational Schooling: A Systematic Review.*" Office of Planning Evaluation and Policy Development, 2005

pronounced during those years.³²⁰ Furthermore, gender equity and the education of children requires more than simply ensuring that girls have the same level of opportunities as boys. It significantly involves “eliminating the stereotypes and barriers that limit the choices and opportunities of both sexes, which keep them from reaching their full potential.”³²¹ The importance of identity formation and gender role socialization during adolescence originating in Erik Erikson’s theory of social development is an area of vital importance, extensively examined by sociologists and developmental psychologists alike.

Renowned in the field of social psychology, Erik Erikson (1902-1994) is best known for coining the term “identity crisis;” providing a theoretical basis for investigating what has come to be regarded as the single most critical aspect of personality development prior to adulthood.³²² While Erikson acknowledged that identity issues occur throughout an individual’s lifetime, dilemmas associated with its formation are more intense as children transition into adolescence.³²³ Psychologists elaborate on this theory by confirming that during those years males and females are especially cautious to ensure gender role conformity. By late adolescence, however, the pronounced expectations and pressures to comply become increasingly more flexible with the gradual shift into adulthood.³²⁴ The concept of “empowerment” defined as “the collective action by the oppressed to overcome the obstacles of structural inequality that have put

³²⁰ Koch, J. and Irby, B. *Gender and Schooling in the Early Years*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing, 2005, 29

³²¹ Ibid

³²² Erikson, E. *Identity, Youth and Crisis*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1968

³²³ Ibid

³²⁴ Steinberg, L. & Morris, A.S. “Adolescent Development,” *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 2001, 83-110

them in a disadvantaged position” becomes increasingly relevant.³²⁵ The Women’s Empowerment Framework further views this process as essential for female advancement, as it is the means by which “women, understand, identify, and overcome gender discrimination.”³²⁶ In this process, education occupies a central position, as women’s academic achievements have been shown to have ripple effects within the family and across generations.³²⁷ Current research confirms the importance of gender equity in education during adolescence, particularly in the construction of gender identity during a time when most girls have been documented as losing confidence as learners.³²⁸ The empowerment of young women at this juncture has been shown to serve as an antidote for negative self-image by “creating a space within the school where they can develop a sense of solidarity.”³²⁹ Within these discussions, the significance of identity formation and gender socialization for Iranian women in single-sex schools during this crucial phase of life has been altogether overlooked. While early adolescence represents a difficult milestone for both sexes, it is considered to be an especially challenging juncture for girls.³³⁰ The transformation of a young girl into a young woman is complex, as it entails meeting the unique demands of society, which at times assigns them roles that are clearly less valued than those allocated to men. Large-scale empirical studies have reported a substantial deterioration in the

³²⁵ UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE) “*Women, Education and Empowerment*,” (5) Hamburg, Germany, 1995

³²⁶ UNICEF 1997; Hall, M. *Women and Empowerment: Strategies for Increasing Autonomy*. Washington, DC: Hemisphere Publishing Corp., 1995

³²⁷ Stromquist, N. “Women’s Education in Development: From Welfare to Empowerment,” *Convergence*, 21 (4) 1988, 5-17

³²⁸ Gilligan, C. *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993

³²⁹ Sanford, K. & Blair, H. “Engendering Public Education: Single-Sex Schooling in Western Canada,” in Datnow, A. & Hubbard, L. (eds.) *Gender in Policy and Practice: Perspectives on Single-Sex Education and Coeducational Schooling*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002, 94

³³⁰ Brooks-Gunn, J. & Peterson, A. *Girls at Puberty*. New York: Plenum Press, 1983, 110

self-esteem and confidence levels of adolescent girls, which oftentimes come at the expense of academic achievement.³³¹ The conflicted view of the self during those years is supported by research showing that girls need to be actively encouraged to participate in class, and therefore require additional nurturing and teacher time.³³²

The value of acquiring an education in single-sex schools, especially for girls, has become the subject of an ongoing debate in the United States and other countries over the last two decades. The attention to gender and education in the United States in recent years has primarily arisen from nationally acclaimed reports documenting the general misconceptions applicable to single-sex schools, as well as the prevalent unconscious gender biases in coeducational classrooms which significantly “short change” young women in the social and academic process.³³³

A brief overview of the history of coeducation reflects the ideological basis for this model, and the inadequate research and assessment undertaken by educators in order to ensure equitable outcomes in this particular aspect of schooling. The origins of coeducation in the United States date back to the mid-nineteenth century, when women initially demanded access to education as part of the early efforts spearheaded by equal rights activists, whose leaders maintained that “mixed” learning environments were an essential prerequisite of emancipating

³³¹ Simmons, R. & Blyth, D. *Moving into Adolescence: The Impact of Pubertal Change and the School Context*. U.S.: Aldine de Gruyter Press, 1987, 72-125

³³² *AAUW Report*, American Association of University Women, 1990, 32, 147

³³³ Sadker, M. & Sadker, D. *Failing at Fairness: How Cheat Girls*. New York: Touchstone 1994; Riordan, C. *Boys and Girls in School: Together or Separate?* New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1990; AAUW Report. *How Schools Shortchange Girls*. New York: Marlowe & Co., 1992

women from their “separate sphere.”³³⁴ Coeducation was not only academically and sexually appealing, but it was based on the premise that a joint education would create a more natural and realistic atmosphere.³³⁵

During this period, select communities in Massachusetts began to experiment with the “radical” concept of a high school education for girls, and the “common school system” pioneered by education reformer Horace Mann came to be seen as “America’s great equalizer.”³³⁶ The impact of this revolutionary new concept varied considerably among different groups, with adversaries becoming increasingly concerned about the sexual consequences of a “mixed” learning environment, as well as the necessity for boys and girls to be educated separately for their “distinct life paths.”³³⁷ Advocates of coeducation replied that it gave girls access to better educational opportunities, while their presence in class would placate the rambunctious nature of boys. This contentious debate was eventually resolved on the basis that separate schools for girls and boys ultimately required higher taxes, and consequently should be viewed as an economically unviable and unfeasible option.³³⁸ The triumph of coeducation was therefore primarily based on eliminating financial burdens, and not on creating a superior learning environment. Parents who continued to discredit this type of learning environment enrolled their children in private and parochial single-sex schools. However, over the years single-sex institutions began to lose their initial appeal, with their eventual decline contributing

³³⁴ Solomon, B.M. *In the Company of Educated Women and Higher Education in America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985

³³⁵ Tyack, D. & Hansot, E. *Learning Together: A History of Coeducation in American Schools*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990

³³⁶ Sadker, M. & Sadker, D. 1994, 18

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid.

to the perception that a joint education was synonymous with conceptions of equality and accordingly constituted the most effective solution for eradicating stereotypical attitudes.³³⁹ These assumptions were merely hypothetical and not based on any definitive or conclusive studies conducted in this realm. While during the 1960's, approximately 62% of non-religious independent, and 100% of all Catholic schools were single-sex institutions, these figures were drastically reduced by the early 1990's to 19% and 40% respectively.³⁴⁰ Amidst their struggle to survive, a deluge of new studies began to report that girls were in fact not receiving the same quality and/or quantity of education as boys, as male disciplinary problems demanded additional teacher time and attention.³⁴¹ The publication of these findings began to offer a remarkably new message: "Schools without boys seem to be good for girls."³⁴² While the rise of coeducation in other countries was more gradual and single-sex schools continued to retain their popularity among traditional families, their "re-emergence" in the United States sparked a host of additional investigations among these nations, exposing the benefits associated with this type of learning environment. This new message received a strong response and reinvigorated the debate on single-sex education. Further momentum came from parents, educators, and policy makers who began to question whether teaching boys and girls separately could potentially translate into added social and intellectual advantages.

While the very notion of separating boys and girls in the 21st century is considered to be an outdated and old fashioned approach, the extensive research exposing the natural learning differences of males and females has led many educators to view the single-sex domain as

³³⁹ Ibid., 232

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Sadker, M. & Sadker, D. 1994; *AAUW Report*, 1990

³⁴² Sadker, M. & Sadker, D. 1994, 233

creating more positive and equitable outcomes. Indeed the benefits of a segregated learning environment tend to be especially pronounced for adolescent girls, oftentimes resulting in increased confidence, academic engagement and achievement.³⁴³ The publication of these studies revived interest in this model, causing enrollments in private all-girls schools in the United States to increase by approximately 2,000 during the 1995/1996 school year, with an additional 3,000 in the subsequent year.³⁴⁴

The question of “how” to educate boys and girls is complicated and often involves entertaining a multitude of variables including their socialization, academic achievement, and questions addressing morality and equality between the sexes.

In 1961, sociologist and author James Coleman questioned the social climate of coeducational institutions in the United States, as his research in this domain led him to believe that “coeducation may be inimical to both academic achievement and social adjustment.”³⁴⁵ His investigations were not extensive, as they were based on examining the value systems of adolescent boys and girls in only ten schools and communities across the country. However, Coleman emphatically concluded that the prevailing youth culture which interfered with academic performance and underscored popularity, proved especially damaging for girls, who

³⁴³ Gilligan, C., 1993; Gilligan, C. *Joining the Resistance*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2011; Sadker, M. & Sadker, D. 1994; AAUW, 1990; Riordan, C. “What Do We Know about the Effects of Single-Sex Schooling in the Private Sector? Implications for Public Schools,” in Datnow, A. & Hubbard, L. *Gender in Policy and Practice: Perspectives on Single-Sex and Coeducational Schooling*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002, 10-30; Sax, L. *Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know about The Emerging Science and Sex Differences*. New York: Random House, 2005

³⁴⁴ Salamone, R. “The Legality of Single-Sex Education in the United States: Sometimes Equal Means Different,” in Datnow, A. & Hubbard, L. (eds.) 2002, 52

³⁴⁵ Coleman, J. *The Adolescent Society: The Life of the Teenager and its Impact on Education*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishers, 1961, 51

became consumed with a self-imposed mission to render themselves “desirable objects for boys.”³⁴⁶

It took an additional two decades for a number of studies in other countries, including the United States, Canada, and England, to confirm Coleman’s earlier findings, and to draw attention to the prevailing sexism in coeducational schools. Yet this point of view remained essentially dormant for the remainder of the 20th century, as the coeducation model, based on the popular theme of “equality for all,” continued to be the dominant ideology of the American school system.³⁴⁷ In 1979, poet Adrienne Rich poignantly declared: “If there is any leading misconception, it is that of coeducation!”

As the 1990s dawned, the revival of national concern with the flaws, inadequacies, and setbacks of coeducation led to a renewed interest in single-sex institutions and their potential to maintain gender equity. While single-sex schools and classrooms had been a common feature of private institutions throughout the years, their absence in the public school system was essentially due to the controversy it raised on ideological grounds. Efforts to establish public single-sex schools had been met with tremendous resistance in the U.S. judicial system. Single-sex public education virtually vanished as a result of Title IX of the 1972 educational bill; an equity law banning sex discrimination in federally funded educational institutions.³⁴⁸ In recent years, however, public single-sex schools and classrooms have begun to increase with the amendment of Title IX regulations by Congress, easing restrictions on single-sex education as part of the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act. This act specifically approved federal funding for

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 51

³⁴⁷ Sadker, M. & Sadker, D. 1994

³⁴⁸ Lee, V. & Marks, H.M. “Who Goes Where? Choice of Single-Sex and Coeducational Independent Secondary Schools,” *Sociology of Education*, Vol.65, July 1992, 228

innovative educational programs, including single-sex classrooms within already existing coeducational frameworks.³⁴⁹ Senator Hillary Clinton, who was responsible for introducing this provision explained: “We know that single-sex schools and classrooms can help young women improve their achievements.”³⁵⁰ According to the National Association for Single-Sex Public Education (NASSPE), there are currently 92 single-sex public schools and 448 coeducation schools offering single-sex classes in the United States.³⁵¹ Since 1991, applications to private all-girls schools have increased by 40% and enrollments by 29%.³⁵²

The concept of “gendered learning differences” in the United States was initially reintroduced into the educational mainstream by psychologist Carol Gilligan during the early 1980’s. Gilligan stimulated much of the research on female adolescent development, providing a theoretical framework for gender differences in moral and cognitive development. Although her discoveries were not initially concerned with gender differences in learning, they revived interest in single-sex education.³⁵³ Gilligan’s theory holds particular implications for young women, who are often faced with “unique” issues during adolescence as they struggle to develop a sense of self. The author refers to those complicated years as a “watershed” in female development, a time when girls are in danger of drowning or disappearing.”³⁵⁴ Gilligan’s extensive

³⁴⁹ Lee & Marks, 1992; Sadker, M. & Sadker, D. 1994

³⁵⁰ Sommers, C.H. “Single-Sex Schools: Separate But Equal?” New York Times, October 17, 2011

³⁵¹ NASSPE, 2009

³⁵² Salamone, R. in Datnow & Hubbard (eds.) 1999, 48

³⁵³ Gilligan, C. “Women’s Psychological Development: Implications for Psychotherapy,” in Gilligan, C., Rogers, A.G., & Tolman, D.L. *Women, Girls and Psychotherapy: Reframing Resistance*. London & New York: The Haworth Press Inc., 1991, 24; Hekman, S. *Moral Values, Moral Selves: Carol Gilligan and Feminist Moral Theory*. Canada & U.S.: Polity Press, 1995, 12

³⁵⁴ Brown, L.M. & Gilligan, C. *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women’s Psychology and Girls’ Development*. U.S.: Ballantine Books, 1992; Gilligan, C. “Teaching Shakespeare’s Sister,” in

conversations with adolescent girls revealed the inherently incompatible nature of both sexes with regard to perceived life orientations.³⁵⁵ Gilligan maintained that girls often lose their “authentic voice” during adolescence as they become overwhelmed by the patriarchy of their daily surroundings.³⁵⁶ In contrast to boys, girls tend to be “passive players” and consequently require additional encouragement within the classroom setting in order to abandon their silent voices.³⁵⁷

A re-evaluation of the coeducational model was ultimately brought to the forefront by the observational studies of Myra and David Sadker, who gained prominence during the mid-1990s with their documentation of the challenges faced by adolescent girls stemming from the “subtle” gender biases in the school system.³⁵⁸ While Myra Sadkers first book *Sexism and Society* published in 1973, was written for teachers and illuminated the potential academic and psychological costs of sexism in the American education system, her second book *Failing at Fairness: How our Schools Cheat Girls*, published in 1994, ignited investigation into the impact of coeducation on female students. The Sadkers collection of data on patterns of instruction combined with their conversations with teachers, students, parents, and administrators across the country to expose the existence of “two worlds” in the coeducational school system: “One of

Gilligan, C., Lyons, N. & Hammer, T. (eds.) *Making Connections: The Relational Worlds of Adolescent Girls at Emma Willard School*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990 (quotation appears on p. 10); Hekman, S.J. *Moral Voices, Moral Selves: Carol Gilligan and Feminist Moral Theory*. U.S. & Canada: Blackwell Publishers, 1995, 12

³⁵⁵ Gilligan, 1993, 2011

³⁵⁶ Interview with Carol Gilligan: Restoring Lost Voices. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 81, No. 9, May 2000, 701-704

³⁵⁷ Gilligan, C., 2011, 109

³⁵⁸ Sadker, M & Sadker, D., 1994

boys' action and the other of girls' inaction."³⁵⁹ They found the sexes had very different educational experiences within the same classroom setting, as boys dominated the bulk of time and discussion with girls reluctantly becoming "passive participants."³⁶⁰ Teachers unintentionally spend the majority of their attention either praising, criticizing, correcting and/or assisting boys rather than girls.³⁶¹ The Sadkers argued that in the course of years, the "uneven distribution of teacher time" takes its toll on girls, often impacting their self-esteem and academic achievement and ultimately escalating into a "silent erosion of female potential."³⁶² Since this is not a self-evident problem, most individuals are intrinsically unaware of these "quiet losses" for girls.³⁶³ Unfortunately, the "good behaviour" of girls liberates the teacher to focus on the "more difficult to manage" boys, leading to less instruction time and fewer challenges for young women.³⁶⁴

In direct contrast to coeducational schools, the Sadkers found remarkable differences in single-sex schools, where girls spoke their minds with ease and asked more questions, as they were not subject to the habitual interruptions of boys.³⁶⁵ Furthermore, they were more successful in their studies. They openly admitted to their confusion with confidence and determination to master the subject at hand.³⁶⁶ Using separate focus groups with students, parents, and educators, the Sadkers substantiated their original findings and affirmed the integrity of education in single-

³⁵⁹ Ibid, 42-55

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid. 1

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid. 44,46

³⁶⁵ Ibid. 234

³⁶⁶ Ibid. 235

sex schools for adolescent women. They showed that girls in single-sex schools have a stronger sense of identity and display more interest in the non-traditional subjects such as math and physical sciences, and find more positive role models and mentors.³⁶⁷ In 2001, the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education paid homage to the Sadkers with the Gender Architect Award, and in 2004, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) presented them with the Eleanor Roosevelt Award. Today, The Myra and David Sadker Foundation continues to be dedicated to the promotion of equity in schools and beyond.

The collective contributions of Carol Gilligan and the Sadkers alerted the American Association of University Women (AAUW) to the inadequacies of the American education system. This organization, which was founded in 1881, and is considered to be the oldest and largest national organization dedicated to “advancing the equity of women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy and research,” commissioned a study by the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women in order to assess the collective studies of adolescent girls learning experience.³⁶⁸ This report surveyed over 1300 studies and highlighted a problem of national proportions. Documenting a shortfall for adolescent girls in receiving equitable amounts of teacher time, it cautioned that America may in fact be responsible for nurturing a generation of women with low self-esteem.³⁶⁹

The virtues of single-sex education have additionally been hailed by psychologist and physician, Dr. Leonard Sax, Executive Director of the National Association for Single-Sex Public Education (NASSPE), which was founded in 2002. Dr. Sax maintains that the “benefits of

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ How Schools Shortchange Girls: The AAUW Report: A Study of Major Findings on Girls and Education. New York: Marlowe & Co., 1995

³⁶⁹ Ibid

single-sex education go far beyond academics, as innate biological differences necessitate the separation of boys and girls...³⁷⁰ Dr. Sax, who combines his comprehensive knowledge of scientific literature with numerous case studies, argues that the “paradox lies in the fact that coed schools ironically reinforce gender stereotypes, whereas single-sex schools have the ability to break them down.”³⁷¹ The existing subtleties of gendered learning differences, he reports, are not only more pronounced during the adolescent years, but reflect the incompatible nature of the sexes in the classroom.³⁷² While Dr. Sax believes that single-sex education should ultimately be a choice, he is critical of the harmful effects of coeducation on both “academic achievement and social adjustment.”³⁷³

Traditional assumptions regarding the egalitarian nature of coed schools have likewise been challenged by Dr. Rosemary Salomone, Associate Dean and Director of the Center for Law and Public Policy at St. John’s University. Dr. Salomone’s published findings support and corroborate those of earlier studies regarding the benefits of single-sex schools for adolescent young women. In an interview given on July 1, 2003, Dr. Salomone reflects on her own education and experiences in an all-girls school:

There wasn’t the gender polarization that often happens in coed schools... You went to school not worried about how you looked. It gave you a sense of limitless possibilities.³⁷⁴

³⁷⁰ Sax 2005, 242

³⁷¹ Ibid, 243

³⁷² Ibid, 1

³⁷³ Ibid, 247

³⁷⁴ Teicher, S.A. “The Case for Single-Sex Schools” *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 1, 2003

The underlying opposition to this type of schooling, according to Dr. Salamone, emanates from “assertions grounded in ideology and misplaced fears rather than in sound pedagogy or reasoned judgment.”³⁷⁵

In 1990, Dr. Cornelius Riordan, Professor of Sociology at Providence College, released the first of many publications arguing that the “academic value climate” of all-girls schools consistently provided a more effective educational atmosphere over coed schools.³⁷⁶ Dr. Riordan believes that in a coed setting the “needs of one sex are subordinated to those of the other,” and in this context holds the “adolescent subculture” referred to by James Coleman in 1961, as responsible for essentially creating an environment which “favors popularity over academic achievement.”³⁷⁷ In 2008, Dr. Riordan published the results of a three-year study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education. This systematic examination of the two educational approaches confirmed innate biological differences in the learning styles of boys and girls, overall positive student/teacher interaction, decreased distractions, as well as teacher testimonials for less serious behavioral problems in single-sex schools.³⁷⁸

Author and educator Valerie E. Lee, who has conducted extensive research on gender equity, has found that the effects of single-sex schooling for girls in particular carries over well into their college years, and leads to higher aspirations for attending graduate school in the non-

³⁷⁵ Ibid

³⁷⁶ Riordan, 1990

³⁷⁷ Ibid, 56

³⁷⁸ Riordan, C. “Early Implementation of Public Single-Sex Schools: Perceptions and Characteristics” Prepared for The United States Department of Education: Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2008, 21, 24, 27

traditional disciplines and to less stereotypical attitudes in the workplace.³⁷⁹ Kathleen Ponze, Director of Education for the Young Women’s Leadership Foundation cites countering gender stereotyping as the primary reason for establishing single-sex schools:

At a time when girls are at their most delicate in terms of self-esteem, these schools provide a personalized, focused education in an environment that minimizes toxic negative cultural stereotypes, and provides the opportunity for maximum self-actualization, especially during the vulnerable and critical adolescent years.³⁸⁰

Neurobiology contributes to these findings.³⁸¹ Social philosopher and family therapist Dr. Michael Gurian, founder of the Gurian Institute, provides compelling neurological evidence for this premise.³⁸² Since its inception in 1996, his organization has conducted field research and trained professionals in developmental gender differences in schools and districts around the world.³⁸³ Dr. Gurian’s brain-based research provides evidence for the sociological and psychological premise that boys and girls do indeed learn differently.³⁸⁴ He has found structural differences and variations in the manner in which the sexes use their brains to process information, and this has helped educators develop strategies for a more effective gender-based curriculum.³⁸⁵ A 2007 pediatric neuroimaging study by the National Institute of Mental Health showed that various brain regions develop in different sequences, thus contributing to disparities

³⁷⁹ Lee, V. & Marks, H.M. “Sustained Effects of Single-Sex Secondary School Experience on Attitudes, Behaviors, and Values,” *Journal of Educational Psychology* 82(3), 1990, 578-592

³⁸⁰ Salomone, R. 2003, 23, 24

³⁸¹ Novotney, A. “Coed vs. Single-Sex Schools,” *American Psychology Association*, 42(2), February 2011

³⁸² Gurian, M. *Successful Single-Sex Classrooms: A Practical Guide to Teaching Boys and Girls Separately*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009

³⁸³ Gurian, M. *Boys and Girls Learn Differently: A Guide for Teachers and Parents*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011

³⁸⁴ Gurian, 2009, 21

³⁸⁵ Gurian, 2011

in the language processing of boys and girls.³⁸⁶ Dr. Gurian cautions however, that while gender-based distinctions are applicable to the majority of males and females, they do not necessarily extend to all brain-based differences.³⁸⁷

Studies conducted outside the United States shed additional light on this ongoing debate. Over the last decade, renewed interest in single-sex schools and classrooms has arisen in numerous countries around the world. National studies conducted in Belgium, Canada, England, and Nigeria where single-sex education is widely available, provide additional support for the benefits of single-sex education for adolescent women. A 2002 study of adolescent boys and girls in single-sex and coeducational schools in Belgium concluded:

Mixed-sex interaction hampers girls' sense of social connectedness with the school, whereas all-girl schools appear to provide a basis of social solidarity around a shared gender identity.³⁸⁸

Major findings on single-sex and coed schools in Canada also revealed a heightened sense of confidence and empowerment particularly in the tendency of single-sex schools to reduce gender stereotyping.³⁸⁹

In 2002, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), established in 1946 as a center for research and development in England and Wales, was commissioned to study the effects of single-sex versus coeducation on academic performance. In examining 2,954 high schools (grades 9-12) throughout England, the foundation concluded that after controlling for

³⁸⁶ Novotney, A. Feb. 2011

³⁸⁷ Gurian, 2009

³⁸⁸ Brutsaert, H. & Houte, M.V. "Girls and Boys Sense of Belonging in Single-Sex versus Coed Schools," *Research in Education*, No. 68, 2002, 54

³⁸⁹ Thompson, T. & Ungerleider, C. "Single-Sex Schooling Final Report," *The Canadian Center for Knowledge Mobilization*. University of British Columbia. Vancouver, Canada, 2004

students academic abilities and variables related to race and socio-economic background, the benefits were dramatic across the board for girls, who consistently performed better in single-sex environments. And in Nigeria, Dr. Valerie Less found that adolescent women demonstrated higher achievement levels and held less stereotypical views regarding the traditional male subject matter than did females attending integrated institutions. She also discovered that contrary to girls, boys performed significantly better in coed schools.³⁹⁰

While the overwhelming evidence appears to substantiate the enormous benefits of single-sex schools and classrooms for adolescent girls during a most impressionable and critical phase of life, it has done little to persuade the advocates of coeducation, who relentlessly argue against the evidence provided by questioning the logic and efficacy of a separate learning environment. Critics maintain that a single-sex atmosphere undermines equity and fundamentally constitutes a form of gender discrimination analogous to racial segregation.³⁹¹ By reducing opportunities for cooperation and contact between the sexes, they maintain, “separation is ultimately a euphemism for worse and represents subordination and inferiority, perpetuating harmful stereotypes.”³⁹² In recent years, the Independent Women’s Forum (IWF), considered to be a counterweight to groups such as the AAUW, has denounced the evidence endorsing single-sex education. Christine Hoff Sommers, Professor of Philosophy at Clark University and Chairwoman of the IWF, has questioned the validity of the observational studies of the Sadkers, AAUW reports, and Carol Gilligan’s theorizing for their lack of empirical data. She refers to

³⁹⁰ Lee, V. & Lockhead, M.E. “The Effects of Single-Sex Schooling on Achievement and Attitudes in Nigeria,” *Comparative Educational Review* 34(2), May 2009, 209-231

³⁹¹ Hoff Sommers, C. “A Necessary Option” *New York Times*, October 28, 2011

³⁹² Salomone, R. 2003, 40

their findings as “nothing more than a seductive hypothesis.”³⁹³ Coeducation advocate Dr.

Patricia Campbell, who over the last three decades has been extensively involved in educational research and evaluation, adamantly maintains:

By removing the girls rather than dealing with the issues of classroom disruptions, we are assuming a stereotyped view of girls as gentle, weak creatures, who cannot handle the rough environment of the real world.³⁹⁴

Diane Halperin, Professor of Psychology at Claremont McKenna College and one of the cofounders of the American Council for Coeducational Schooling (ACCES), a non-profit organization examining the implications of organizing classrooms based on the student’s sex, argues:

Since schools are a preparation for adult life, how can boys and girls learn to interact as equals in the work place, if they have no experience interacting as equals in school?³⁹⁵

Compared with the numerous arguments and studies favoring a segregated learning environment, supporters of the coeducation model are comparatively lacking in concrete research for their assumptions and assertions against single-sex schools. Cornelius Riordan observes: “Far less is known about the effects of gender integration in schools.”³⁹⁶ In addition, other educators who have conducted noteworthy studies in this realm contend: “Surprisingly there are very few formal reviews of the relative effects of coed schools.”³⁹⁷

³⁹³ Ibid, 77

³⁹⁴ Campbell, P.B. & Sanders, J. “Challenging the System: Assumptions and Data behind the Push for Single-Sex Schooling,” in Datnow & Hubbard (eds.) 2002, 40

³⁹⁵ Novotney, A. February 2011

³⁹⁶ Riordan, C., 1990, 43

³⁹⁷ Riordan, C. “What Do We Know About the Effects of Single-Sex Schools in the Private Sector? Implications for Public Schools,” in Datnow & Hubbard (eds.), 1999, 13

The backlash against the single-sex model has seldom been based on any evidentiary data, causing opponents of coeducation to assert that “sometimes equal means different.”³⁹⁸ Studies commissioned by the United States Department of Education, indicate the intricate variables regarding the elusive nature of such assessments. In a 1992 review of both learning environments, the Department cautiously concluded that there is significant evidence to support the proposition that single-sex schools may produce positive outcomes for young women. A decade later, however, another report by the same department documented that there was insufficient evidence to substantiate that either learning environment is superior to the other. The review emphasized the need for additional research using more sophisticated methodology which would examine a variety of outcomes using a larger representative of samples. In direct contrast, a 2005 study undertaken by the American Institute for Research for the United States Department of Education found that in relation to coeducation schools, single-sex institutions “accrued more positive outcomes-particularly for women.”³⁹⁹ Myra and David Sadker accordingly conclude:

It is difficult to detect sexism unless you know precisely how to observe. And if a lifetime of socialization makes it difficult to spot gender bias even when you are looking for it, how much harder is it to avoid the traps when you are the one doing the teaching.⁴⁰⁰

While the ultimate verdict on the question of gender and education for adolescents remains uncertain, extensive worldwide documentations offering persuasive and powerful evidence supporting the benefits of single-sex schools for young women cannot be disregarded

³⁹⁸ Salomone, R., 2003, 40

³⁹⁹ Mael, F., Alonso, A., Gibson, D., Rogers, K., & Smith, M. “Single-Sex vs. Coeducational Schooling: A Systematic Review. American Institute for Research. Prepared for The United States Department of Education, Washington, DC, 2005

⁴⁰⁰ Sadker, 1994, 4

altogether. It is thus plausible to surmise that the mandate for single-sex schools by the Islamic Republic of Iran may have been fortuitous in creating an atmosphere wherein adolescent Iranian women are given a platform to excel and consequently are empowered to have a “voice” without the constraints inherent in an integrated learning environment. It is further arguable that this format is partially responsible for redirecting a large segment of the female school-age population into previously uncharted territory, and for providing them with the social and psychological capacity to challenge the misogyny of the regime.

As educators continue to battle over which educational format leads to more favorable outcomes and least undermines the equality of the sexes, it becomes important not to lose sight of the obvious: Every child is different and neither model will automatically guarantee success. While it is impossible to maintain that the positive results for young women in single-sex schools in other countries can be categorically expected of Iranian girls, it is unreasonable to dismiss them. In many ways, the evidence provided by advocates of segregated learning can be applied to Iranian women, particularly given the combination of an ingrained culture of modesty and patriarchy, which continues to permeate Iranian society. Keeping in mind that the “one size fits all” formula does not necessarily apply, single-sex education’s capacity to “minimize toxic and negative cultural stereotyping” while eliminating the unconscious biases discovered by the numerous cited studies cannot be disregarded. It can be argued that single-sex schools appear to be far more advantageous for Iranian girls, given their ability to counter many of the inequities prevalent in the coeducation classroom and to provide a supportive environment in which girls don’t feel constrained by gender stereotypes. From a theoretical standpoint, it may additionally be inferred that the characteristics and circumstances afforded by these schools may significantly reduce the overriding societal values and cultural pressures encouraging female compliance with

conservative gender norms. The opportunity to acquire an education while being simultaneously nurtured within a system that lends itself to supporting confidence and self-esteem may potentially be a powerful means of accelerating the emergence of the female consciousness and solidarity needed to battle the existing biases.

Sociologists maintain that socialization undertaken in school is a critical factor in introducing changes in societal perceptions.⁴⁰¹ The collective observations and discoveries by educators, sociologists, psychologists, and neurobiologists confirm the innate biological differences responsible for gendered learning differences. Armed with neuroscience, these studies provide striking testimony that today's women are not reaching their full potential, and that the ideology of coeducation as synonymous with equitable learning may be erroneous. Thus Iranian women have been inadvertently empowered to defy the Islamic Republic's conservative views regarding the female population through this seemingly outdated mandate. If one accepts the universality of gendered biological differences, then the "brain-based" rationale for single-sex schools should be applied to the Iranian woman. Unlike young women in Iran today, the majority of the female population in most Western countries, do not struggle with the misogynistic biases of their societies. Furthermore, the ability to mitigate traditional views regarding stereotypically male-oriented subjects may be particularly relevant given the importance of gender identity construction during adolescence. This dynamic may partially explain the previously cited fact that the percentages of Iranian women in engineering were virtually on a par with women in most Western nations. Gilligan's observation that girls in single-sex schools and classrooms are "empowered" to have a voice may be all the more profound for Iranian girls confined to a society that attempts to routinely silence them. The

⁴⁰¹ Stromquist, N. 2007, 7

advantages derived from an unrestrained single-sex environment in which prejudicial gender assumptions are significantly muted, in conjunction with the high number of female instructors serving as role models and mentors, may allow these women to envision their future differently than the one prescribed by the dominant ideology. In this respect it can be argued that the Islamic Republic has yet again been complicit in undermining its own “female agenda” via changes instituted in the educational arena and has inadvertently acted to counteract the image of the traditional Muslim woman.

Single-sex schooling is inherently compatible with the underlying culture of modesty in Iranian society, and given the fact that the “Islamization” of education has proven counter-intuitively to be responsible for generating unprecedented educational gains for the vast majority of the female population, the arguments for coeducational schooling in the United States, do not seem to be transferrable to Iran.

Of course, supporters of this model do not consider that the segregation policies of the Islamic Republic discourage contact with non-family members of the opposite sex in public spaces, and thus contradict the logic that contact between the sexes in academia is essential for their preparation to interact as adults in the community at large. If “coeducation” is supposed to mirror and replicate the society at large, this does not apply to the post-revolutionary Islamic social order in which spatial boundaries between the sexes are a cornerstone of morality. The single-sex educational format could be responsible for the failure of an Islamic education to produce women who subscribe to a traditional gender mentality. Furthermore, despite the fact that the government devoted considerable effort to purifying and cleansing the school system in the aftermath of the revolution, the “cleansed” schools cannot be considered “religious” in the conventional sense. Rather, they are variants of a Western infrastructure implanted by the

previous regime. The eradication of coeducation at the elementary and secondary levels may have been a blessing, as their elimination automatically led to the reduction of an “adolescent subculture” which has elsewhere been documented as interfering with women reaching their full potential. An integrated atmosphere, it could be argued, would actually be detrimental to adolescent Iranian girls, given the male-dominated culture of the post-revolutionary era, and would thus lend itself to perpetuating and reinforcing conservative gender stereotypes.

Interviews with Iranian women in the post-revolutionary years provides compelling evidence that their “Islamic” education has not effectively socialized them into the regime’s idealized role for them. Freelance journalist Jane Howard, sociologist Mahnaz Kousha, and academic scholar Haleh Esfandiari, collectively present fascinating narratives and interviews with educated rural and urban women of all ages and from diverse economic, professional and social backgrounds. They offer the reader captivating insights into women’s experiences and attitudes regarding work, education, and family, and manifest an overwhelming desire for equality.⁴⁰² Women’s own voices expose the shifting perspectives highlighting zeal for social change and a refusal to succumb to the demands of a misogynistic ideology.⁴⁰³ Despite their diverse lives, similarities exist among women who feel compelled to “broaden their horizons beyond their wifely and motherly duties” and adamantly maintain that their education and economic independence is “crucial in a patriarchal society.”⁴⁰⁴ The authors emphasize that these women are not rejecting motherhood or their maternal responsibilities, but rather are searching for alternate avenues for personal fulfillment and gratification, instead of remaining bound by

⁴⁰² Howard, J., 2002; Kousha, M. *Voices From Iran: The Changing Lives of Iranian Women*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002; Esfandiari, H. *Reconstructed Lives: Women and Iran’s Islamic Revolution*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997

⁴⁰³ Howard, J., 2002, 75

⁴⁰⁴ Kousha, M., 2002, 167, 218

archaic standards. Not one of these women believes that this ambition constitutes a “double burden” since they expect and demand that their “husbands help around the house, and with the children.”⁴⁰⁵ In most cases, women of all ages felt “superior to men,” claiming that it is “the women who have the power to shape their families, to influence their husbands, and to lead their lives.”⁴⁰⁶ This becomes clear in remarks like: “The government agencies are not able to frighten us,” and “each of us finds a way to show our resistance to the daily harassments we face.”⁴⁰⁷ These testimonials reflecting their “superiority” and “solidarity” are analogous to characteristics attributed to and accruing in a single-sex learning environment. The tenacity with which they are held could be an outgrowth of their early foundation and their single-sex education, leading them to avoid the “watershed in female development” during those vital years, that crucial point that Carol Gilligan maintains is “when they are most in danger of drowning.” Many of the older women interviewed felt that the younger generation, and in particular their daughters, were “more conscious and would demand the rights and privileges they were denied.”⁴⁰⁸ A large number were also convinced that their education fueled “their resistance” as “educated and competent women stand up to men...”⁴⁰⁹ Jane Howard’s observation of an all-girls elementary school outside of the capital city of Tehran draws attention to their obsessive attention to education. In her interviews with numerous instructors the author was informed of the “obvious” fact that “girls are studying harder... and achieving more than boys.”⁴¹⁰ In addition, they expressed admiration for the ambitious nature of the younger female generation: “When you go

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid, 110

⁴⁰⁶ Kousha, M. 2002, 183

⁴⁰⁷ Kousha, M., 2002 12; Esfandiari, H., 1997, 149

⁴⁰⁸ Kousha, M., 2002, 14

⁴⁰⁹ Esfandiari, H., 1997, 147, 151

⁴¹⁰ Howard, J. 2002, 80, 85

to a village in the afternoon, you see boys loitering around. The girls are inside studying.”⁴¹¹ In addressing the issue of the veil, most women confirmed that “[it] is not a problem for those children who were raised with it. It is not going to stop them... a piece of material is not going to stop women’s progress.”⁴¹²

A significant number of the adolescent girls who spoke with the authors displayed characteristics reflective of those attributed to the social benefits of a single-sex educational environment. Phrases such as: “my gender has never hindered me in what I wanted to do” and “I like being a woman,” provide testimony that their experience in a segregated atmosphere has led to increased self-confidence and the rejection of stereotypical perceptions.⁴¹³ The authors collectively believe that these women will serve as role models and “pave the way for generations of women to come.”⁴¹⁴

Tehran University sociologist and feminist activist Jaleh Shaditalab further maintains:

Women’s steady march towards education must surely mark one of the biggest social revolutions since 1979. Women’s enrollment in higher education continues to increase, leading to worries about the achievement among boys.⁴¹⁵

The Islamic regime thus seems to have inadvertently created a “perfect storm” in the educational arena for its female population and in the process undermined its own agenda by empowering an entire generation to challenge the very system that was supposed to redirect them into the private

⁴¹¹ Ibid, 85

⁴¹² Kousha, M. 2002, 228

⁴¹³ Kousha, M. 2002, 182, 222

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 159

⁴¹⁵ Howard, J. 2002, 237

domain. The question is whether Iran's male population has been short changed given this fascinating and unexpected outcome.

*“The dream of a new identity begins with new forms of expression.” —
Marie Laure Ryan*

CHAPTER FOUR

ISLAMIC FEMINISM AND THE PATH FOR REFORM

As a result of an arduous journey marking a phenomenal era, the Iranian woman has been victorious in achieving empowerment, despite the stream of impediments. The Republic’s crusade to cultivate a new generation embracing the legacy of the timeless Muslim woman has not been realized. Far from creating a loyal cadre, the spirit of command has led to an incessant struggle between members of the political elite and Iran’s women. A combination of desperation and resolve to resist an imposed status has severely undermined the agenda of the dominant order for a socially binding ideology. Today, the direction taken by this constituency reflects an unprecedented solidarity between secular and religious women to escape their ordained fate. The genesis of this ideological shift, originating with women’s betrayal despite their support of the revolutionaries and their sacrificial contributions during the war years, has been identified as integral to the redirection of once loyal enthusiasts.⁴¹⁶ Indeed, when Ayatollah Khomeini referred to the war as “a blessing,” and called on women to assist during this destructive period, he underestimated the ability of such a command to generate imagery at odds with the stereotypical image of women in a patriarchal society.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ Povey, E.R. “Feminist Contestations in the Institutional Domains in Iran,” *Feminist Review*, 2001 (69) 44-72; Kar, M. *Crossing the Red Line: The Struggle for Human Rights in Iran*. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2007; Paidar, P. 1995, 305

⁴¹⁷ Rabassa, A., Waxman, M., Larson, E., & Marcum, C.Y. *The Muslim War after 9/11*. Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Group, 2004, 226

Initially paralyzed during the war by the absence of fathers and husbands, and burdened by their dual roles as providers and caregivers, women nevertheless responded with valor and conviction to the requirements of a daunting task. Azam Taleghani, daughter of prominent Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani, recalls the nature of cooperation among women at large during this challenging interim:

During the war we joined the Sisters Mobilization Organization. We worked in the mosques, prepared food, blankets and medicines for the men at the war front... In the war zone areas, women were involved in the distribution of arms amongst the population and the soldiers. In other areas, women set up mobile hospitals and looked after the injured. As the war continued, women had to return to their homes, but they still continued their voluntary work, and had to organize their time in a way that would allow them to do their housework and their voluntary work in order to keep their family members happy.⁴¹⁸

Mobilized by the state and a post-revolutionary climate, the eight-year struggle of many previously confined women did little to alter an obsolete mindset, as legal barriers continued to stand in the way of their inherent rights in the family and in society at large. War widows, in particular, were outraged when sharia-based laws assigned guardianship of minors and childcare payments from the Martyrs Foundation (*Bonyad-e Shahid*) to the child's paternal grandfather.⁴¹⁹ In 1985, as a result of vehement protests and petitions, the parliament approved a bill granting custody of children whose fathers had been killed in the war to their mothers.⁴²⁰ Sporadic concessions such as this one signaled the state's need in a calamitous time, awakening women in that transitory moment to their resilience and self-sufficiency in the absence of men. Author Louise Halper believes that, as difficult as those years may have been, they were instrumental in

⁴¹⁸ Vakili, S. 2011, 85

⁴¹⁹ Kar, M. "Women's Strategies in Iran from the 1979 Revolution to 1999," in Bayes, J. & Tohidi, N. *Globalization, Gender, and Religion: The Politics of Women's Rights in Catholic and Muslim Contexts*. New York: Palgrave, 2000, 177-203

⁴²⁰ Kar, M. 2007, 96

“altering the consciousness of many women, particularly popular class women [who] not only felt empowered, but [also] obliged to discuss their status and establish the continuity of their participation in public life.”⁴²¹ Legal anthropologist Ziba Mir-Hosseini concludes that “a door from within was opened that could no longer be closed.”⁴²² Repercussions of conflicting gender roles only intensified after the war, as women continued to be afflicted with the intolerance of an orthodox national leadership. While the war years had been marked by ideological stasis, the presidency of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997) following Iran’s ceasefire with Iraq spread the seeds of a progressive ideology within the traditional outlook of the ruling institutions.⁴²³ Rafsanjani’s “era of reconstruction,” described as the “driving force of moderation,” fostered a more subdued atmosphere nourishing an isolated and shattered nation.⁴²⁴ A decisive shift in gender principles became apparent with the removal of quotas for women in fields of higher education and the launching of a nationwide campaign to stabilize the massive population growth.⁴²⁵ The Ministry of Health authorized clinics throughout the country to promote and dispense contraceptives as part of its family planning services, resulting in a

⁴²¹ Halper, L. “Law and Women’s Agency in Post-Revolutionary Iran,” *Harvard Journal of Law and Gender*, 2005 (28) 117

⁴²² Mir-Hosseini, Z. “Islam, Women and Civil Rights: The Religious Debate in the Iran of the 1990’s,” in Ansari, S. & Martin, V. (eds.) *Women, Religion and Culture in Iran*. Richmond, Surrey, U.K., 2002, 169-188

⁴²³ Brumberg, D. *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001, 153; BBC News, “Profile: Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani,” June 19, 2009; Sciolino, E. *Persian Mirrors: The Elusive Face of Iran*. New York: Free Press, 2010

⁴²⁴ Sciolino, E. “Rafsanjani Sketches Visions of a Moderate Iran,” *New York Times*, April 19, 1992; Fadaee, S. *Social Movements in Iran: Environmentalism and Civil Society*. New York: Routledge, 2012, 61

⁴²⁵ Moghadam, V. *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*. 2nd edition. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003, 208

dramatic reduction in population growth from 3.2% in 1986 to 1.5% by 1996.⁴²⁶ According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Iran experienced one of the fastest known reductions in fertility, with the most significant decreases occurring in rural areas.⁴²⁷ In this decade of the 1990s, rising social tensions within an already fragmented Iran stimulated a rudimentary alliance between disillusioned supporters of the revolution and marginalized secular and religious women, against the inadequacies of an Islamic state.⁴²⁸ According to Ray Takeyh, “not for the first time was Iran paralyzed by the core contradiction between factions professing ideology and those pressing the cause of national interest.”⁴²⁹ This fortuitous development gained momentum during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), a moderate cleric whose reformist policies momentarily displaced a conservative agenda by promoting the country’s passage into a “thrilling Tehran spring,” a bid for the ascendancy of reform-minded constituencies against the unrelenting persecution of traditionalist forces.⁴³⁰

The birth of the reform movement resulted in modifications of numerous patriarchal mandates, alleviating drastic measures in legal (including family law), educational, and

⁴²⁶ Roudi-Fahimi, F. “Iran’s Family Planning Program Responding to a Nation’s Needs,” MENA Policy Brief, Washington: Population Reference Bureau, 2002

⁴²⁷ 2006 Iran Census; U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA). *Country Report on Population Reproductive Health and Family Planning Program in the Islamic Republic*. Tehran: Family Health Department, Undersecretary for Public Health, Ministry of Health and Medical Education, 1988

⁴²⁸ Paidar, P. “Gender and Democracy: The Encounter between Feminism and Reformism in Contemporary Iran,” Program Paper No. 6, U.N. Research Institute for Social Development, Democracy, Governance and Human Rights, October 2001, 18-24

⁴²⁹ Takeyh, R. *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*. New York: Holt, 2006, 43

⁴³⁰ “Conservative or Conservative? A Pitiful Narrowing of Choice for Iranians and the World,” *The Economist*, March 19, 2008; Sedghi, H. *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling and Re-veiling*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 327-330

employment institutions.⁴³¹ The accession of numerous reformist politicians and Islamist women to positions of authority fortified the emerging transformation, putting it on the path toward compensating for unrealized dreams. The Center for Women's Participation (*Markaz-e Mosharekat-e Zanan*) was created as an extension of the President's Office to raise awareness and improve women's rights. Many accomplished women were appointed to office, including Zahra Shojaie as Advisor on Women's Affairs, Massomeh Ebtekar as Head of the Environmental Protection Organization, Dr. Jamileh Kadivar as Special Adviser on Press Affairs, Dr. Zahra Rahnavard as Chancellor of Al Zahra University, and Khatami's wife Zohreh Sadeghi as head of a newly conceived committee for addressing the deficient conditions of rural women.⁴³² The appointment of Dr. Ata'ollah Mohajerani, husband of Dr. Jamileh Kadivar, as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, fostered greater autonomy in the media and the arts, drastically accelerating the dissemination of controversial literary and cinematic genres. Affiliated with Rafsanjani's Construction Party, Dr. Mohajerani's official liberal stance of "tolerance and laxity" (*tasahol va tasameh*) was the basis for a directive that sustained a dynamic women's press, already set in motion by Khatami in his capacity as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance under Rafsanjani.⁴³³ New channels methodically used a new rhetoric for the "radical re-thinking of law, policy, and constitution," while the formation of more than 600 non-governmental

⁴³¹ Keddie, N. *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003, 294; Sedghi, H. 2007, 242-272; Brumberg, D., 2001

⁴³² Vakili, 2011, 140-143; Kadivar, J. "Women Working as Judges and Making Judicial Decisions," in Povey, T. & Rostami-Povey, E. (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*. London: Ashgate, 2012, 115

⁴³³ De Bellaigue, C. *The Struggle for Iran*. New York: New York Review of Books, 2007, 8-9; Sciolino, E. 2005, 213; Vakili, 2011, 119-140

organizations (NGOs) contributed to the integration of women from divergent backgrounds.⁴³⁴ This ambitious undertaking elevated the consciousness of the female population who began to use a variety of reformist outlets as their primary symposia for gender debate and resolution.⁴³⁵ Avant-garde features by filmmakers Tahmineh Milani (*Two Women*, 1998), Rakhshan Bani Etemad (*May Lady*, 1997), and Samira Makhmalbaf (*The Apple*, 1998), worked in sync with a modified women's press to promote the artistic and social forces challenging the bitter realities of a suffocating atmosphere.⁴³⁶ However, even though these forms of expression infiltrated Iranian society, incessant interventions by the Council of Guardians and the Supreme Leader disrupted the progressive platform, which as early as 1998 was threatened with laws forbidding the use of non-sharia standards for advocating women's rights.⁴³⁷ By April 2000, these assaults had virtually become a symbol of the political and cultural schism in Iran. More than 30 publications were closed and many defiant journalists were arrested and imprisoned. The attempt

⁴³⁴ Kiabany, G. & Sreberny, A. "The Women's Press in Contemporary Iran: Engendering the Public Sphere," in Sakr, N. (ed.) *Women and Media in the Middle East: Power Through Self-Expression*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007; Poya, M. *Women, Work and Islamism*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999; Kar, M. "Standing on Shifting Ground: Women and Civil Society in Iran," in Simone, F.N. (ed.) *On Shifting Ground: Muslim Women in the Global Era*. New York: The Feminist Press, 2005, 218-234

⁴³⁵ Mir-Hosseini, Z. "Debating Women: Gender and the Public Sphere in Post-Revolutionary Iran," in Sajoo, A.B. (ed.) *Civil Society in the Muslim World: Contemporary Perspectives*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002, 95-122; Khiabany, G. "Politics of the Internet in Iran," in Semati, M. (ed.) *Media, Culture and Society: Living with Globalization and the Islamic State*. New York: Routledge, 2007, 17-36

⁴³⁶ Kar, M. "Standing on Shifting Ground: Women and Civil Society in Iran," in Nourai-Simone, F. (ed.) *On Shifting Ground*. New York: Feminist Press, 2005, 218-234; Interview with Samira Makhmalbaf, BBC News, May 15, 2012; Naficy, H. "Veiled Visions/Powerful Presences: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema," in Afkhami, M. & Friedl, E. (eds.) 1994, 131-134

⁴³⁷ Menashri, D. *Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran: Religion, Society and Power*. London: Routledge, 2001, 141; Poya, M. 1999, 145; Vakili, 2102,120

to repeal such severe enactments by a parliament controlled by reformists merely exacerbated tensions, prompting Ayatollah Khamenei to release the following statement:

If the enemies infiltrate our press, this will be a big danger to the country's security and the people's religious beliefs. I do not deem it right to keep silent... There are 10 to 15 papers writing as if they are from one center, undermining Islamic and revolutionary principles, insulting constitutional bodies, creating tension and discord in society... Unfortunately, the same enemy who wants to overthrow the regime has found a base in the country...⁴³⁸

In the same year, the coerced resignation of Minister of Culture Mohajerani amidst allegations of a “permissive stance,” further solidified the crackdown.⁴³⁹ These attacks were especially disconcerting for Khatami's female constituency, who along with the country's youth had been drawn into a pledge of “religious democracy.”⁴⁴⁰ Furthermore, except for Zahra Shojaie, who held cabinet rank as the President's advisor, the obvious absence of women in ministerial positions after Khatami had vowed “he would make no distinction between men and women when it came to assigning [cabinet] posts,” only appeared to validate the reigning deceptions of the Islamic Republic.⁴⁴¹

While on numerous levels the realities of a shifting landscape may have culminated in the bankruptcy of unrealized dreams, the Khatami administration cannot be considered entirely misbegotten. The ebb and flow of this unconventional tide needs to be considered in relation to the conciliatory measures sanctioned by a lenient conservative and the burdens manufactured by

⁴³⁸ “Iran Parliament Bid To Ease Press Curbs Quashed,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 7, 2000; Soroush, A. “2001 World Press Freedom Review,” <http://www.drSORoush.com>; Patterson, S. *Let the Swords Encircle Me: Iran — A Journey Behind the Headlines*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010, 265; Campagna, J. *Iran Briefing*, Committee to Protect Journalists, May 2000

⁴³⁹ De Bellaigue, 2007, 5

⁴⁴⁰ Moghadam, V. 2003, 218; “Profile: Mohammad Khatami,” BBC News, June 17, 2009

⁴⁴¹ Interview with Mohammad Khatami: “What does Khatami Have to Say About Women?” (“*Khatami Dar Bar-re-ye Zanan Che Migouyad?*”) *Zanan*, May 1997, No. 34, 2-5

the architects of an antiquated ideology. In reality, despite Khatami's popularity and his landslide victory, he was routinely handicapped by the power elite, whose members denounced his constituency as "diseased people."⁴⁴² For example, when Khatami himself initiated the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was approved by a parliamentary majority, it was overruled by the Council of Guardians on the grounds that it "conflicted with several principles of the Constitution including inheritance and divorce laws, the veil, and polygamy."⁴⁴³ Given the severity of such impediments, it is likely that Khatami felt it necessary to proceed with caution, despite his campaign assurances, rather than take the risks inherent in making full-blown concessions to a "radical" agenda. The moderate, yet steady progress of the infusions of the Khatami administration could at least partially account for an invigorated common social platform, which today can no longer be effaced. In assessing the efficacy of Khatami's kaleidoscope of societal changes, historians have acknowledged the oversight of a conservative leadership who, by accepting the verdict of this election, "miscalculated the potential for the reform movement to garner popular support."⁴⁴⁴ Ali Ansari estimates that "much to everyone's astonishment the appeal of the modest intellectual proved infectious," while sociologist Asef Bayat confirms that "Khatami's discourse of civil society, democracy, transparency, and rule of law, which were quite absent in the 1980s, became the dominant concept..."⁴⁴⁵ Accordingly, for women, the "move to allow greater freedom of expression to the press changed the face of media in Iran," effectively throwing open the

⁴⁴² Menashri, D. 2001, 96; "Profile: Mohammad Khatami," BBC News, June 6, 2001

⁴⁴³ Afary, J. *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 330.

⁴⁴⁴ Vakili, S. 2011, 139; Afary, J. 2009, 329

⁴⁴⁵ Ansari, A.M. *Modern Iran Since 1921: The Pahlavis and After*. Harlow, Essex, U.K.: Pearson Education, 2003, 248; "Profile: Mohammad Khatami," BBC News, June 6, 2001

floodgates for a thriving “women’s rights movement” that refuses to surrender despite the manifold barricades erected by powerful forces.⁴⁴⁶

Previous writers have assessed the arenas in which gender false consciousness can be exposed, and have seen the academic platform as necessary for achieving gender equality. This chapter will evaluate how the blessings of an education can be combined with a reformist platform to sow the seeds of a feminist consciousness in the crevices of Khatami’s “civil society.” The objective is always to consider what Abdol Ali Rezai refers to as “the sum of social transformations in Iranian society,” actual and potential, and here the subject is the tactical dissemination of the thinking of feminist mentors.⁴⁴⁷ In this respect, there are lacunae in existing scholarship regarding the role of the women’s press, especially in the propagation of new trends and social identities within burgeoning spaces in Iranian society. The women’s press is especially influential among young women. Within the spectrum of the women’s press, the role of one publication in particular will be appraised as healing the wrongful fracture between Iran and the West by presenting an unorthodox, woman-centered language — a language that invigorates the socialization of young women during a most impressionable phase of their development.

Post-revolutionary scholarship has largely addressed the exceptional contribution of the magazine *Zanan* — and its mastermind — from a linear perspective, by emphasizing its brazen censure of the enshrined order as actually being anathema to conventional norms and a threat to a conservative order. The content of *Zanan* will be examined as part of a rhetorical partnership that

⁴⁴⁶ Gheissari, A. & Nasr, V. *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, 135

⁴⁴⁷ Rezai, A.R. “The Full Half of the Glass,” in *The Intellectual Bases of the Khatami Phenomenon in Iran*. New York: Middle East Institute, Columbia University, 1999, 43

unites seemingly incompatible dimensions in the propagation of a new discourse that fans the flames of women's determination to achieve restitution.

Intimations of a liberation crusade embedding the anguished voices of Bibi Khanum Astarabadi and Taj Al-Saltaneh have erupted nearly a century after their era into a requiem denouncing servitude and compliance to a patriarchal order. What is most perplexing about this convoluted journey is that it has ironically blossomed into the glorious debut of "feminism" in Iran during a most unexpected era. This historically unknown terminology, energized by an eclectic variety of post-revolutionary women's publications, has evolved to bring a variety of categories under its banner, including "women's rights advocacy/activism," "Islamic feminism," "secular feminism," and "indigenous feminism," reflecting the combined dialogue of a distinguished task force against the unwavering norms espoused by enthusiasts of tradition.⁴⁴⁸

Today, "Islamic feminism," a term initiated by female expatriates, flourishes as the predominant paradigm within Iran among an array of devout and secular women who, in the application of a "dynamic jurisprudence" (*fiq 'h-e pooya*), have dispensed with the traditional recipe (*fiq 'h-e sonnati*) by seeking equality within the bounds of religious scriptures.⁴⁴⁹

In reference to this exquisite development, scholars in Iran and abroad have produced a wealth of literature on the complex debates surrounding the compatibility of a universal ideology

⁴⁴⁸ Howard, J. 2002; Moghadam, V. 2003; Poya, M. 1999; Mir-Hosseini, Z. 1999; Afary, J. 2009; Vakili, S. 2011; Afshar, H. *Islam and Feminism: An Iranian Case Study*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998

⁴⁴⁹ Mir-Hosseini, Z. "Women and Politics in Post Khomeini Iran: Divorce, Veiling and Emerging Feminism," in Afshar, H. (ed.) *Women and Politics in the Third World*. London & New York: Routledge, 1996, 145-174; Mir-Hosseini, Z. "Stretching the Limits: A Feminist Reading of the Sharia in Post-Khomeini Iran," in Yamani, M. (ed.) 1996, 285-319; Paidar, P. "Gender and Democracy: The Encounter between Feminism and Reformism in Contemporary Iran," Program Paper No. 6, U.N. Research Institute for Social Development, Democracy, Governance and Human Rights, October 2001, 18-24

with the formulation of an indigenous definition restricted to the parameters of a misogynistic establishment. A strategic nomenclature adopted by women to validate a new brand of rhetoric, has been simultaneously praised and criticized for its revisionist approach, aimed at dismantling the dominant gender precepts objectified in divine law.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁵⁰ Moghissi, H. *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male-Defined Revolutionary Movement*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996; *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Post-Modern Analysis*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002; Moghissi, H. "Women, Modernity, and Political Islam," *Iran Bulletin*, Autumn/Winter 1998; Shahidian, H. "The Iranian Left: The Woman Question: The Revolution of 1978-1979," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 26(2): 223-247; Shahidian, H. "Islamic Feminism Encounters Western Feminism: Towards an Indigenous Alternative?" Paper presented to the Feminism and Globalization Seminar, Illinois State University, Feb. 12, 1998; Shahidian, H. *Women in Iran: Gender Politics in the Islamic Republic*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002; Shahidian, H. *Women in Iran: Emerging Voices: The Women's Movement*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002; Afshar, H. "Feminist Voices," in Afshar, H. (ed.) *Women and Politics in the Third World*. London & New York: Routledge, 1996, 142-169; Afshar, H. "Islam and Feminism: An Analysis of Political Strategies," in Yamani, M. (ed.) 1996, 197-217; Mojab, S. "Islamic Feminism: Alternative or Contradiction," in Moghissi, H. (ed.) *Women and Islam: Critical Concepts in Sociology*. London & New York: Routledge, 2005, 320-325; Tohidi, N. "The Issues at Hand," in Tohidi, N. & Bodman, H.L. (eds.) *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity Within Unity*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, 277-294; Tohidi, N. "Gender and Islamic Fundamentalism: Feminist Politics in Iran," in Mohanty, C.T., Russo, A., & Torres, L. (eds.) *The Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, 251-267; Tohidi, N. "Modernity, Islamization and Women in Iran," in Moghadam, V. (ed.) *Gender and National Identity: Women in Politics in Muslim Societies*. London: Zed Books, 1994, 110-147; Moghadam, V. "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward a Resolution and Debate," *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 27(4), 2002, 1135-1171; Moghadam, V. *Women, Work, and Economic Reform in the Middle East and North Africa*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998; Najmabadi, A. "Power, Morality and the New Muslim Womanhood," in Weiner, M. & Banuazizi, A. (eds.) *The Politics of Social Transformation in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994, 366-389; Najmabadi, A. "Feminism in the Islamic Republic: Years of Hardship, Years of Growth," in Haddad, Y. & Esposito, J. (eds.) *Gender and Social Change in the Muslim World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 59-84; Mir-Hosseini, Z. "Sexuality, Rights and Islam," in Beck, L. & Nashat, G. (eds.) 2004, 214-217

“Feminism” which, in its broadest definition, refers to the array of movements and ideologies “advocating women’s rights on the grounds of sexual equality,”⁴⁵¹ has come to be regarded by many scholars as harmonious with an interpretation enabling “women to maintain their religious beliefs while promoting a more egalitarian Islam.”⁴⁵² The collective rendition of a group of writers including Nayereh Tohidi, Afsaneh Najmabadi, Haleh Afshar, Valentine Moghadam, and Ziba Mir-Hosseini applauds this interpretation for altering the extreme formulations preserved in sacred manuscripts, by “expanding legal, literary and gender consciousness,” in a manner authorizing a woman’s right to *ijtihad*, independent reasoning with respect to religious interpretation.⁴⁵³ Their concurrence has itself become an indispensable ally for all women previously resistant to a contrarian position, as it significantly diminishes clerical authority over religious scripture through an approach which “anchors [its] search in a motion of a return to the roots, and claims to recapture both the purity and vitality of Islam that existed at its inception.”⁴⁵⁴

On the opposing spectrum, adverse conclusions by Haideh Moghissi, Hammed Shahidian, and Sharzad Mojab impugn the integrity of a restricted prescription which “far from being an alternative, is a compromise with patriarchy.”⁴⁵⁵ The effort to seek resolution solely within a “religion based on hierarchy” is insufficient, particularly in its neglect of broader social issues including sexuality and personal autonomy.⁴⁵⁶ Accordingly, the integration of secular

⁴⁵¹ *The Concise Oxford English Language Dictionary*, 11th edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 522

⁴⁵² Tohidi, 1998, 283-285

⁴⁵³ Moghadam, V. 2002, 1154

⁴⁵⁴ Afshar, A. 1998, 18

⁴⁵⁵ Mojab, S. 2005, 325

⁴⁵⁶ Shahidian, H. “Feminism in Iran: In Search of What?” *Zanan*, No. 46 (1998), 32-38

women in this formula is viewed as contradictory within a divinely ordained system prone to official decrees suppressing any and all radical affirmations invoking temporal connotations.⁴⁵⁷

Shahidian maintains:

If feminism is a movement to abolish patriarchy, to protect human beings from being prisoners of fixed identities, to contribute towards a society in which individuals can fashion their lives free from economic, political, social and cultural constraints, then Islamic feminism proves considerably inadequate.⁴⁵⁸

In this assignment, a transformation beyond religious boundaries is called for, rather than remaining confined within limits imposed by a defective understanding of feminism. Feminist scholar Valentine Moghadam, who has praised this invaluable exchange for “broadening the discursive universe,” appears to remain indecisive, declaring on the one hand, “it is counterproductive to create absolute boundaries,” while maintaining that their “position on political and economic issues remains unclear and undeveloped.”⁴⁵⁹

In light of this development, it is useful to recognize the complex relationship among historical, cultural, and religious forces challenging gender “norms” in Iranian society. Historians assessing “women’s responses to patriarchy” and the redirection of once passionate supporters, acknowledge that the educational background and religious knowledge of Muslim women with familial ties to the state, coalesced with those of their secular counterparts and enlightened intellectuals to construct many of the early arguments on Islam, gender, and equality.⁴⁶⁰ The rise of this new discourse has been instrumental in emphasizing that “no inherent or logical link

⁴⁵⁷ Shahidian, H. 1995, 5; Mojab, S. 1995, 25

⁴⁵⁸ Shahidian, H. 1998, 11-12

⁴⁵⁹ Moghadam, V. 2002, 1158

⁴⁶⁰ Poya, M. 1999, 122; Vakili, S. 2011; Afshar, H. 1996; Moghadam, V. 2002; Kar, M. 2001; Halper, L. 2005

stands between patriarchy and Islamic ideals.”⁴⁶¹ Over the last two decades, the many women in the vanguard of this movement have included:

- Azam Taleghani – Former Member of Parliament and daughter of Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani
- Zahra Rahnavard – Former Chancellor of Al Zahra University and wife of former reformist Prime Minister and presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi
- Faezeh Hashemi – Daughter of former President Rafsanjani, former Member of Parliament, and Head of the Women’s Sports Federation
- Dr. Jamileh Kadivar – Professor and founding member of the Association of Iranian Female Journalists (1998)
- Marzieh Dabbagh – Member of Parliament (1979-2000)
- Shahla Sherkat – Founder and editor in chief of *Zanan* (1992-2008)
- Parvin Ardalan – Journalist and cofounder of the One Million Signatures Campaign
- Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani – Founder and director of Nashr-e Towseh Publishing House
- Shahla Lahiji – Founder of Roshangaran Press
- Shirin Ebadi – Nobel Laureate and prominent attorney
- Mehrangiz Kar – Attorney and human rights activist
- Nahid Motiee and Jaleh Shaditalab – Sociologists⁴⁶²

⁴⁶¹ Mir-Hosseini, Z. in Beck, L. & Nashat, G. (eds.) 2004, 212

⁴⁶² Paidar, P. 1995; Moghadam, V. 2002; Siavoshi, S. “ ‘Islamist’ Women Activists: Allies or Enemies?” in Jahanbegloo, R. (ed.) *Iran: Between Tradition and Modernity*. New York: Lexington Books, 2004, 169-185; Zahedi, A. “Contested Meaning of the Veil and the Political Ideology of the Iranian Regime,” *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 3(3) 2007

The powerful voices of this phalanx have blended with those of many like-minded individuals to produce a consensus, demonstrating that the antidote to the poison of their previous factionalism lies in forging a new direction within the parameters of an altruistic and moderate Islam.

Despite the fact that the majority of religious women seek reform within a Koranic framework, and their secular colleagues subscribe to a separation between “church” and “state” and to the egalitarian principles enshrined in the CEDAW in 1979, they have chosen to disregard their personal differences and give precedence to their greater purpose, to eradicate an inferior existence.⁴⁶³ Writer Parvin Paidar maintains that “old enemies may turn into new political allies when it comes to resisting the onslaught of male supremacy.”⁴⁶⁴

Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh (Zahra Ommi), the editor in chief of the defunct reformist women’s journal *Farzaneh* (Wise), believes that “Iran has marched into this century with women as a powerful catalyst for social change.”⁴⁶⁵

This powerful common front forms the nucleus of a theology-based rejection of unequal status according to gender, challenging institutionalized codes of conduct in an Islamic society. This magnificent coup, anchored in an ambitious strategy aimed at “bargaining with patriarchy,” was featured prominently in a spectrum of post-revolutionary women’s publications, ranging from the distinctly conservative to the strikingly progressive, reflecting the nuances of a

⁴⁶³ Poya, M. 1999; Paidar, P.1995; Moghadam, V. 2002, 2003; Afary, J. 2009; Vakili, S. 2011

⁴⁶⁴ Paidar, P. “Gender and Democracy: The Encounter Between Feminism and Reformism in Contemporary Iran,” U.N. Research Institute for Social Development, Program Paper 6, October 2001, 64

⁴⁶⁵ Kian-Thiébaud, A. “Women and Politics in Post-Islamist Iran: The Gender Conscious Drive to Change,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 24(1), 1997, 91

variegated approach.⁴⁶⁶ Studies of this corpus reveal a multifaceted ritual of promoting and denouncing the patriarchal standard. This literature is an intellectual tour de force, exposing a woman-centered discourse grounded in the moral and spiritual dimensions of divine doctrine.⁴⁶⁷ Moghadam believes “women’s continuous exposure to ideological challenges undermined efforts to re-domesticate and privatize them, and because these women were ideologically correct, they could not be accused of *gharbzadegi* (westoxication).”⁴⁶⁸

Among the well known publications of the day, a select few upheld the sanctity of immutable laws, while the majority became forceful contenders in dissolving the enshrined status. In the aftermath of the revolution, the only two women’s publications employed in the Pahlavi era as vehicles for propagating a western lifestyle were re-launched as a powerful “arm of activism” on behalf of the reigning orthodoxy.⁴⁶⁹ The bright, colorful pages of *Ettela‘at-e Banovan* (Ladies’ Information) and *Zan-e Ruz* (Today’s Woman) were replaced with somber vestiges and displays endorsing the official creed of a religious empire. *Ettela‘at-e Banovan* was taken over by the Islamic Republican Party and renamed *Rah-ye Zeynab* (Zeynab’s Path) after

⁴⁶⁶ Kandiyoti, D. “Bargaining with Patriarchy,” *Gender and Society*, 2(3), Sept. 1988, 274-290

⁴⁶⁷ Lichter, I. *Muslim Women Reformers: Inspiring Voices Against Oppression*. New York: Prometheus Books, 2009; Mir-Hosseini, Z. “Debating Women: Gender and the Public Sphere in Post-Revolutionary Iran,” in Sajoo, A. (ed.) 2004, 95-122; Vakili, S. 2011; Afary, J. 2009; Poya, M. 1999; Sedghi, H. 2007; Moghadam, V. 2002, 2003; Howard, J. 2002; Nikanashi, H. “Power, Ideology and Women’s Consciousness in Post-Revolutionary Iran,” in Bodman, H. & Tohidi, N. (eds.) *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity Within Unity*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, 83-100; Shahidian, H. 2002; Povey, E. 2001; Mir-Hosseini, Z. 1999; Samiuddin, A. & Khanum, R. “Gender Politics in Iran and Afghanistan,” in Samiuddin, A. & Khanum, R. (eds.) *Muslim Feminism and Feminist Movements (Central Asia)*. Delhi, India: Global Visions Publishing House, 2002, 45-81; Shahidian, H. *Journalism in Iran: From Mission to Profession*. London & New York: Routledge, 2007

⁴⁶⁸ Moghadam, V. 2003, 177

⁴⁶⁹ Vakili, S. 2011, 120

Prophet Mohammad's granddaughter, while *Zan-e Ruz* retained its original name and operated under Dr. Zahra Rahnavard and the editorship of Shahla Sherkat.⁴⁷⁰

Conservative journals *Neda* (Proclamation) and *Payam-e Zan* (Woman's Message) were dedicated patrons of a traditional Islamic agenda, voicing privileges for women solely within the boundaries of a censored atmosphere. Launched in 1990, *Neda*, the quarterly journal of the Women's Association of the Islamic Republic of Iran (or Women's Society of the IRI, *Jami'at-e Zanan-e Jomhuriy-ye Islami*), a state-sponsored organization headed by Khomeini's daughter Zahra Mostafavi, appeared at irregular intervals under the editorship of Khomeini's granddaughter Fereshteh A'arabi. However, given its limited circulation and general lack of appeal, the journal was mainly employed for governmental and institutional research purposes.⁴⁷¹

Payam-e Zan, inaugurated in 1992, is the official journal of the Qom religious seminary. Written and edited by men on the grounds that women are not permitted at the seminary, the magazine denounced gender parity as a western concept with no place in Islam. Under the editorship of cleric Seyyed Zia Mortazavi, this entity held the "pronounced patriarchal biases of sharia legal rulings to be immutable."⁴⁷² Over the years *Payam-e Zan* has vociferously denounced the equality premise in scriptures and even gone so far as to buttress its refutations by publishing a series of one hundred interviews with well known professional Muslim women who adhere to the principles of sacred authority. In reviewing their dialogue, author Janet Afary has

⁴⁷⁰ Afary, J. 2009, 316; Khiabany, G. 2010, 90-97; Vakili, S. 2011, 87; Khiabany, G. & Sreberny, A. in Sakr, N. (ed.) 2007, 19; Shahidian, H. 2002, 82-85

⁴⁷¹ Mir-Hosseini, Z. in Sajoo, A. 2002, 103-105; Khiabany, G. & Sreberny, A. "The Women's Press in Contemporary Iran: Engendering the Public Sphere," in Sakr, N. (ed.) 2007, 34-35; Keddie, N. 2003; Mir-Hosseini, Z. 1999, 215

⁴⁷² Mir-Hosseini, Z. in Sajoo, A. 2002, 109; Nikanashi, H. in Bodman, H. & Tohidi, N. (eds.) 1998, 85-86; Mir-Hosseini, Z. 1999, 86

concluded that, while these ladies are ideologically sanctioned by the traditional order and work in close proximity with various government officials, “not one appears to be a conventional wife and mother.”⁴⁷³

In recent years, “financial compensation” and “job security” have been cited as primary explanations for the minor segment of “conservative conformist women,” who purport to subscribe to the Republic’s official ideology.⁴⁷⁴ While the repressive faction continues to maintain that women occupy influential political positions, the number of appointees in 2009 included a mere 12 female deputies out of 290 members of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (*Majlis-e Shoray-e Islami*). Accordingly, Ahmadinejad’s 2006 and 2009 appointments of radically conservative women — including Zohreh Tabibzadeh Nouri as head of the Iran Center for Women and Family Affairs and Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi as Minister of Health and Medical Education — exemplify the type of women already affiliated with the current government.⁴⁷⁵ As the country’s first female minister since the Islamic revolution, Dastjerdi, a former parliamentarian, approved segregation in medical institutions and supported legal amendments infringing a woman’s right to divorce and to obtain custody of her children. Tabibzadeh Nouri, likewise, passionately endorsed Iran’s refusal to sign the Human Rights Charter, declaring:

As long as I live and remain in charge of this Center, I will not let anyone sign international charters or declarations of international conferences on women’s rights, since we can fix the gaps and existing problems through the Islamic faith. I see no reason to follow the unsuccessful western model.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷³ Afary, J. 2009, 310

⁴⁷⁴ Kar, M. 2001, 182; Vakili, S. 2011, 80

⁴⁷⁵ Vakili, S. 2011, 18, 190

⁴⁷⁶ Lichter, I. 2009, 133; “The First Woman to Become Minister in the Islamic Republic,” BBC Farsi, Sept. 3, 2009

Author Sanam Vakili maintains that the state has exploited this dependency on financial compensation in return for political support, while activist Mehrangiz Kar states that “to safeguard their power positions, many of these women do not go beyond some vague rhetorical or general statement about women’s issues.”⁴⁷⁷

Conversely, *Payam-e Hajar* (Hajar’s Message), *Hoquq-e Zanan* (Women’s Rights), *Jens-e Dovom* (The Second Sex), *Zan* (Woman), *Farzaneh* (Wise), and *Zanan* (Women) embarked on an extraordinary campaign conceptualizing alternative readings to the enforced dogma.

The weekly *Payam-e Hajar* (1980-2000) named after the Prophet Abraham’s wife and launched by Azam Taleghani, became a success virtually overnight by adopting a moderate position, denouncing both the “Westoxicated” woman and the traditional Muslim woman of the official ideology.⁴⁷⁸ A political prisoner during the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and a member of the first revolutionary parliament, Taleghani was among the initial wave of disenchanted Islamist women who began advocating equal rights by challenging the outdated scriptures.⁴⁷⁹ As the official journal of the Islamic Women’s Institution (*Mo’asseseh-ye Eslami-ye Zanan-e Irani*), for which Taleghani served as director, *Payam-e Hajar* openly contested the premise of many patriarchal laws in Iranian society. In one of her many editorials, Taleghani argued that while the law recognizes a man’s right to “take up to four wives as long as he is able to treat them all equally, the very fact that the infallible Prophet Muhammad was in principle unable to perform this task, would make it highly inconceivable for the ordinary man to do so

⁴⁷⁷ Vakili, S. 2011, 80; Kar, M. in Bayes, J. & Tohidi, N. (eds.) 1999, 180-181

⁴⁷⁸ Nikanashi, H. in Bodman, H. & Tohidi, N. (eds.) 1998, 97; Vakili, 2011, 85

⁴⁷⁹ Khiabany, G. 2010, 97; Poya, 1999, 139

either.”⁴⁸⁰ However, despite all of its meticulous renderings, the journal all too often exposed Taleghani’s personal “political and religious ideology, where factional politics overshadows discussion of gender and women’s rights.” In 2000, *Payam-e Hajar* was officially shut down for unspecified reasons.⁴⁸¹

Farzaneh (1993-2009), a prominent, independent academic journal of women’s studies published in both English and Farsi by the Center for Women’s Studies and Research, served predominantly as a theological and theoretical campaigning medium among academics, scholars, and policy makers in Iran and abroad.⁴⁸²

Its licensee, Massoumeh Ebtekar, served in Khatami’s administration, and its editor in chief, Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh, was a well-known women’s rights activist, whose numerous public demonstrations culminated in her arrest and imprisonment in 2010.⁴⁸³

Farzaneh’s exceedingly unbiased disposition is possibly best exemplified in the philosophy of Abbasgholizadeh herself:

We know that secular women do not share our convictions, but this does not give us any problems, since we are all working to promote the status of women. We Islamists have abandoned the idea that we are the sole heirs to the revolution. We realize that our sectarianism during the early years led to the isolation of many competent women and this was detrimental to women in general. We want to make up for our mistakes.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸⁰ Vakili, S. 2011, 117

⁴⁸¹ Mir-Hosseini, Z. in Sajoo, A. (ed.) 2002, 102

⁴⁸² Shahidian, H. 2002, 41; Khiabany, G. & Sreberny, A. in Sakr, N. (ed.) 2007, 30; Khiabany, G. 2010, 103

⁴⁸³ Khiabany, G. & Sreberny, A. in Sakr, N. (ed.) 2007, 31-32

⁴⁸⁴ Moghadam, V. 2003, 219

However, despite a progressive vision and the use of a dual language reflecting a desire to engage with professional women abroad, the editorial board of *Farzaneh* avoided making any use of the “feminist” terminology, simply referring to their team as *karshenas*, (experts).⁴⁸⁵

Over the years, *Farzaneh* appeared sporadically, and while the journal never officially ceased publication, it has not been seen on newsstands since 2009.⁴⁸⁶

Jens-e Dovom (1998-2000) and *Hoquq-e Zanan* (1998-1999), launched by Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani and Ashraf Geramizadegan respectively, made a brief debut on the media horizon. Geramizadegan, who replaced Shahla Sherkat in 1991 as editor of *Zan-e Ruz*, focused exclusively on debating gender issues from a legal perspective, while Khorasani, who was among the first women to procure a publishing license, often collaborated with women’s rights activists in exile to gain additional insight on international women’s issues.⁴⁸⁷

Zan (1998-1999), the infamously controversial publication founded by the rebellious daughter of Iran’s former President Hashemi Rafsanjani, was the Republic’s first women’s daily newspaper. Increasingly frustrated by the condition of women in Iran, Faezeh Hashemi, who served as a member of the fifth parliament (1996-2000), was a vocal critic of the state’s discriminatory practices. Her daring escapades, a constant source of rage for the conservative coalition, made her extremely popular among women and youth.⁴⁸⁸ Ms. Rafsanjani routinely advocated that women should engage in athletics and stand as candidates for the Assembly of

⁴⁸⁵ Khiabany, G. 2010, 103; Khiabany, G. & Sreberny, A. in Sakr, N. (ed.) 2007, 30-32

⁴⁸⁶ Vakili, S. 2011, 122

⁴⁸⁷ Howard, J. 2002, 47-51; Khiabany, G. & Sreberny, A. in Sakr, N. (ed.) 2007, 35-36, Mir-Hosseini, Z. in Sajoo, A. (ed.) 2002, 113-115; Mir-Hosseini, Z. in Martin, V. & Ansari, S. (eds.) 2002, 116

⁴⁸⁸ Mir-Hosseini, Z. in Martin, V. & Ansari, S. (eds.), 2002, 137; Khiabany, G. & Sreberny, A. in Sakr, N. 2007, 33

Experts (*Majlis-e Khobregan*).⁴⁸⁹ Not one to shy away from confrontation, she was notorious for her brash statements, including that “if men are our problem, then we should get them to read these issues.”⁴⁹⁰ The paper’s demise in its first year stemmed from an interview conducted with Iran’s former Empress, Farah Pahlavi, on the eve of the Persian new year, and a satirical cartoon aimed at the Islamic Retribution Law (*Qesas*), in which the husband of a couple held at gunpoint beckons the criminal to shoot his wife: “Kill her — She is cheaper!”⁴⁹¹ Faezeh’s defiant nature has continuously been the subject of media coverage and ultimately not without consequence. In 2012, Ms. Rafsanjani was sentenced to six months in prison for “making propaganda against the ruling system,” and prohibited from participating in all cultural, political, and media activities for a period of five years.⁴⁹² Throughout all of her trials and tribulations, Faezeh has always maintained “that it is not Islam which forbids women from attaining office, but the interpretation of its teachings by the clerics.”⁴⁹³

The centrist position of these publications was courageously enhanced by *Zanan* (1992-2008) in its predilection for a modernist interpretation of gender issues in the four domains of “religion, law, culture, and education.”⁴⁹⁴ Launched in February 1992, this independent reformist publication was instantly classified as a “sophisticated literary magazine with an overtly feminist agenda.”⁴⁹⁵ Under the brilliant and astute leadership of Shahla Sherkat, this highly creative monthly deviated from the print media norm by portraying, in vivid and exquisite prose, the

⁴⁸⁹ Howard, J. 2002, 151-212

⁴⁹⁰ Rostami-Povey, E. 2001, 58

⁴⁹¹ “Iranian Newspaper Banned,” BBC News, April 7, 1999

⁴⁹² “Iran Jails Former President Rafsanjani’s Daughter,” BBC News, Jan. 3, 2012

⁴⁹³ Esfandiari, H. “The Politics of the ‘Woman Question’ in the Islamic Republic, 1979-1999,” in Esposito, J. & Ramazani, R. (eds.) *Iran at the Crossroads*. New York: Palgrave, 2001, 110

⁴⁹⁴ Khiabany, G., 2010, 102

⁴⁹⁵ Afary, J. 2009, 317

sufferings of women imposed and refined by the custodians of a malignant ideology. Throughout its operation, Sherkat managed the publication with a small staff, mostly women, who labored tirelessly under extremely modest conditions, to expose the abysmal existence of women under the veil of patriarchy.⁴⁹⁶ As the countries “most popular” and “influential” women’s journal, *Zanan* unveiled a new dawn through its fearless coverage of forbidden topics and its brazen analysis of alternative renderings as an antidote to the prevailing standards.⁴⁹⁷ *Zanan*’s award-winning editor in chief made an indelible impression at home and abroad, as she boldly traversed uncharted territory with a calculated and cutting-edge formula, captured in the collaboration of diverse forces.⁴⁹⁸ Passionate and inspiring editorials written by a powerhouse collection of enlightened intellectuals saturated a diverse array of publications, to communicate the penetrating realities of everyday life for the Iranian woman. The innovative and stylish coverage of reformist politicians, women’s rights activists, and renowned western feminists, combined with the journal’s “roundtable” deliberations on women’s issues to produce a comprehensive and intelligible road map for women handicapped by societal constraints. The magazine’s credibility among women and youth in particular was unprecedented, specifically when its endorsement and coverage of Khatami’s bid for the presidency was credited with mobilizing the support of this constituency for the reformist candidate.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁶ “Inside Iran: Interview with ‘Zanan’ Magazine’s Editor Shahla Sherkat,” *Asharq al-Awsat*, May 11, 2007

⁴⁹⁷ Afary, J. 2009, 316-317; Lichter, I. 2009, 196; Kar, M. in Nouraie-Simone (ed.) 2005, 225

⁴⁹⁸ Lichter, I. 2009, 133

⁴⁹⁹ Lichter, I., 2009, 197; Poya, M. 1999, 141; Interview with Mohammad Khatami, *Zanan*, May 1997, No. 34, 6th year, 2-5; Sadeghi, F. “Bypassing Islamism and Feminism: Women’s Resistance and Rebellion in Post-Revolutionary Iran,” in *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, Dec. 2010, 218

Throughout its years of operation, *Zanan* was distinguished as a “major voice of reform,” “challenging the foundations of the dominant forms of Shi‘ite jurisprudence,” by demonstrating the multiple ambiguities in Koranic verses.⁵⁰⁰ Afsaneh Najmabadi contends that, “At the center of *Zanan*’s revisionist approach is a radical decentering of the clergy from the domain of interpretation... which challenges the foundational concept [of] deference to the rulership of the... *velayat-e faqih* [guardianship of the jurist].”⁵⁰¹ This deliberate departure from the status quo has been widely applauded for inaugurating a “new chapter,” influencing “the evolution of ideas... and the progression towards a sharia-based feminist discourse...”⁵⁰² In this major initiative, Sherkat often resorted to a diversified approach, in which unorthodox expressions suggested the fluidity of women’s prerogatives in Islam. This unprecedented salient was reinforced by a revered group of clerics and intellectual dissidents, who methodically “called for modern interpretations of classical traditions.”⁵⁰³

Abdolkarim Soroush, Hujat ul-Islam Muhammad Shabestari, Seyyed Mohsen Saidzadeh, and Hujat ul-Islam Mohsen Kadivar were among the distinguished architects of theological formulations expressing “equality and empowerment in Islam’s true spirit.”⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰⁰ Howard, J. 2002, 142-144; Povey, E.R. “Feminist Contestations of Institutional Domains in Iran,” *Feminist Review*, 69(1), 2001, 59; Moghadam, V., 2002, 219; Lichter, I. 2009, 140; Shahidian, H. 2002, 40-41; Najmabadi, A. “Feminism in an Islamic Republic,” in Scott, J., Kaplan, C., & Keates, D. (eds.) *Transitions, Environments and Translations: Feminism in International Politics*, London & New York: Routledge, 1997, 390-399.

⁵⁰¹ Najmabadi, A. 1998, 71

⁵⁰² Afary, J. 2009, 320; Mir-Hosseini, Z. in Yamani, M. (ed.) 1996, 285-309

⁵⁰³ Vakili, S. 2011, 105-106

⁵⁰⁴ Moghadam, V. 2002, 177; Mir-Hosseini, Z. in Beck, L. & Nashat, G. (eds.) 2004, 214; Mir-Hosseini, Z. “The Conservative–Reformist Conflict over Women’s Rights in Iran,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 16(1), Fall 2002, 37-53; Jahanbaksh, F. *Islam, Democracy and Religious Modernism in Iran (1953-2000): From Bazargan to Soroush*. Boston: Brill Leiden, 2001

Individuals associated with this remarkable endeavor, referred to as “neo-religious thinkers” (*no-andishan-e dini*), elucidate a more tolerant and liberal Islam by distinguishing “that the Qur’an and hadith are part of divine and eternal religion,” and therefore “the interpretation of these texts is a matter of human and religious knowledge and is thus open to debate.”⁵⁰⁵

Abdolkarim Soroush, a professor and non-clerical religious intellectual, who was chosen by *Time* magazine in 2005 as one of the 100 most influential people in the world, is possibly the leading “intellectual force behind the Islamic Republic’s pro-democracy movement.”⁵⁰⁶ Drawing from both western and Islamic sources, Soroush laid the foundations for “Islamic pluralism” by challenging Ayatollah Khomeini’s concept of the guardianship of the jurist. One of the leading ideologues of the new Islamic Republic, he was one of the original seven members of the Council for Cultural Revolution assigned to Islamize all universities in the aftermath of the revolution.⁵⁰⁷

Soroush, born Hossein Dabbagh in 1945, was raised in a religious household and pursued higher education in both Iran and England, where he studied the history and philosophy of science after earning degrees in pharmacology and analytical chemistry.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁵ Vakili, S. 2011 (quotations appear on p. 106); Shahidian, H. 2002, 35; Afary, J. 2009, 320; Mir-Hosseini, Z. in Beck, L. & Nashat, G. (eds.) 2004, 204; Ashraf, A. & Banuazizi, A. “Iran’s Tortuous Path Toward Islamic Liberalism,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 15(2), Winter 2001, 237-256

⁵⁰⁶ S. Macleod “The 2005 Time 100: The Lives and Ideals of the World’s Most Influential People,” *Time*, April 18, 2005

⁵⁰⁷ Keddie, N. 2006, 250

⁵⁰⁸ Kurzman, C., *Liberal Islam*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 244; Mir-Hosseini, 1999, 218; Jahanbakhsh, F. “Religion and Political Discourse in Iran: Moving Towards Post-Fundamentalism,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Winter/Spring 2002/2003, Vol. IX, Issue 2, 243-254

In his monthly publication *Kiyan* (1991), Soroush began to revise and reinterpret Islamic theology, based on his extensive knowledge of philosophers such as Hegel and Fromm, without sacrificing the essence and sanctity of divine principles.⁵⁰⁹ Greatly admired by women and youth, Soroush's argument that "our comprehension of religion is scientifically, socially, and culturally constructed, and hence open to interpretation," supports a rapprochement between Islam and democracy, and accordingly facilitates the disclosure of feminist ideals in religious dogma.⁵¹⁰ In a 2000 interview with *Zanan*, his understanding that "God manifests himself in each historical period according to the understanding of the people of the era," justifies Islam's harmony with modern conceptions of scientific knowledge, human rights, and democracy.⁵¹¹ Ziba Mir-Hosseini confirms that "Soroush's approach to sacred text has not only enabled women in *Zanan* to frame their demands within an Islamic framework, but has also encouraged clerics for whom gender has become a 'problem,' to address it from within a 'fiqh' framework."⁵¹²

Like many of his progressive-minded counterparts, Abdolkarim Soroush eventually fell victim to the tide of conservative backlash. His liberal sermons were often disrupted, and he was persistently harassed and eventually forbidden to teach. Since 2000, he has continued his new

⁵⁰⁹ Soroush, A., Sadri, M., & Sadri, A. *Reason, Freedom and Democracy in Islam: The Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000

⁵¹⁰ Afary, J. 2009, 320-321

⁵¹¹ Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush, *Zanan*, Jan. 2000, "The Receipt and Expansion of Women's Rights," (*Qabz va Bast-e Hoquq-e Zanan*) No. 59, 32-38

⁵¹² Mir-Hosseini, Z. 1999, 215

age discourse as a visiting scholar and lecturer at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, where he remains an icon of enlightened religious theory.⁵¹³

High-ranking Shi‘ite clerics Mohsen Kadivar and Mohammad Mujtahed Shabestari undertook paths similar to that of Soroush, and disputed the absolute authority of the clerical establishment. In a 2008 interview in the German online publication for dialogue with the Muslim world, *Qantara*, Shabestari stated that “Islam is a religion in every sense, not a political agenda.... The first priority for the Islamic world today is that it should become aware of the present state of humanity.”⁵¹⁴

In 2004, Mohsen Kadivar, the brother of Jamileh Kadivar and brother-in-law of Ata‘ollah Mohajerani, declared:

Every member of society and every member of government is subject to the law. No one can be above it. Everyone has the same rights, yet the root of the *faqih* is inequality. He assumes he is above it... It is time for the Supreme Leader to be subject to the Constitution too. After all, the Supreme Leader doesn’t come from God!⁵¹⁵

In 1999, Kadivar was tried and sentenced to 18 months in prison for challenging the doctrine of clerical rule. Today, he resides in the United States, where he is a visiting professor in the Department of Religion at Duke University.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹³ Vahdat, F. “Post-Revolutionary Islamic Discourses on Modernity in Iran: Expansion and Contradiction of Human Subjectivity,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 35, 2003, 599-631

⁵¹⁴ Fatma Saqir interview with Mohammad Mujtahid Shabestari, “Islam Is a Religion, Not a Political Agenda,” en.qantara.de, July 11, 2008

⁵¹⁵ Wright, R. *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East*. US: Penguin Press, 2008, 296

⁵¹⁶ “A Scholar and Dissident,” *The Chronicle: The Independent Daily at Duke University*, Dec. 2, 2011

The wisdom and insight of these thinkers enhanced *Zanan*'s project, as did the collaboration of a young, mid-ranking cleric well versed in juridical protocol, and the legal expertise of a secular attorney. Regular features by Seyyed Mohsen Saidzadeh and Mehrangiz Kar, “one a male religious scholar and one a female intellectual — side by side — pursued discussions regarding women’s related jurisprudence and law.”⁵¹⁷ Saidzadeh, possibly the most “radical... and vocal proponent of gender equality,” and one of the earliest advocates of Islam and feminism in post-revolutionary Iran, was born and raised in the small town of Qaen in the province of South Khorasan.⁵¹⁸ A graduate of the Qom Seminary (*Madrese-ye-Ali-ye Qazai’i-ye-Qom*), he resigned soon after earning his Judgeship in 1983, to embark on a personal exploration of religious issues relating to women. Saidzadeh began writing in May 1992, when his first series of articles appeared in *Zanan* under the name of his wife, Mina Yadegar Azadi, an unknown secondary school teacher.⁵¹⁹ His editorials examining Islamic law within the family, the capacity of women to serve as judges (*mujtahidūn*), and women in the penal system (*qesas*), “showed with certainty that there is no unanimity regarding women-related religious commands, and secondly that these directives must change on the basis of the requirements of the time.”⁵²⁰ In later years, when his authorship was uncovered, Saidzadeh explained that the pretense was solely for the purpose of providing his wife with entry into the field of journalism. However, given the controversial nature of these pieces and fearing the loss of her employment, Azadi denied any

⁵¹⁷ Eftekhari, R. “Zanan: Trials and Successes of a Feminist Magazine in Iran,” in *Middle Eastern Women on the Move: Openings for and the Constraints on Women’s Political Participation in the Middle East*, proceedings of a conference of the Middle East Project at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars held October 2 and 3, 2001, published 2003, 18

⁵¹⁸ Mir-Hosseini, Z. in Yamani, M. (ed.), 1996, 296

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

⁵²⁰ Eftekhari, R. 2003, 17-18

connection with the articles. In the aftermath, Saidzadeh continued to write, establishing the need for women's roles to be "regulated by familial and social circumstances... as opposed to natural or divine will..."⁵²¹ Saidzadeh, in a conception similar to that of Soroush, considered the traditional approach applied in modern day society as "the lowest-ranking religious science," and maintained that a reformulation of the body of Islamic laws within the "new political context," would enable women to engage in advancing their own needs.⁵²²

The sermons of this moderate cleric accentuated the secular legal panache of Mehrangiz Kar, who joined the reformist movement in the early 1990s when she was drawn into collaborating with her Islamic counterparts. Kar, who for obvious reasons was discharged from her position after the revolution, emerged in the aftermath of the war to represent women in divorce, adultery, and child custody cases. Born in 1944, Kar who was raised by a "veiled yet western-oriented" mother, was initially skeptical about meeting with Sherkat, as she was altogether hesitant about a religion dismissive of the equality between men and women.⁵²³ However, her cynicism was almost immediately dispelled; she recalls her astonishment upon visiting the offices of *Zanan*:

Something is happening which is no lesser in significance than the Islamic revolution. Cultural and intellectual forces were openly engaged in a challenge with those forces of the regime... It was becoming obvious to me that a split had begun to take place within the ideologues and cultural forces of the ruling system. A new force emerging from within had begun to challenge the status quo.⁵²⁴

⁵²¹ Halper, L. 2005, 136; Mir-Hosseini, Z. 1999, 24

⁵²² Halper, L. 2005, 138

⁵²³ Kar, M. in Bayes, J. & Tohidi, N. (eds.) 2001, 178-193

⁵²⁴ Kar, M. in Bayes, J. & Tohidi, N. (eds.) 2001, 199

Kar, who had never resorted to religious criteria in her writings, and whose work prior to 1979 focused primarily on social reform, agreed to work for *Zanan* as she was convinced “that this was a historic occasion — one which she knew would benefit women and the women’s movement.”⁵²⁵

In 1993, with Kar’s permission, Saidzadeh modified her written work as a precautionary measure aimed at preventing the magazine from “being charged with blasphemy.”⁵²⁶ Her inaugural article entitled, “Women’s Position in Iran’s Penal Law,” published in summer 1993, was a critique of the Retribution Law in a manner reflecting the necessity for “universal human rights to be the basis of all legislation.”⁵²⁷ Her articles, which appeared at regular intervals, revealed her knowledge of the judicial process, while Saidzadeh’s “mastery of the sharia ensured that the debates remained within the acceptable boundaries of religious dogma.”⁵²⁸

In 1998, this novel collaboration ended with the abrupt demise of Saidzadeh’s career, after he published an article in the daily newspaper *Jame‘eh* (Society) comparing the discriminatory policies of the state to those of the Taliban in Afghanistan:

Based on these traditional texts, they should follow the same route as the Taliban have, and some in Iran have actually done so. One example, is the story of some fanatics in Iran who have tried to prevent women from biking which in the same tradition as that of the Taliban’s prevention of women from riding horses.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 191-194

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 193

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 194

⁵²⁸ Mir-Hosseini, Z. in Yamani, M. (ed.) 1996, 296

⁵²⁹ Kar, M. in Bayes, J. & Tohidi, N. (eds.) 1996, 194-195

In consequence, Saidzadeh was excommunicated, imprisoned, and forbidden to publish.⁵³⁰

Nevertheless, Saidzadeh continues to maintain the validity of feminism in Iran as a viable “social movement” which, through emphasizing the common humanity of the sexes, endeavors to free women “from an unwanted subordination imposed by [an] androcentric society.”⁵³¹

Mehrangiz Kar remained with *Zanan* until her arrest in April 2000, after she and 16 other reformist women, including Shahla Sherkat, attended the Berlin Conference on “The Future of Reform in Iran.”⁵³² In the aftermath of this meeting, the groundbreaking reconciliation between secular and religious women was momentarily brought to a halt when Kar was sentenced behind closed doors to four years’ imprisonment for her criticism of the Islamic Constitution, while Sherkat was tried, fined, and released in an open court for questioning the religious dress code.⁵³³ Kar was bitterly dismayed at Sherkat for not coming to her defense, and for choosing to protect her magazine over her relationship:

“We always sensed that there was a gap. It simply became clear after Berlin that the reformists would never take any risks for us, or defend us...”⁵³⁴

After spending one month in solitary confinement, Kar, who had been battling cancer, was released after officials under Khatami intervened, allowing her to leave the country for advanced treatment.⁵³⁵

⁵³⁰ Shahidian, H. 2002, 41

⁵³¹ Mir-Hosseini, Z. 1999, 248-249

⁵³² Lichter, I. 2009, 199

⁵³³ Afary, J. 2009, 48-49

⁵³⁴ Khiabany, G. & Sreberny, A. in Sakr, N. 2007, 31

⁵³⁵ Sedghi, H. 2007, 260-269

Over the years this incident has been attributed to Kar's secularism versus Sherkat's religious identity, and there has been a range of speculations including fear of "possible retaliation by the system, loss of employment and imprisonment."⁵³⁶ Although such conclusions are entirely plausible, it is necessary to address an altogether neglected factor indicating that the decisive issue for Sherkat was neither consideration. For 16 years, Sherkat, who frequently took risks, faced the tribunal for an onslaught of allegations regarding her deluge of controversial features.⁵³⁷ Accordingly, far from being a lucrative production, the magazine was continuously in a financial cul-de-sac. In a 2007 interview, Sherkat described the extent of her burden:

In terms of financial obstacles, *Zanan* is under tremendous pressure. No one backs us financially. Day after day wages rise, the price of paper increases by double or more and the office rent is climbing. All this puts us in an incredibly compromising situation. I have had to sell my mobile phone and car to cover the expenses, I have also had to sell my house.⁵³⁸

Given the harsh realities of this enterprise, the determining factor appears to be the necessity of forging ahead with the arduous undertaking of an altruistic mission in which "nothing is impossible."⁵³⁹ Therefore, this ostensible act of betrayal is not in fact attributable to a personal ideology, but to a higher purpose aimed at advancing the women's movement in Iran. In any case, Sherkat's public condemnation of Kar's sentence would not have prevented her incarceration. It is obvious from all of her trials and tribulations that the magazine was not a "job" for Sherkat, but a labor of love. From this standpoint, Kar's release by officials under Khatami, soon after her imprisonment, may have been at the behest of Sherkat herself. While it

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 259

⁵³⁷ Lichter, I. 2009; Afary, J. 2009; Vakili, S. 2011

⁵³⁸ "Inside Iran: Interview with *Zanan* Magazine's Editor Shahla Sherkat," *Asharq al-Awsat*, May 11, 2007

⁵³⁹ Sherkat, S. "Telling the Stories of Iranian Women's Lives," *Neiman Report*, Neiman Foundation for Journalism, Harvard University, Nov. 2009

entirely plausible that Kar was the “sacrificial lamb” in this scenario, it would not be farfetched to conceive that Sherkat intervened on her behalf from behind the scenes. This speculation could even be applied to *Zanan*’s survival for almost two decades, during a period in which reformist publications were regularly shut down for the slightest deviation. Her affiliation with Mohammad Khatami, dating back to their time at the Keyhan Institute and *Zan-e Ruz* in the 1980s, should be examined in connection with her ability to remain below the radar and evade drastic penalties despite her incessant trespasses. This connection — shown in Khatami’s approval of Sherkat’s license to publish in 1991 and the magazine’s endorsement of his presidential bid — cannot be denied. While her passion is obvious and her skill in manipulating hazardous topics is no small achievement, the magazine’s staying power is baffling, especially because its content is far more radical than that of all the other kindred publications. Its long life is extraordinary given its consistent coverage of sensitive material, including that of renowned western feminists, amidst the systematic termination of other publications and organizations for “collusion and conspiracy with the West.”⁵⁴⁰ While Sherkat’s travails were by no means without complications, she was consistently exonerated of all accusations.⁵⁴¹ Authors Elaine Sciolino and Ida Lichter, who have both remarked on the magazine’s survival, are equally perplexed. During her many trips to Iran, Sciolino, a correspondent for *Newsweek* and the *New York Times*, often contemplated this unusual fact: “Sometimes I could not figure out why *Zanan* has not been shut down.”⁵⁴² In her extensive documentation of women in the Muslim world, Ida Lichter considers the same question: “It is remarkable that *Zanan* has survived for 16 years in a country that

⁵⁴⁰ Lichter, I. 2009, 140

⁵⁴¹ Vakili, S. 2011, 189

⁵⁴² Sciolino, E. 2000, 121

Reporters Without Borders has called the biggest prison for journalists in the Middle East.”⁵⁴³ In April 1997, Khatami acknowledged, in an interview with Sherkat, that “the culture of patriarchy is one of the most important impediments to women in Iran, and... the laws pertaining to gender equality will benefit civil society.”⁵⁴⁴ Mir-Hosseini observes that, although Khatami’s pledge for freedom was not entirely fulfilled, “reformist efforts to reconcile Islam, democracy and human rights brought to the surface many of the inherent contradictions between the Constitution and gender rights in sharia law and democratic ideals.”⁵⁴⁵ In many ways, Sherkat’s role as a “persistent trespasser” has been indisputable in this regard.⁵⁴⁶

In this process, Khatami’s background and ideological disposition significantly explain the benevolence and open-mindedness of this visionary leader. The son of a wealthy, high-ranking cleric who grew up in the provincial city of Yazd, Khatami was exposed to the “ideals of freedom” during his youth, while earning a degree in Western Philosophy from the University of Isfahan.⁵⁴⁷ His enlightened disposition is reflected in his recognition of the West for its “great achievements to humanity,” and a philosophical creed distinguishing that “history is all about the evolution of beliefs and assumptions.”⁵⁴⁸

Likewise, Sherkat’s personal history shed light on her impartiality and her tolerant disposition. Born in 1956 to a devout family in the city of Isfahan, her upbringing was unlike that

⁵⁴³ Lichter, I. 2009, 198

⁵⁴⁴ Interview with Mohammad Khatami, *Zanan*, No. 34, May 1997, 2-5

⁵⁴⁵ Mir-Hosseini, Z. “The Conservative-Reformist Conflict over Women’s Rights,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 16(1) Fall 2002, 37-53 (quotation appears on p. 38)

⁵⁴⁶ Sedghi, H. 2007, 268

⁵⁴⁷ Sciolino, E. 2000, 80

⁵⁴⁸ Khatami, M. *Islam, Liberty, and Development*. Binghamton, NY: Global Academic Publishing, 1998, 82, 88

of the many conservative households who remained apprehensive about the westernized climate of the Pahlavi era. Her parents, a housewife and a civil servant, remained comfortable in a secular atmosphere despite their own religious convictions, and this laid the groundwork for their daughter's outlook.

In an interview with BBC correspondent Jane Howard, Sherkat recalled attending elementary school in this dichotomous atmosphere:

He [her father] was very particular about the hijab and we even wore our headscarf to school and sometimes the chador too... At the time I went to school, there would be girls sitting next to me with miniskirts, but I was never made to feel uncomfortable.⁵⁴⁹

In later years, at her mother's insistence, the family moved to Tehran, where Sherkat earned her undergraduate degree in psychology from Tehran University.

In her early years, her career in journalism coincided with the collapse of the monarchy when, as a revolutionary enthusiast, she initially found employment at *Rah-e Zaynab*, formerly *Ettela'at-e Banovan*. In 1982, she was approached by Zahra Rahnavard to "revitalize" *Zan-e Ruz*.⁵⁵⁰ It was here that she initially came into contact with Mohammad Khatami, who was serving as supervisor for the Keyhan Institute, the publishing house that owned *Zan-e Ruz*. Sherkat's indomitable spirit became almost immediately apparent from the onset, when, much to the dismay of the editorial board, she elected to refurbish the publication's content with hardcore analysis of women's issues in a post-revolutionary climate:

⁵⁴⁹ Howard, J. 2002, 143

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

My main difficulty with them was that they wanted to portray an image of women being in the house, putting on their make-up when their husbands came home. The beds are made, the table is set.... It got to a point where I said no more.⁵⁵¹

In 1991, Sherkat departed from *Zan-e Ruz* amidst a dispute over the publication of an essay by renowned filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf, in which he harshly reacted to criticism of one of his movies by state officials. During this period Khatami, who was serving as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance (1982-1986, 1989-1991) came to her defense by supporting Makhmalbaf's right to rejoinder. While this dispute caused Khatami to resign, it nevertheless placed him in good standing with Sherkat, who later endorsed his candidacy. In 1992 Sherkat, who had obtained a publication license from none other than Khatami before her departure from *Zan-e Ruz*, started *Zanan* and embarked on her journalistic crusade.⁵⁵² This association represented an interlude in which western ideas infiltrated a restrictive climate, allowing the ideals of a religious woman who was "neither apologetic nor defensive about Islam and openly associated herself with feminism," to converge with the unconventional wisdom of a devout cleric, who subscribed to and stressed the importance of "incorporating the West into one's values and life."⁵⁵³

While Khatami was unable to prevent the closure of numerous reformist publications, he may have travelled the extra mile for this one. Unfortunately, Sherkat's guardian angel was powerless when *Zanan* finally fell prey to the conservative climate of the Ahmadinejad era (2005 to the present). On January 28, 2008, the Press Supervisory Board of Iran, backed by the Ministry of Culture, announced the revocation of *Zanan*'s license for "endangering the spiritual, mental and intellectual health of its readers, and threatening psychological security by

⁵⁵¹ Howard, J. 2002, 144-145

⁵⁵² Sedghi, H. 2007, 268; Lichter, I. 2009, 196; Khiabany, G. 2010, 100

⁵⁵³ Mir-Hosseini, Z. 1999, xv; Khatami, M., 1998, 82

deliberately offering a dark picture of the Islamic Republic.” Although no specific article or articles were named in this accusation, there was speculation that an investigative piece on the martyrdom movement entitled “Dying in Order to Kill” triggered the shutdown. This estimate stems from the charges accusing Sherkat of “breaking the law and defaming military and revolutionary institutions...”⁵⁵⁴ *Zanan*’s demise resonated in Iran and around the world as activists and supporters petitioned the Iranian government to reinstate the journal’s license.⁵⁵⁵ Sherkat’s legal advisor stated that the manner in which the magazine was shut down may have violated official standard procedure:

Events that have taken place since the license revocation suggest that the decision was motivated more by personal and ideological animosity of a few individual members and not the whole Press Supervisory Board which presumably ordered the license revocation.⁵⁵⁶

Today, Sherkat — who was honored in both 2004 and 2005 with the Courage in Journalism Award by the International Women’s Media Foundation for her “dangerous and challenging work,” and the Louis M. Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism from the Neiman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University — has accepted a management position in an Arts and Cultural Institute for economic reasons. In 2010, this divorced mother of two described her anguish over the loss of *Zanan*:

Every day I arrive at work but a piece of the puzzle of my being has been lost. It has been two years since they have taken from our family our 16 year old daughter *Zanan*. I

⁵⁵⁴ “Shutting Down *Zanan*,” *New York Times*, Feb. 7, 2008; “Iran: Closure of Women’s Rights Publication *Zanan*,” *Frontline*, Feb. 5, 2008; Lichter, I. 2009, 197-198

⁵⁵⁵ Vakili, S. 2011, 189

⁵⁵⁶ Farhi, F. “The Attempted Silencing of *Zanan*,” *Informed Comment Global Affairs Blog*, Feb. 1, 2008

have walked up and down many stairs and corridors to find my lost one. But have not had any success.⁵⁵⁷

In the aftermath of Khatami's presidency and the elimination of a multitude of reformist organizations, reformist women began using the Internet to sustain and propagate women's consciousness.⁵⁵⁸ In 2001, when the Iranian government initially launched its Internet program, access to unconventional material was tenuous at best.⁵⁵⁹ Gradual improvements led to an increase in the number of journalists and activists launching locally produced feminist sites.⁵⁶⁰ Journalist Parvin Ardalan is one of the many activists who resorted to cyberspace to propagate discussions of gender. As founder and editor in chief of *Zanestan*, Iran's premier online women's magazine, Ardalan was instrumental in organizing mass rallies and meetings throughout the country.⁵⁶¹ As with many of her predecessors, when Ardalan eventually fell prey to the Iranian authorities, it did not go unnoticed among western nations. In 2007, she was awarded the Olof Palme Prize for courage in Stockholm, Sweden, and although she was banned from leaving the country to accept the honor in person, the recognition itself was sufficient validation.⁵⁶²

Jila Baniyaghoub, award-winning freelance journalist and editor in chief of the website *Kanoun-e Zanan-e Irani* (Iranian Women's Rights) — whose 2007 and 2009 coverage of gender-related protests in Iran led to her imprisonment and 30-year ban from journalistic

⁵⁵⁷ Sherkat, S. "Telling the Stories of Iranian Women's Lives," *Neiman Report*. Neiman Foundation for Journalism, Harvard University, Summer 2009

⁵⁵⁸ "Iran's Banned Press Turns to the Net," *BBC News*, Aug. 9, 2002

⁵⁵⁹ Khiabany, G. 2010, 75

⁵⁶⁰ Lichter, I. 2009, 139; Nourai-Simone, F. "Wings of Freedom: Iranian Women, Identity and Cyberspace," in Nourai-Simone, F. (ed.) 2005, 69; Khiabany, G. 2010, 51-107

⁵⁶¹ Lichter, I. 2009, 151; "Slamming Its Doors on the World," *Time*, Jan. 15, 2006

⁵⁶² Sayyati, S. "Parvin Ardalan Wins the Olof Palme 2007 Award," *Payvand Iran News*, Feb. 14, 2008

activities — believes “security forces have become more and more aggressive, even as women’s actions have become more peaceful over time.”⁵⁶³ For young women in particular, social media operating as a nexus between two worlds provide a safe haven, alleviating their despair. The following anonymous testimonials confirming the relevance of “shared experiences,” are emblematic of the momentary escape provided by “the borderless nature of the Internet”:

“Cyberspace has been a liberating territory — A place to resist a traditionally imposed identity...”

“I want moments that cannot be repeated.... An embrace that dissolves me in myself.”

“The Internet is a new sphere of possibilities... To build up a connection with physically removed persons...”

“...We are like scattered bits and pieces coming together...”⁵⁶⁴

However, it was not long before the blogosphere also drew the attention of the repressive authorities. With the influx of female bloggers, the government felt obliged to formulate new Internet policies regulating the expansion of weblogs. In 2006, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution (SCCR) issued the Cyber Crime Bill, providing guidelines and penalties under the guise of “safeguarding individual rights as well as Islamic, national, and cultural values.”⁵⁶⁵

While Mehrangiz Kar is discouraged by this motion, and sees it as another attempt to “stop the trend towards liberalization and to curtail the freedoms gained during the reform era,”

⁵⁶³ Lichter, I. 2009, 139

⁵⁶⁴ Nouraie-Simone, F. in Nouraie-Simone 2005, 62-80

⁵⁶⁵ Khiabany, G. 2010, 5, 76

Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani remains more hopeful: “We are linked together indirectly through theoretical and practical work. We work systematically, therefore, we operate like a chain.”⁵⁶⁶

While such extreme measures have been profoundly debilitating for women’s rights activists, their consequences have been strikingly more pronounced among the nation’s youth as a whole, for whom the Internet is a radically new, alluring phenomenon facilitating their connection to a forbidden realm. The closure of thousands of websites has only intensified the obstinate resourcefulness of a youthful population, which has begun to resort to workarounds such as proxy servers, allowing the user to be redirected in disguise to the desired destination.⁵⁶⁷ A recent study conducted by the United States Institute of Peace estimates that there are 60,000 to 110,000 active blogs in Iran today, reflecting not only a strong desire of young people to be part of the international community, but also that, “as the most restive segment, Iranian youth represent one of the long-term threats to the current form of theocratic rule.”⁵⁶⁸

Today, 70% of Iran’s population under the age of 30 visibly departs from the previous generation in adhering to a philosophical outlook that identifies with the ideals implanted during the Khatami era.⁵⁶⁹ Their continued nonconformity with official values indicates that nominal concessions are no longer sufficient to hold their allegiance. Increased urbanization, high literacy rates, and rising unemployment have combined with exposure to satellite television and the Internet to accelerate the pace of social change among a nonconformist youth.⁵⁷⁰ Perhaps the

⁵⁶⁶ Kar, M. in Nouraie-Simone, F. 2005, 219; Povey, E.R., 2011, 55

⁵⁶⁷ Bakhtavar, S. *Iran: The Green Movement*. U.S.: Parsa Enterprises, 2010, 206

⁵⁶⁸ “Iran’s Youth: The Protests Are Not Over,” U.S. Institute of Peace, *Peace Brief*, No. 36, June 8, 2010

⁵⁶⁹ Bakhtavar, S. 2010, 9-10

⁵⁷⁰ “Iran’s Youth: The Protests are Not Over,” U.S. Institute of Peace, *Peace Brief*, No. 36, June 8, 2010, 3; Bakhtavar, S. 2010, 47-48

state's failure has been most obvious among a defiant female population that is resorting to all possible measures to circumvent an otherwise enforced status of inferiority. In a country where freedom of expression is a rare commodity, stoic actions by women of all ages and from all walks of life testify to their relentless pursuit of freedom, despite the fact that their earlier hopes have been shattered. Their resolve remains potent even though some 4,000 students, women's rights activists, and journalists continue to be detained in Iranian prisons.⁵⁷¹ In 2006, Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani and Parvin Ardalan were part of a large contingent of peaceful protestors at Haft Tir Square who were arrested, tried, and sentenced on various fraudulent charges.⁵⁷² In 2009, the world watched in horror the video of 26-year-old Neda Agha Soltani's shooting death during demonstrations rejecting the outcome of the Presidential election, which was repeatedly aired in the media.⁵⁷³ In 2011, Maryam Majd, 25, Iran's only female sports photographer, and filmmaker Mahnaz Mohammadi, 37, were arrested for "unspecified reasons." Mohammadi understood her detention in this way: "I am both a woman and a filmmaker — sufficient to be arrested."⁵⁷⁴ Controversial screenwriter Tahmineh Milani, 51, who has endured numerous arrests since her career began in 1989 for her fearless on-screen portrayals, is adamant "that a society which reduces women to mere sexual objects would have a high price to pay."⁵⁷⁵ Activist and journalist Shahla Lahiji estimates that, despite such radical countermeasures, there are still more

⁵⁷¹ "Iran Protest Biggest Since Revolution," *Washington Times*, June 16, 2009; "Post-Election Clampdown," *BBC News*, June 15, 2009; "Iran Continues to Crack Down on Women's Rights Advocates," *Ms. Magazine*, Winter 2010

⁵⁷² Khiabany, G. 2010, 106; "Iranian Women Protesters Sentenced to Jail," *Reuters Press*, April 18, 2007

⁵⁷³ "In a Death Seen Around the World: A Symbol of Iranian Protest," *New York Times*, June 22, 2009

⁵⁷⁴ "Women's Rights Activist Missing in Iran," *Guardian*, June 22, 2011; Sahim, M., Frontline Tehran Bureau, June 30, 2011 (source of the quotation)

⁵⁷⁵ 2007 Interview with Tahmineh Milani posted on *YouTube*

than 400 female publishers in Iran today who are “younger and better educated than their predecessors.”⁵⁷⁶ The percentage of female journalists in Iran has increased from 2.5% in 1971, to 10% in 1997, and 22% by 2006.⁵⁷⁷ Nevertheless, Lahiji considers that female publishers and journalists continue to be handicapped by conservative restrictions.⁵⁷⁸

In 2012, reports appeared of the re-imposition of restrictions by 36 public universities across the country, banning female enrollment in 77 academic fields including mathematics, engineering, and accounting.⁵⁷⁹ Kamran Daneshjoo, the Republic’s Minister of Science and Technology since 2009, justifies this drastic policy as a measure for safeguarding adherence to “Islamic values and principles” decreed in 1987 by the SCCR.⁵⁸⁰ The Iranian parliament has accordingly voiced concern over the “destructive consequences of female matriculation on family life — such as employment and delays in marriage and motherhood.”⁵⁸¹ Despite “reverting to the failed policies of the past,” Haleh Esfandiari is confident that such tactical maneuvers will be ineffectual in decelerating the momentum of a feminist generation, as “Iranian women have again and again shown that they can come up with new ways of pursuing their goals.”⁵⁸² In the midst of such drastic proceedings, the veil, once hailed as “the flag of the

⁵⁷⁶ Khiabany, G. & Sreberny, A. in Sakr, N. (ed.) 2007, 36

⁵⁷⁷ Farhadpour, L. “Women, Gender Roles and Journalism in Iran,” a paper presented at the Development Studies Association, Women and Development Study Group, May 6, 2006, York University, U.K., page 6

⁵⁷⁸ Khiabany, G. & Sreberny, A. in Sakr, N. (ed.) 2007, 35

⁵⁷⁹ Gemholtz, L. & Sanei, F. “Iran’s Islamicisation Program Threatens Civil Society,” *Public Service Europe*, October, 5, 2012

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² Interview with Haleh Esfandiari, “Iran Curtails Female Education,” *U.S. Institute of Peace*, August 20, 2012

revolution,” has lost its initial allure. The words of Zahra Eshraghi, 39, granddaughter of the late Ayatollah Khomeini, expresses the severe need for reform:

I am sorry that the chador [veil] was forced on women. [Today] people have just lost their respect for it. We only have ourselves to blame. People are not happy and the chador has become its symbol.⁵⁸³

The succession of disturbing events and mounting pressures have done little to dissuade a new generation which, empowered by the unwavering determination of its senior members, are a force to be reckoned with. The investigations of Janet Afary and Pardis Mahdavi on gender and sexuality among Iran’s “dissident youth,” testify that this reformist generation remains resolute in the face of adversity.⁵⁸⁴ Their documentation of Iran’s sexual revolution as a “source of freedom and an act of rebellion,” indicates a penchant for “living unrestrained sexual lives behind closed doors.”⁵⁸⁵ Afary notes that, although these women have learned to accept the presence of religion as part of an everyday reality, the vital introduction to a liberal Islam has significantly contributed to “closing the gaps that separate Iran and western countries.”⁵⁸⁶

A recent article in the British *Guardian* detailing the lifestyle of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender population in Iran also reveals the atrocious punishments inflicted on this community.⁵⁸⁷ A study conducted by Small Media, a non-profit group based in London, provides hundreds of direct testimonials through a clandestine online forum revealing “that the bastions of the Islamic Republic of Iran fully recognize an established (albeit secretive) LGBT

⁵⁸³ Sciolino, E. “Daughter of the Revolution Fights the Veil,” *New York Times*, April 2, 2003

⁵⁸⁴ Afary, J. 2009; Mahdavi, P. *Iran’s Sexual Revolution: Passionate Uprisings*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009

⁵⁸⁵ Afary, J. 2009, 322-337; Mahdavi, P. 2009, 36

⁵⁸⁶ Afary, J. 2009, 322

⁵⁸⁷ “Iran’s Persecution of Gay Community Revealed,” *Guardian*, May 17, 2012

[lesbian gay bisexual transgender] community exists beneath the folds of fundamentalism in the country... But figuratively speaking the Iranian government is doing its utmost to sweep this community under a densely woven Persian rug.”⁵⁸⁸

Mahmoud Shams, editor of the quarterly journal *Kiyan*, previously published by Abdolkarim Soroush, explains: “As children of the revolution, we are viewed by the militants as far more dangerous than secularists — for we fight them from an Islamic base.” Shams predicts that “the enlightened rational trend will prevail because technology as a cultural invasion cannot be stopped.”⁵⁸⁹ Under such circumstances, he views the youth’s “fascination” with western culture as reinforcing their negative views of an ideology in which Islam is not a “choice” but a series of onerous “do’s and don’ts.”⁵⁹⁰ Likewise, Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, 42, who belongs to a generation of women raised in an Islamic milieu, confirms that, “while many of the older activists are still suspicious and cautious where it concerns the West,... for millions of young women who came into adulthood in post-revolutionary Iran, in which there was no strong western presence, the West... is not threatening...”⁵⁹¹

Delaram Ali, a 24-year-old sociology student who was arrested and sentenced to 2½ years in prison for her participation in the Haft Tir Square protests in 2006, believes that “the previous disconnect between Iranian women has transformed into a collective movement which will not be silenced.”⁵⁹²

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ Miller, J. *God Has Ninety-Nine Names: Reporting from a Militant Middle East*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997, 455

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Interview with Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, *First Edition*, March 13, 2000

⁵⁹² Lichter, I. 2009, 148-149

In recent years, expressions from the adolescent population show that the evolution of their consciousness persists, as shades of their stamina and will power are ever present on a horizon in which the words “access denied” have increasingly become *les mots du jour*.

The following expressions in the 2008 documentary, *Generation Teheran*, indicate that, “despite restrictions in every aspect of their lives, Iranian youth exhibit progressive aspirations”:

Today’s youth have lost their culture. They only want a western culture, like sexual freedom or freedom with clothes or hair.

Our freedom should neither violate the rights of others, nor should it be confined to boundaries that limit us from improving ourselves.

Over here only your thoughts are allowed to be free.

You will never be able to successfully define people by a piece of land.

In the 2010 documentary, *The Green Wave*, director Ali Samadi Ahmadi poignantly captures the depth of anguish among the youth, who envision “endurance” as their only source of salvation. Interviews and actual footage from cell phone videos and Internet blogs amplify the voices of dissent and disillusion in a deteriorating society. The words of young bloggers are emblematic of the rise of a fearless generation that, above all else, has come to value “transparency, cultural openness, democracy, respect for Iran’s cultural diversity, respect for the rights of women and retrieving the lost humanity.”

In the analysis of an unresolved verdict among scholars, “Feminism,” as the principal standpoint for understanding and rejecting the inequality of the sexes, is the overall agenda of women’s rights advocates, through their steadfast resolve to eradicate the inferior status of women. This commitment, in and of itself, places this movement within the accepted parameters

of a feminist doctrine. Contrary to declarations by a host of intellectual luminaries, the nascent stages of this campaign do not constitute a substandard remedy, as the foundational principles of an authentic egalitarian crusade could not have gained momentum without the negation of religiously sanctioned gender constraints. In many ways, such a cynical disposition devalues the opening phase of an impressive effort, which is an effective strategy because religion is intrinsically woven into the fabric of Iranian society. In considering a post-revolutionary climate and the aversion of many senior architects of the movement to absorbing foreign values, the incorporation of the full feminist rhetoric may have adverse implications given the traditional ideology of the dominant order. For example, bringing demands of a sexual nature to the forefront can be harmful from the perspective of an orthodox leadership. The omission of secularists could also be detrimental, particularly as these women have been making significant contributions to this new development. Creating such a boundary may even negatively impact a burgeoning reconciliation between secular and religious women and debilitate the progress of what appears to be a promising opening act.

Furthermore, it becomes important to note that many devout women initially refrained from any association with the “feminist” classification, seen predominantly as an immoral western contrivance and regarded as fundamentally incompatible with, and irrelevant to, their demands, electing instead to employ more generic labels including “women’s rights activists and advocates.” By the mid-1990s, however, a specifically feminist consciousness had gathered momentum — as a result of the state’s relentless discriminatory practices — to gradually dilute many of the features of a previously orthodox outlook held by many women. Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh who, during the early 1980s produced many articles for *Zan-e Ruz* categorically rejecting the term “Islamic feminism,” shifted during the 1990s to a more moderate

stance, advocating a complete “reassessment” and “re-evaluation” of women’s issues altogether.⁵⁹³ In similar fashion, Massoumeh Ebtekar confessed to *Zanan* that she only began to wear the “full chador” (veil) after her appointment as Head of the Environmental Protection Organization in 1997, in order “to represent her country with the ideal covering.”⁵⁹⁴ In a 1999 interview with *Zanan*, Zahra Rahnavard expressed disappointment at the state’s treatment of women as “the second sex,” the title of Simone de Beauvoir’s famous feminist manifesto.⁵⁹⁵ Faezeh Hashemi who, during the early revolutionary years was adamant that the hijab (veil) was “an indisputable symbol for Muslim women,” presented a far different picture in 1997, when author Jane Howard was introduced to her at a state dinner given by Khatami’s wife Zohreh Sadeghi:

She was tall, leggy, with blond hair. She was wearing a long black velvet gown covered in sequins and split up thigh high.... Hers was the daring outfit of the evening.⁵⁹⁶

Given the enormous magnitude of this task, it would be reasonable to assume that some Muslim loyalists would adopt a discreet approach, rightfully fearing that moving too fast would obstruct the future of this movement. After all, in avoiding western terminology, these women were able to successfully renegotiate and even reverse some of the initial discriminatory laws and policies regarding employment and education, and to obtain permission for unmarried women to study abroad and to serve as “investigative” and “research” judges.⁵⁹⁷ In 2010, for

⁵⁹³ Poya, M. 1999, 140

⁵⁹⁴ Sciolino, E. 2000, 136

⁵⁹⁵ Ardalan, P. “The Year 77 — The Best and Worst Year for Women” (*Sal-e Haftado Haft — Behтарin va Badтарin Baraye Zanan*), *Zanan*, March 1999, No. 51, 9

⁵⁹⁶ Moghadam, V. 2003, 217; Howard, J. 2002, 13

⁵⁹⁷ Moghadam, V. 2002, 1156; Samiuddin, A. & Khanum, R. 2002, 236; Afshar, H. in Yamani, M. (ed.) 1996, 214

example, when Zahra Rahnavard publicly denounced the state's initiative to reintroduce a bill granting men the right to polygamy without the consent of their wives, she demanded a reassessment by "experts and progressive-minded individuals" in the following context:

Calling off the bill from the Parliament's agenda is not a feminist demand, but rather a symbol of the national demand for the prosperity of the Iranian nation and the stability of the Iranian families.⁵⁹⁸

In many ways, the unforeseen collision of the "westernized" Iranian woman of the Pahlavi era with the "traditional" Muslim woman of the Republican era, has resulted in a realistic gender ideal, forged out of a common commitment to democracy and human rights. The complexity of reconciling allegedly incompatible ordinances needs to be acknowledged in relation to the emergence of a feminist movement, indebted in large part to the fusion of secular and religious trends in Iranian society. While Khomeini's coming to power resulted in the overnight transformation of Iranian society, the consequences of the war produced a shift in gender consciousness, effectively betraying the Republic's gender proclamations and opening the way for the eventual toleration of ancillary features by many devout women. Women's gradual awakening, stimulated in part by their education in the remnants of a fundamentally "western" framework, merged with the visionary contributions of a progressive movement to establish an extraordinary social landscape — not necessarily analogous to, or replicating the western model, but materializing out of indigenous models and the many illogical assumptions of the ruling elite.

In reference to a mutual understanding among previously antagonistic classes, author Sanam Vakili asserts "that indeed such an alliance was not a luxury but a political

⁵⁹⁸ "Iran Hardliners Push for Family Law Bill That Activists Say Further Erodes Women's Rights," *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 26, 2010

necessity...”⁵⁹⁹ While this conclusion might be correct, it is also possible that such a view is too superficial, given the grand scheme of events. The forging of this remarkable “joint venture” therefore requires more in-depth deliberation. Since the Islamic Revolution, the verdict of historians has been that although the monarchy did not advocate a complete rupture with the past, its reforms overwhelmingly benefited a small minority that was able to capitalize on the opportunities bestowed on it. Therefore, despite the inauguration of many liberating measures, patriarchal standards continued to be maintained by a large segment of the traditional population, which kept its distance from the tempestuous tides of change. According to author Parvin Paidar, the “end result of the Pahlavi state’s female emancipation was to be the ‘gharbzadeh’ [westoxicated] woman of the seventies.”⁶⁰⁰ There are other analyses that are similarly critical of the monarchy’s initiatives for “modernizing” without establishing the foundations of a “feminist” regimen. In her study, “Islamist Movements and Women’s Responses in the Middle East,” Valentine Moghadam refers to the conclusions of Naila Minai and Eliz Sanasarian who, in their documentation of these developments, have concluded that in “adopting the West... including the exploitation of women’s bodies,... the real feminist issues... were inadequately addressed.” In this appraisal, women in the anti-monarchist movement are also disparaged for “not making feminism an issue [and therefore] not achieving much by the overthrow of the Shah.”⁶⁰¹ To claim that the omission of a feminist perspective during both phases means that women made few gains, is oversimplifying a historically significant process that continues to take center stage even in the 21st century. While the monarchy has been reproached for its biased emphasis on a western lifestyle, its initiatives should be valued for their introduction of certain basic principles

⁵⁹⁹ Vakili, S. 2011, 91

⁶⁰⁰ Halper, L. 2005, 104

⁶⁰¹ Moghadam, V. in Moghissi, H. (ed.) 2005, 264-281 (quotations appear on p. 276)

launching the women's rights itinerary in Iranian society. Furthermore, in light of the confined condition of Iranian women, if the Pahlavis had in fact introduced feminist prescriptions, Iranian women's conservatism, lack of education, and self-imposed seclusion would have made it impossible for them to understand and accept such an approach, especially since these concepts are largely associated with a western ideology.

Ironically, the Pahlavis' noble, yet possibly misguided objectives laid the basis for conceptualizing an integrated framework for women's rights in the post-revolutionary era. Mahnaz Afkhami, who served as Minister of Women's Affairs during the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, believes "that the law as the expression of the will of the state was indispensable to the securing of women's rights in Iran."⁶⁰²

In reality, while the Pahlavis accelerated the pace of an emancipatory agenda, they were not the sole proprietors of a foreign import. By the dawn of the 19th century, gradual missionary work had already captured the nuances of a western ideology, which in an overly optimistic gesture, eventually made its debut in the global amphitheater. This venture was facilitated by the only two women's publications of the Pahlavi era, which in essence became the media for the infiltration of this preliminary model. Launched in 1957 and 1964 respectively, *Ettel'at-e Banovan* and *Zan-e Ruz* were committed to the government's enterprise for enhancing the image of the "up-to-date" Iranian woman. Officially sanctioned by the state, the competing periodicals essentially followed a similar pattern, which on principle avoided politics and mainly served as manuals for the advancement of women. Over the years, limited studies conducted in this realm have testified to the steadfast devotion of both publications to the "westernized" Persian

⁶⁰² Afkhami, M. in Afkhami, M. & Friedl, E. (eds.) 1994, 14

woman.⁶⁰³ Author Hammed Shahidian refers to the magazines as “women’s weeklies in a tradition similar to *Cosmopolitan* and *Mademoiselle*,” while Nayereh Tohidi concludes that “the slavish imitation of European fashion, preoccupation with self-presentation, and in short commercialization of women, created in part a confused and ‘alien’ model of womanhood, thus hardly preferable to the traditional one.”⁶⁰⁴ Camron Michael Amin’s extensive coverage of the rise of the Persian woman provides a comprehensive examination of this ambitious enterprise beginning with the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi (1925-1941). In his overall assessment, he determines that the regime fashioned “an image of modern Iranian womanhood in the Iranian press — an image modeled on the modernity of Europe and America and set in contrast to a negative image of traditional womanhood.”⁶⁰⁵ Although Amin is to be commended for recognizing that the image for the “new” Iranian woman possibly held minimal appeal in a traditional society, the complex social nature of the social evolution must be deciphered with respect to the awakening of diversified segments of the female population during both the Pahlavi and Republican eras. To achieve a more concrete understanding, the present study examined the content of both publications. By analyzing 85 issues of *Zan-e Ruz* (1964-1977) and 70 issues of *Ettel’at-e Banovan* (1957-1977), this investigation was able to support the general conclusions of previous inquiries, yet it was unable to decisively corroborate their negative evaluations. At first glance, the dominant concept and design of both journals identifies a western appearance with that of the “liberated” Iranian woman. However, upon further inspection, substantial differences were noted in the general composition, design, and subject

⁶⁰³ Poya, M.1999; Amin, C.M. 2002; Shahidian, H. 2002; Tohidi, N. “Gender and Islamic Fundamentalism: Feminist Politics in Iran,” in Moghissi, H. (ed.) 2005, 282-191

⁶⁰⁴ Shahidian, H. 2002, 40-41; Tohidi, N. in Moghissi, H. (ed.) 2005, 288

⁶⁰⁵ Amin, C.M. 2002, 13

matter of both magazines. While the overall profile of *Zan-e Ruz* appeared to be more risqué, colorful, and carefree, that of *Ettela'at-e Banovan* was demure, reserved and modest by comparison.

Standard features in *Zan-e Ruz* included vibrant captions on foreign delicacies and alluring and flashy photographs of the latest haute couture and accessories, swimwear, lingerie, beauty products, and facial treatments. Articles and exposés on Persian and European royalty, local and foreign celebrities, and numerous “sexy” cover photos also adorned the pages of this magazine. The minimal references to career, employment, and educational opportunities for women are overshadowed by the overt emphasis on the latest plastic surgery techniques and seductive actresses like Raquel Welch and Farah Fawcett, confirming Shahidian and Tohidi’s analogy to trendy publications in the United States.

A portfolio inundated with modern feminine paraphernalia and the presentation of an unattainable imagery would hold minimal appeal at best for those with limited exposure to an altogether unknown culture.

In direct contrast, *Ettel'at-e Banovan* presents an agenda aimed at familiarizing the female population with an infinite array of career and educational opportunities. Regular coverage on family law and social reforms is integrated with images of, and articles on professional and accomplished women in Iran and abroad, including well known athletes, lawyers, pilots, scientists, and physicians, in order to showcase the endless possibilities for the Iranian woman. The focus on more serious topics through empowering editorials entitled, “Women’s Rights In Iran,” “The Success of Iranian Female Students in America,” “Women Factory Employees,” and “Women and Freedom in Iran,” merges with those on foreign women

including “Uganda’s First Female Minister,” “What Our Muslim Sisters Are Doing,” and “Women Rule in The United States of America,” to disclose and promote a universal agenda aimed at encouraging women’s participation in society at large. Occasional culinary recipes, and cosmetic and fashion displays also reflect the image of the worldly woman. Unlike *Zan-e Ruz*, the majority of women portrayed are clearly Persian and appropriately dressed. And while the dearth of features on the rural community, conventional attire, and Islamic designs demonstrate an affinity for an increasingly secular approach, the absence of provocative foreign imports clearly reflects awareness of, and deference to Iran’s modest culture. While each publication provides a guide for a preferred image, they do not, as Amin suggests, place this image in direct opposition to an outdated portraiture of the Iranian woman. Accordingly, the absence of “before” and “after” photographs, illustrations, and text designed to cast the traditional past in a negative light nullifies his conclusions.

While the Pahlavis can be faulted for failing to adopt a feminist ideology, the state’s pursuit of equal opportunities in many areas directly indicates the rudimentary stages of a feminist agenda. Moreover, supplementary reports in *Ettela’at-e Banovan* such as “American Women — After 72 Years of Negotiations We’re Allowed to Vote,” and “Iranian Women Business Owners,” among many, testify to a strategy embracing the basic principles of a women’s rights itinerary. The feminist concept required as added ammunition to demolish the pervading patriarchy of the Islamic Republic, was potentially not viewed as a priority during an era seeking to enhance the role of women. Furthermore, even liberated nations like the United States and France have a spectrum of women’s publications, ranging from the more sexually alluring to the more conventional.

In assessing the validity of the women's rights movement in post-revolutionary Iran, it can be seen that — given this complicated canvas — a commitment to reinterpreting religious texts as a means of liberation indicates a strategic “opening act” by the architects of this campaign. In many ways, the direction undertaken thus far appears to be the preferred path towards the eventual adoption of additional cross-cultural distinctions much in the same manner that feminism in the western world evolved over centuries to accommodate a variety of feminist distinctions. Those concerned over the seemingly self-imposed restrictions of the Iranian women's movement should remember that feminism in western nations came in waves, expressing a plethora of ideals, emerging out of a unique blend of circumstances, in societies with markedly different beliefs and moral standards. Since its inception in the 19th century, this movement has continuously absorbed increasingly diverse orientations including “liberal,” “radical,” “Marxist,” “Christian,” “socialist,” and “multi-racial” distinctions.⁶⁰⁶ Early feminist pronouncements in Europe and the United States unveiled a new era of enlightenment, with many early pioneers making significant contributions to the advancement of women in traditionally patriarchal societies. The struggle for equality in America dates back to the 17th century. The world's first women's conference was the Seneca Falls Convention in New York state (1848), where Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1851-1902) boldly took the stage to address the necessity “for women's wrongs to be laid out before the public.” In this assignment, she believed “that a woman herself must do this work, for woman alone can understand the height, the depth,

⁶⁰⁶ Allan, S. *Social and Sociological Theory: Visualizing Social Worlds*. Second edition. Los Angeles & London: Sage, 2011; Kolmar, K. & Bartkowski, F. *Feminist Theory: A Reader*. Third edition. New York: McGraw Hill, 2010; Buechler, S.M. *Women's Movements in the United States: Woman Suffrage, Equal Rights, and Beyond*. New Brunswick & London: Rutgers University Press, 1990; Tong, R. *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. Third edition. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009

the length and the breadth of her own degradation.”⁶⁰⁷ In her book, “The Woman’s Bible,” Elizabeth and 26 other women challenged the Judeo-Christian tradition by concluding that “the Bible in its teachings degrades women from Genesis to Revelation.”⁶⁰⁸ In the aftermath of her declarations, major literary figures associated with the “first wave” (19th to early 20th century) established many initiatives for disarming patriarchal norms, attacking the institutions that reduced women to a life of confinement and obedience. American feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935), who wrote *The Home* (1903), *The Man-Made World; Or, Our Androcentric Culture* (1911), and *Herland* (1915), as a response to the male-centered ideology of divine scriptures, declared that there is “no female mind, as the brain is not an organ of sex.”⁶⁰⁹ Perkins advanced the notion that “a normal feminine influence in recasting religious assumptions will do more than any other thing to improve the world.”⁶¹⁰

The painful revelations of British novelists Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) and Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) are personal expressions of the “pernicious effects arising from unnatural distinctions established in societies,…” where men were not as “concerned with women’s inferiority as they were with their own superiority.”⁶¹¹ Their impassioned testimony of the chronic physical and mental anguish of women “confined in cages” spoke to the need for their intellectual awakening as an antidote to the lethargy of their minds.⁶¹² In her acclaimed

⁶⁰⁷ Kolmer, K. & Bartkowski, F. 2010, ix, 7, 42

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 36-37

⁶⁰⁹ Gilman, C.P. *Women and Economics*. Boston, MA: Small, Maynard & Co., 1893

⁶¹⁰ Kolmer, K. & Bartkowski, F. 2010, 7, 32-45

⁶¹¹ Wollstonecraft, M. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. London: Penguin Books, 2004, 175; Woolf, V. *A Room of One’s Own*. London: Harcourt Brace, 1981, 34

⁶¹² Wollstonecraft, M. 2004, 85-90; Woolf, V. 1981, 59

essay, “A Room of One’s Own” (1929), Woolf took a courageous stance against “the patriarch who has to conquer.” In a belligerent tone she admonished the patriarch by declaring:

Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of the mind.⁶¹³

In “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,” Wollstonecraft simultaneously disparaged the shallowness of a life of glamorous excess, and those women who have surrendered to a life of enslavement. By revealing the fundamental “truths,” Wollstonecraft discloses the manner in which “religion,” and “the language of men,” have devalued women and deprived them of their “natural prerogatives” in life.⁶¹⁴

Reason is, consequently, the simple power of improvement; or more properly speaking, of discerning truth. Each individual is in this respect a world in itself. More or less may be conspicuous in one being than another, but the nature of reason must be the same in all, if it be an emanation of divinity, the tie that connects the creature with the Creator; for can that soul be stamped with the heavenly image that is not perfected by the exercise of its own reason?... This understanding, strictly speaking, has been denied to woman; and instinct, sublimated into wit and cunning, for the purposes of life, has been substituted in its stead.⁶¹⁵

While the first wave essentially focused on women’s suffrage and enforced prejudices, the second wave (1960s to 1980s) — referred to as the women’s liberation movement — extended the scope of earlier deliberations to include gender equality in culture, law, higher education, employment, sexual, and reproductive rights. Motivated by the accomplishments of their predecessors, the monologues of renowned feminists including Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, and Alice Walker, blended to deride conformity to the frivolous and

⁶¹³ Woolf, V. 1981, 35, 76

⁶¹⁴ Wollstonecraft, M. 2004, 65, 72

⁶¹⁵ Ibid. 69-70

demeaning standards endorsed by the fashion and beauty industries, while attacking the numerous institutions perpetuating female stereotypes and documenting the interconnections among race, class, and gender oppression.

In the early 1990s, the third and most radical wave of feminism debuted primarily among younger women who were raised with the advantages owed to the achievements of the first and second waves.⁶¹⁶ Raised in a society that offers and accepts an abundance of personal choices, the focal point of the third wave is diversity; it rejects the existence of a true female identity, “since no monolithic version of ‘woman’ exists.”⁶¹⁷ This extremist ideology repudiates all boundaries in its core belief that it is virtually impossible to delineate every woman’s concerns, as “such issues are as diverse as the many women who inhabit our planet.”⁶¹⁸ Proponents of this wave are receptive towards all means of personal empowerment, and acknowledge deviant parameters including pornography and transgender politics as accepted norms. Well-known third-wave feminists include authors Margaret Atwood, Jennifer Baumgardner, and Amy Richards, and musicians Courtney Love, Madonna, and Alanis Morissette.⁶¹⁹

In the context of the defenders of Islamic feminism in Iran, and those who insist on the need to accommodate broader issues of a liberation theology, the survey of a language reflecting centuries of female oppression among western nations presented in a leading post-revolutionary women’s magazine, may have the ability to illuminate the future of this movement.

⁶¹⁶ Allan, K. 2011, 219

⁶¹⁷ Allan, K. *A Primer in Social and Sociological Theory: Toward a Sociology of Citizenship*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2011, 234

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ Sowards, S.K. & Renegar, V.R. “The Rhetorical Functions of Consciousness-Raising in Third-Wave Feminism,” *Communication Studies*, 55(4), Winter 2004, 535-552

In many ways, *Zanan*'s unique brand of journalism stems from Sherkat's partiality towards the term "indigenous feminism" (*feminizm-e boomi*), which "relates women's issues to the social and cultural specifics of Iran."⁶²⁰ Sherkat, who places herself on "the religious side of the modern left," clarifies her own personal conviction regarding a collective movement in the following way:⁶²¹

Women's rights issues in Iran are so complicated that we must start from somewhere that we could agree with each other and work through until we arrive at areas of disagreement... Not to forget that beside secular women, we also have religious minorities and national minorities where the issue of feminism could mean different things for different women.⁶²²

In presenting to her readers a collection of translated feminist writing, and thereby bringing to their attention the powerful voices of historically disempowered women in western nations, Sherkat boldly connects with a movement that is outside the purview of the Islamic Republic's ideology. While this courageous initiative has been credited for "transforming knowledge [by] conscientiously encouraging a brand of feminism that takes Islam as a source of legitimacy and makes no apologies for drawing on western feminist sources," it has not been examined in sufficient detail.⁶²³ A detailed examination is needed particularly with emphasis on a sociological approach distinguishing the relevance of feminist rhetoric to the empowerment of women as a "muted group":

The language of a particular culture does not serve all of its speakers equally, for not all speakers contribute in an equal fashion to its formulation... Women are inarticulate

⁶²⁰ Moghadam V. 2003, 220

⁶²¹ Howard, J. 2002, 146

⁶²² Moghadam, V.2003, 220

⁶²³ Mir-Hosseini, Z. "Religious Modernists and the 'Woman Question': Challenges and Complexities," in Hooglund, E. (ed.) *Twenty Years of Islamic Revolution: Political and Social Transition in Iran Since 1979*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002, 74-95

because the language that they use is derivative — meaning that it has largely been developed out of male perceptions of reality.⁶²⁴

For a subordinate group, the repertoire of essays by the illustrious engineers of a feminist curriculum has the capacity to serve as a sophisticated intermediary for unveiling a forbidden language, in which “prescribed social roles based on biological identity are replaced by representations of ‘real’ women as they actually are or can be.”⁶²⁵ For a generation intrigued by, yet deprived of access to many facets of a western culture, the significance of exposure to women’s dilemmas over time becomes all the more crucial for delineating the common ingredients between an “indigenous” conception and an expansive universal model which continuously absorbs new dimensions. Feminist author Joan Kelly validates the power of feminist communication in understanding the existential nature of patriarchal oppression:

I believe that all feminist work emerges out of the spirit and reality of collectivity... When women are scattered and cannot work together... women suffer a loss... When some connection among women exists, even if it is only a literary one, it creates an impressive tradition of thinking.⁶²⁶

Kelly traces the earliest rhetoric emphasizing the relevance of developing a “consciousness about women that extends beyond individual oppression” to the 14th century when French poet Christine de Pizan’s (c.1364-c.1430) writings ignited a genre referred to as *La Querelle des Femmes* (Woman’s Quarrel).⁶²⁷ Considered to be the first major feminist literary figure during an era devoid of women’s rights, her manuscript highlighted the importance of shared knowledge

⁶²⁴ Foss, K.A., Foss, S.K. & Griffin, C.L. *Readings in Feminist Rhetorical Theory*. Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2004, 19

⁶²⁵ Currie, D.H. *Girl Talk: Adolescent Magazines and Their Readers*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, 56

⁶²⁶ Kelly, J. *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1984, xiii-xiv

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.* xviii, 65-108

“arising in dialectical opposition to the male defamation and mistreatment of women.”⁶²⁸ In the comprehensive overview of the *Querelle*, the author develops a liberating medium enhanced by a “connected body of feminist thought capable of transmitting to generations of women... the knowledge and the confidence needed to reject claims of female inferiority.”⁶²⁹ For Kelly, an excursion into this realm has the ability to produce a “feminist consciousness,” by “creating new contours, possibilities and realities.”⁶³⁰

Contemporary sociological studies continue to document this trend and the importance of feminist scholarship as a means of “gendering the reader” by exposing a correlation between a universal “gender praxis” and the debilitating effects of sexual hierarchy rooted in conventional paradigms.⁶³¹ This anthology of confessions reflects a verbal design disrupting traditional discipline through the complementary parameters of “language, power, and knowledge,” which as “social scripts” have the power to “draw attention [to] the dominant categories which claim to express the ‘truth’ about womanhood” in a world “defined, labeled, and classified according to men’s, and not women’s interests.”⁶³²

In this undertaking, adolescent exposure to the “voices, visions, and lived experiences” of women chronicling the historical oppression of a homogenous group, may be a potent

⁶²⁸ Kelly, J. “Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes, 1400-1789*,” *Chicago Journals* 8(1), autumn 1982, 5-7

⁶²⁹ Kelly, J. 1984, xxiv-xviii

⁶³⁰ Ibid.

⁶³¹ Mills, S. *Gendering the Reader*. London: Harvester Wheat-Sheaf, 1994

⁶³² Connelly, M.O., Li, T.M., Macdonald, M. & Parpart, J.L. “Feminism and Development: Theoretical Perspectives,” in Parpart, J.L., Connelly, M.O. & Barriteau, V.E. (eds.) *Theoretical Perspectives on Gender and Development*. Ottawa, Canada: International Development Research Centre, 2000, 137; Hesse-Bieber, S.N. “Feminist Research: Exploring, Interrogating and Transforming the Interconnections of Epistemology and Method,” in Hesse-Bieber, S.N. *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012, 3; Currie, D.M. 1999, 9-13

consciousness-raising strategy by illuminating a new social order in which women themselves become protagonists of their own destiny.⁶³³ In support of this conjecture, there are compelling arguments substantiating the authority of women's magazines in the social construction and identity formation of adolescent females.⁶³⁴

While research in this area remains somewhat inconclusive, as the disparate and voluminous nature of print media complicates rendering an absolute verdict, the evidence appears to show a solid correlation between information and gendered communication, in which “connected knowing builds on the subjectivists’ conviction that the most trustworthy knowledge comes from personal experience, rather than the pronouncement of authorities.”⁶³⁵ Sociologist Dawn H. Currie maintains that a “woman-centered venue” is considered advantageous over the “purveyors of a pernicious ideology, regardless of whether the readers actively follow the prescribed behaviors, as the knowledge promoted by magazine discourse is more compelling for many young readers than is the insight provided by individual instances of personal knowledge.”⁶³⁶ Aggregated data also corroborate the impact of a unique socialization experience derived from women's magazines, rather than from those experiences derived from the family, the academic environment, and the community at large. The available research underscores a pronounced autonomy in the appropriation of information and command over the selected text — which sociologists confirm translates into a “substantial amount of self-socialization” by

⁶³³ Currie, D.M. 1999, 9-13

⁶³⁴ Currie, D.M. 1999, 7

⁶³⁵ Belenty, M.I., Clinchy, B.M., Goldberger, N.R. & Tarule, J.M. *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of the Self, Voice, and Mind*. New York: Basic Books, 1986, 112-113; Bowling, S.W., Zimmerman, T.S. & Daniels, K.C. “Empower: A Feminist Consciousness-Raising Curriculum for Adolescent Women,” *Journal of Child and Adolescent Group Therapy*, 10(1), 2000, 3-28

⁶³⁶ Currie, D.M. 1999, 18-20, 40, 185

adolescents.⁶³⁷ Social psychologists have long confirmed that adolescents more often than not acquire the ideals of womanhood from a variety of women's publications. In this process, beauty and fashion magazines are implicated for having adverse effects in propagating an unrealistic feminine portraiture during a vulnerable phase when young women are often conflicted by the interplay of contradictory information defining their role as women in society.⁶³⁸ The opposite might also be argued, that is, that the messages conveyed by the more serious women's publications may have the ability to diminish the impact of "unhealthy societal messages."⁶³⁹ Mary Pipher, a clinical psychologist and bestselling author, validates that exposure to strong female role models in cultures where women are expected to "sacrifice" and "relinquish" their "true selves" can profoundly alleviate many of the anxieties associated with a subordinate existence.⁶⁴⁰ Author David Gauntlett additionally finds that the power to negate many of the dominant gender practices during the challenging adolescent phase, is particularly relevant in a "post-traditional order, in which self-identity [often] becomes a reflexive project."⁶⁴¹

Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development emphasizes the value of acquired knowledge in the construction of "morally autonomous" individuals and the formation of their

⁶³⁷ Arnett, J.J. "Adolescents' Uses of Media for Self-Socialization," *Journal of Youth and Adolescents*, 24(5), 1995, 519; Bryant, J. & Oliver, M.B. *Media Affects: Advances in Theory and Research*. Third edition, New York: Taylor & Francis, 1994

⁶³⁸ Arnett, J.J. 1995, 520-523; Gilligan, C. 1993; Pipher, M. *Raising Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* New York: Riverhead Books, 1994; Gauntlett, D. *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*. London & New York: Routledge, 2008

⁶³⁹ Arnet, J.J. 1995, 523; Bowling, S.W., Zimmerman, T.S. & Daniels, K.C. 2000, 4

⁶⁴⁰ Pipher, M. 1994, 38-42

⁶⁴¹ Gauntlett, D. 2008, 107

capacity to emerge as agents of social change in societies that devalue and degrade freedom.⁶⁴² The validity of this conception is measured in relation to “morally non-autonomous” persons, whose “veil of ignorance” restricts, limits, and confines them as “objects of change.”⁶⁴³ The power of such cognitive development is recognized by philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and by conceptions of “freedom and morality” that view the “authentic self” as a mechanism of liberation from social subordination.⁶⁴⁴ This theoretical framework for a new generation of women’s rights advocates in Iran is indispensable, since it recognizes the value of acquired knowledge for personal autonomy, even under the most extreme and repressive circumstances.

The relevance of documenting feminist narratives and the manner in which critical reflections are articulated both consciously and subconsciously through literature is verified in a different way in Michel Foucault’s social theory, establishing that “all power operates through, and is implicated in systems of knowledge.” Foucault argues that “power through discourse is productive [particularly for its ability to] produce social life.”⁶⁴⁵ An example is Simone de Beauvoir’s acclaimed adage, “one is not born, but rather becomes, woman.”⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴² Barazangi, N.H. “Self-Identity As a Form of Democratization,” in Bystydzienski, J.M. & Sekhon, J. (eds.) *Democratization and Women’s Grassroots Movements*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999, 146

⁶⁴³ Barazangi, N.H. in Bystydzienski, J.M. & Sekhon, J. (eds.) 1999, 146; Rawls, J.A. *Theory of Social Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, 118

⁶⁴⁴ Sullivan, R.J. *Immanuel Kant’s Moral Theory*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 44-50; Brison, S.J. “Relational Autonomy and the Freedom of Expression,” in Mackenzie, C. & Stoljar, N. (eds.) *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 280-299; Anderson, J. & Honneth, A. “Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition and Justice,” in Christman, J. & Anderson, J. (eds.) *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 127-149

⁶⁴⁵ Currie, D.M. 1999, 15

⁶⁴⁶ De Beauvoir, S. *The Second Sex*. London: Vintage Books, 2011, 293

Given the authority of such disclosures, *Zanan*'s guidance during a critical transition, when adolescent women frequently gravitate to the social media as an information forum, requires additional interrogation for its immersion in a consciousness-raising rhetoric, contributing to the identity formation and empowerment of women as an otherwise "muted group."

In considering the endurance and popularity of this publication, its infiltration of a radically non-conforming ideology has been inadequately considered as a viable response to the critics of Islamic feminism in Iran, and as part of the socialization journey of the adolescent female population. The publication's prominence makes it a credible challenger within a landscape almost totally bereft of the vestiges of the western tradition. The presentation of a concealed rhetoric for a generation of women fascinated with a virtually annihilated culture, which in many ways has become synonymous with freedom and infinite possibilities, could invigorate the evolution of their consciousness. The multitude of expressions in *Zanan* elucidating the shared essence for western and Iranian women, could be profoundly more alluring than many of the topics deliberated locally. In a country with an extremely youthful population, this powerful and credible discourse, codified in the language of a revered cast of women and documented for nearly two decades in the nation's foremost publication, has been significantly overlooked. This inventory of feminist communication resonating the bonds of sisterhood has been disregarded as part of the socialization process and the message absorbed by young women born and raised in an intolerant environment. For a deprived generation, the temptation to gravitate towards centuries of intimate confessions becomes all the more significant as part of their "self-socialization," in which a personal interpretation of women's desperation may empower them to move beyond the assigned limits. The introduction of an

exquisite collection of feminist literature, including Mary Wollstonecraft, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Simone de Beauvoir, Nancy Friday, Alice Walker, and Virginia Woolf, among many, illuminates the underlying significance of Sherkat's message and her role as a "persistent trespasser" for a generation reared to subscribe to a malignant, yet normative gender ideology. Given the limits on access to outside material and the stringent control over all publications and organizations tending to press against the established boundaries, a lucid and concise journal can establish the legitimacy of an identity at odds with the coercive socialization measures of the regime.

Post-modern feminist Betty Friedan's insight into "the problem that has no name" highlights the "importance of creating space for altered meaning" — one in which previous testimonies are referred to in order to reinforce the motion towards social transformation.⁶⁴⁷ Although different circumstances dictate the pursuit of diverse resolutions, the enormous value of a universal collaboration creates a defining moment — a moment in which the intrusion of external sources could advance the agenda of those caught in the eye of the storm, by revealing a commitment contained within a broader social context. For today's youth, disclosing the residual fragments of an integrated framework in a favorable manner, without sacrificing the integrity of a nation, may ultimately nourish the inception of a local production by capturing the essence of predominant themes for the deconstruction of an inferior existence. While the obvious limitations of this inquiry make it difficult to render an absolute verdict, specifically with respect to the way in which these narratives may be internalized by young women in Iran, the overall data substantiating a connection between feminist literary tradition and empowerment, indicates

⁶⁴⁷ Friedan, B. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York & London: W.W. Norton, 1997, 57

that eloquent disclosures of an ostensibly compatible ideology capturing aspirations of autonomy, may be enticing for a curious audience intrigued by the West.

In support of this hypothesis, the following pages will explore the feminist essays in *Zanan* as part of the socialization enclaves nourishing female empowerment, and in turn contributing to reducing the relevance of strictly “western” and “non-western” standards. This study has so far explored the various components that appear to be implicated in the transformation of Iranian women, particularly within the ranks of the religious segment at the forefront of supporting an approach for recovering an illustrious, yet abandoned era. The contradiction faced by the vast majority of women initially enticed, at the time of the 1979 revolution, by the prospect of an Islamic utopia has led to the alignment of numerous unforeseen factors integral to the cohesion of diversified groups. As one of Sherkat’s many controversial theses, this enterprise could reveal a sufficient commonality among all women historically subjugated by the “norms” prescribed by male-driven authority. While the outstanding achievements of the patrons of the women’s rights movement have considerably deconstructed an inferior reality ingrained in religious discourse, women’s access to revelations from western societies that replicate the predicament of women in Iran, could eliminate many of the connotations of alleged immorality of a vilified culture. *Zanan*’s emotionally rich compilation of influential feminist writers will be assessed in terms of its ability to communicate a universal betrayal independent of race, culture, and creed. Historians have demonstrated *Zanan*’s influence over women and youth, while sociologists and psychologists have enumerated the enormous value of feminist rhetoric and discourse, and the potential role of women’s publications in the construction of the “self.” The following selection of western feminist material (back-translated from Farsi) will be examined for its ability to operate as a unifying force in revealing a more

pronounced and comprehensive definition of feminism. In this context, the relevance of a language symbolizing the struggle for equality and human rights will be evaluated for its capacity to:

1. Delegitimize the pervading male-centered authority of the Islamic Republic
2. Support the socialization and identity construction of adolescent women against the dominant gender assignment
3. Empower and restore silenced voices
4. Expand the boundaries of Islamic feminism by stimulating thought and reflection outside of the designated parameters

In assessing all 152 issues of *Zanan* (February 1992 to January 2008), Sherkat's penchant for venturing into censored terrain becomes almost immediately apparent in her indiscreet approach to the harrowing and disturbing realities facing women in Iran. This astounding excursion, strikingly commemorated in the publication's infamous headlines and front-page features, has undeniably become part of *Zanan*'s enduring legacy.

Disturbing features on domestic violence are exemplified by articles entitled "Sir, Have You Ever Physically Assaulted Your Wife?" and "The Beating of a Woman Is One of the Areas of a Man's Authority." Rampant gender discrimination is highlighted in exposés such as "Female Students Behind Invisible Fences," "Why Don't Women Get Paid as Much as Men?" "Women's Issues Do Not Have Priority," and "Once Again — Limitations on Young Women Entering Universities." The blatant biases of the Islamic Constitution are exposed, for example in "Article 1133 of the Constitution: A Man Can Divorce His Wife Anytime He Wants." Patriarchal laws are critiqued, for example in "Man: Partner Or Boss?" Coverage of international women's issues; the

notorious collection of legal and theological debates by Mehrangiz Kar, Mohsen Saidzadeh (also known as Mina Yadegar Azadi), Abdolkarim Soroush, Hujjat‘ul-islam Shabestari; and an array of feminist expositions, including “Feminists Do Not Have a Place in Tehran’s *Shahrdari* [Municipality],” all serve as powerful reminders of the deplorable state of affairs within a fearful and repressive atmosphere.⁶⁴⁸

Controversial covers endorse the magazine’s stance against the enforced measures of an Islamic dictatorship, including the infamous photograph of inappropriately veiled movie director Rakhshan Bani-Etemad wearing Ray-Ban sunglasses, the picture of two women holding a sign that reads: “The Stadium of 100,000 ~~Persons~~ Men?” and the headshot of a veiled woman removing adhesive tape from her mouth.⁶⁴⁹ Candid interviews with influential public figures and women’s rights activists — including Shirin Ebadi, Mohammad Khatami, Azam Taleghani, Zahra Rahnavard, and the scandalous Faezeh Hashemi — combine with profiles of best-selling author Simin Daneshvar, artist Farideh Lashai, filmmaker Tahmineh Milani, Oprah Winfrey, German-British astronomer Caroline Lucretia Herschel (1750-1848), Benazir Bhutto, Hillary Clinton, artist Georgia O’Keefe, and authors Lillian Hellman, Marguerite Duras, and Nadine Gordimer, to provide a variety of role models for women in Iran.⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁸ *Zanan*, June 1994, No. 18, cover; Aug. 1994, No. 19, 68-72; Nov. 2003, No. 104, 2-6; April 2006, No. 131, 65; April 2007, No. 143, 2-5; July 2007, No. 146, 23-24; Oct. 2007, No. 149, 2-5; March 1995, No. 23, 46-55; Feb. 1992, No. 2, 26-31; Nov. 1994, No. 20, 66-67; Aug. 2007, No. 147, 82-85

⁶⁴⁹ *Zanan*, Oct. 2006, No. 140; April 2006, No. 131; Nov. 1994, No. 20

⁶⁵⁰ *Zanan*, Dec. 2003, No. 105, 6-19; May 1997, No. 34, 2-5; May 1997, No.34, 34; Nov. 1996, No. 31, 2-6; March 1996, No. 28, 4-5; March 2002, No. 86, 32-36; April 2000, No. 63, 26-29; May 1999, No. 53, 20-21; Sept. 2006, No. 135, 6-9; Dec. 2006, No.138, 64-66; Dec. 2007, No. 152, 2-4; Dec. 2002, No. 95, 8-10; Nov. 2002, No. 94, 32-33; Jan. 2001, No. 72, 25-26; April 1997, No. 33, 36-38; Sept. 1999, No. 55, 52-53

Provocative features on the “Arrival of the New IUD,” “The Many Uses of the IUD,” and the state’s infringement on the natural sexual desires of adolescent boys and girls entitled, “This Is Forbidden Love Street,” reflect the magazine’s bold excursion into taboo territory.⁶⁵¹

Zanan’s monthly “roundtable” discussions provide insightful deliberations by men and women from various intellectual fields on relevant topics including, “What Are the Most Important Issues Facing Women?” Their dialogue provides a multi-dimensional overview of the prevailing inequalities, including the “necessity for women to develop themselves in all areas,” “the division of labor in the household,” and the “state’s exaggeration of the importance of motherhood.”⁶⁵²

The occasional piece on fashion, fitness, or Persian and foreign cuisine is almost always eclipsed by the shadows of an oppressive setting. There is nothing remotely subtle about this publication. The inventory of denunciations of the state’s female agenda is accordingly integrated with many translated features on parenting and childrearing practices in western nations, blatantly applauding the virtues of the career-oriented wife and mother, while chronicling the mental and physical ramifications of confinement to the domestic sphere. Articles entitled, “Mother, Why Do You Work? “We Should Not Be Slaves to Our Children,” “Do I Have the Right to Enjoy My Job?” and “Working Mothers and Feelings of Guilt” expose the personal and professional benefits of working women and the “normal” feelings of separation anxiety associated with this lifestyle.⁶⁵³

⁶⁵¹ *Zanan*, Aug. 2007, No. 147, 82-84; Feb. 1992, No. 1, 40-51; May 1998, No. 43, 4-10

⁶⁵² *Zanan*, July 1997, No. 35, 28-35

⁶⁵³ *Zanan*, Feb. 1994, No. 22, 36-38; Nov. 1992, No. 8, 42-44; April 1994, No. 17, 18-20; Dec. 1995, No. 27, 22-23

The following excerpts from articles in *Zanan* enumerate the merits of finding fulfillment outside of the household and the importance of communicating this important message to one's children:

Do you always feel that all your time is at the service of your children and that you neglect yourself most of the time? Just because you are a mother does not mean that you have to sacrifice your entire life.... Your child needs to slowly take other matters into consideration, to be respectful towards your feelings and your right to accomplish what you want.⁶⁵⁴

For every moment that I feel good about my career, I have moments where I feel guilty... But in fact, the time that I spend at work provides me with the strength to perform household work. If I were to spend all of my time with my children, I would not appreciate them as much...⁶⁵⁵

The children of working mothers are more successful in the community as well as in group work. They are also better students in school.⁶⁵⁶

Your conversations about your profession with your children will help them feel proud of a mother that works. The working woman can be a role model for her child, in that she she takes pleasure from both her family and her job.⁶⁵⁷

Nancy Friday's book, *My Mother/Myself: The Daughter's Search for Identity* (1977), explores the mother/daughter dynamic through hundreds of emotionally charged interviews.⁶⁵⁸ Friday, who has written extensively on female sexual liberation, argues that women have been nurtured and raised under such obsolete and oppressive circumstances that it has debilitated their parenting skills, and in turn destroyed their ability to remain true to their inner most selves. The following excerpt from *My Mother/Myself*, in a chapter entitled, "Oh Mother, Come Let's

⁶⁵⁴ *Zanan*, Nov. 1992, No. 8, 42-44

⁶⁵⁵ *Zanan*, April 1994, No. 17, 18

⁶⁵⁶ *Zanan*, Dec. 1995, No. 27, 22-23

⁶⁵⁷ *Zanan*, Feb. 1994, No. 22, 36

⁶⁵⁸ *Zanan*, Aug. 1992, No. 6, 2-5

Confess,” is a daughter’s recollection of her mother’s confession of her profound insecurities as a parent:

I am not a good mother and it is not your fault. It is not easy for me to be a good mother. Therefore, when you see that I am not like other mothers, try to understand that it is not because I do not love you. Quite the contrary... But I am lost myself... I am not sure how I am supposed to raise you. Maybe I should have never been a mother. I never wanted the life my mother showed me. But her life had taken shape at time when women had no choice... The minute we meet a man, we enter into a contract with him. Mothers should not lie and hide this from their daughters. The only result you will derive from choosing not to communicate your feelings, will be a life of emptiness for your daughter... Trusting your inner instinct will be the basis for your success in life.

The desperate attempt of a mother trying to make amends signals a personal bankruptcy and the need to end this pernicious cycle. Friday argues that freedom from a debilitating lifestyle can to a large extent be achieved by the courage and will power to eliminate the cycle of deprivation.

The all-important message conveying the blessings derived from unconventional norms, is further fueled by asking women to seriously consider whether they are “ready to change their lifestyle by having children?”⁶⁵⁹

Make sure that your reasons for having children are the right one’s... Before having children think about whether you are prepared to care for a child or not.⁶⁶⁰

Such profound statements, advancing the notion that women should not consider themselves solely as vessels for procreation, are juxtaposed with sometimes blunt, yet humorous reflections of a woman’s euphoria after returning to work from an extended maternity leave:

I am happy that my maternity leave is over. I have always known that I need something for myself in life. When friends and family ask me how can you work with three children, I often tell the partial truth — which is that I need the money. I have slowly

⁶⁵⁹ “Are You Ready To Be a Mother?” (*Aya Bara-ye Madar Shodan Amadeid?*), *Zanan*, March 2001, No. 74, 30-34

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 32

tried to alleviate my guilt. I love my job and accept it as a part of who I am... It's what makes me a happier mother.⁶⁶¹

Advocating means for personal fulfillment other than those espoused by the regime is emblematic of a deliberate attempt at circumventing the preferred role for women.

Zanan ignites reflection and thought through the confidential revelations of women previously subjugated by misogynistic patriarchies. The publication of an inventory of translated feminist classics by beacons of the feminist movement in western nations — nestled amidst local stories — provides a repertoire of intimate confessions echoing the predicaments of women in post-revolutionary Iran. The moral and humanitarian injustice arising from the construction of an inferior status based on biological difference, draws the reader into identifying with the protagonist without implicating the culprit at hand. This synthesis of interwoven scholarship, as a new elixir legitimizing the depth of their frustrations, extends the scope of *Zanan*'s indigenous orchestration by forging links between the egalitarian premise of a universal treaty established in the embryonic dialogue of a wider disenfranchised community.

The importance of a collective contribution in fomenting women's equality, was aptly described by feminist Alice Paul (1885-1997) in 1923:

I always feel that the movement is sort of a mosaic — Each one of us puts in a little stone, and then you get a great mosaic at the end.⁶⁶²

In combating the Republic's gender ideology, assertions to the contrary by women themselves provide a valuable stimulus. Author Sara Mills refers to "authentic realism," a feminist textual

⁶⁶¹ *Zanan*, April 1994, No. 17, 19

⁶⁶² Adams, K.H. & Keene, M.L. *Alice Paul and the American Suffrage Campaign*. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008

strategy in which the “exchange between author, text, and reader” is able to significantly transform women’s lives by drawing attention to instances of “common experiences.”⁶⁶³ Within this strategy, literature providing “strong female representations to counteract the effects of the weak” is viewed as a powerful means of illustrating an oppression transcending national and cultural boundaries.⁶⁶⁴

While idealized depictions of a foreign prototype were once stringently avoided by a conservative population, revelatory disclosures — not of frivolous modern merchandise and accessories, but of a compelling language denouncing morally reprehensible standards — has the potential to exonerate the misunderstood nature of western women and their ways.

In *Zanan*’s inaugural issue, an excerpt from Evelyn Reed’s (1905-1979) book, *Cosmetics, Fashions and the Exploitation of Women*, condemns the exploits of large corporations that abuse women as second class citizens in order to profit from the sale of the latest beauty and fashion products.⁶⁶⁵ Reed, an active participant in the 1960s and 1970s women’s liberation movement, attacks the political and social institutions at the root of sexism in society. In her essay, Reed targets the marketing ploys of capitalist corporations taking advantage of sexist “norms” for financial gain:

There are three main gangs of profiteers who batten off the mass of women they dragoon or wheedle into their sex-commodity market in search of beauty:

⁶⁶³ Mills, S., Pearce, L., Spaul, S., & Millard, E. *Feminist Readings: Feminists Reading*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989, 51-79

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁵ Reed, E. “The Woman Question and the Marxist Method,” in Hansen, J., Reed, E. & Waters, M.A. (eds.) *Cosmetics, Fashions and the Exploitation of Women*. New York & London: Pathfinder Press, 1986, 76-100; “Women — Fashion and Cosmetics,” (*Zanan — Mod Va Lavazem-e Arayesh*) *Zanan*, Feb. 1992, No. 1, 22-25

1. Those who profit by the manipulation of female flesh into the current standardized fashion mold;
2. Those who paint and emulsify this manipulated flesh with cosmetics, dyes, lotions, emulsions, perfumes, etc.;
3. Those who decorate the manipulated flesh with fashionable clothing, jewelry, etc.

This causes enormous sufferings among women who vary from this standardized, assembly-line mold. Weighed down and frustrated by the real burdens of life under capitalism.... They tend to view their beauty “disfigurements” as the source of all their troubles... They become victims of inferiority complexes... But this does not mean that we must accept these edicts and compulsions complacently or without protest.⁶⁶⁶

For Reed, the conspiracy to forge ahead with a distorted definition of “womanhood” can only be dissolved by abandoning all materialistic acquisitions endorsed by avaricious corporations. In rejecting a detrimental routine, the spirit of a woman’s true worth, which should not be measured by her physical appearance, will shine over the prevailing mindless practices. In many ways, Reed replicates Jalal Al-i Ahmad’s argument against the producers and consumers in capitalist societies who, in their skewed definition of a woman’s liberation, generated a nation of “lipstick and powder” aficionados.⁶⁶⁷ Reed’s argument, unveiled through a critique exposing the extent of man’s corruption, reflects a struggle in which women have effectively become willing participants in a manipulative power structure.

In the same issue, Sherkat’s introduction to French feminist author Simone de Beauvoir’s (1908-1986) revolutionary treatise, *The Second Sex* (1949), shows how one of the leading

⁶⁶⁶ *Zanan*, Feb. 1992, No. 1, 24-25

⁶⁶⁷ Al-e Ahmad, J., 1984

existential intellectuals of the 20th century made significant contributions to feminist rhetoric in a philosophical outlook challenging a woman's "assigned" role as "the second sex":⁶⁶⁸

The situation of woman is that she — a free and autonomous being like all human creatures... nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the "Other." History has shown us that men have always kept in their hands all concrete powers. Since the earliest patriarchal times, they have judged it useful to maintain "Woman" in a state of dependence. Their codes are established against her, and thus she has been concretely constituted as the "Other."

The author's repetitious use of the word "Other" has an almost subliminal affect, conveying the cardinal message that, in relegating "woman" to the position of the "other," man has effectively designated his own self as the "one." Therefore, from this perspective he is free to profit from her existence in any way that is to his benefit. "Man has invented woman for man..."⁶⁶⁹ This mythical construction explains the enduring legacy of a "master" and "slave" relationship — one in which a woman's "natural" place in life is specified and structured according to man's wishes:

It follows that woman sees herself and chooses herself not insofar as she exists for herself (*pour soi*), but as man defines her being — for man is one of the essential factors of her concrete condition.

Critical to de Beauvoir's rejection of this contemptible manufacturing is her infamous proverb, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (*on ne naît pas femme, on le devient*). This powerful statement rejects the idea that women are biologically sanctioned to a "state of subjection" and to a life of servitude. To disengage from a destructive assignment, the author implores all women to seek intellectual awakening outside of this fictitious realm. For de Beauvoir, freedom from patriarchal domination can be achieved by the application of an

⁶⁶⁸ "An Excerpt from Simone de Beauvoir's Book, *The Second Sex*" (*Fazli Az Ketab-e Simone de Beauvoir — Jens-e Dovom*), *Zanan*, Feb. 1992, No. 1, 31-33

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 31

existential doctrine, in which women themselves have the fortitude to destroy the fabricated social distinctions between the sexes:

It is when the slavery of half of humanity is abolished and with it the whole hypocritical system it implies, that the “division” of humanity will reveal its authentic meaning and the human couple will discover its true form.

The path towards redemption is similarly presented by 18th century novelist Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), a woman whose proclamations, progressive for her time, addressed the realities of women’s intellectual and spiritual confinement. Considered to be the founder of modern feminism, Wollstonecraft dedicated her famous novel, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), to French Minister Charles Maurice de Tallyrand (1754-1838) as an appeal for women to be included in the new French Constitution.⁶⁷⁰ In a chapter entitled “Parental Affection,” which appears under the substitute heading “Sacred Arrogance” in *Zanan*, Wollstonecraft blames women’s limited access to academia for their inferior station in life.⁶⁷¹ Wollstonecraft’s argument poignantly discloses that man has manipulated the system in order to take possession through the imposition of “an unconditional obedience,” reducing a woman to the position of “a slave in every situation.” Far worse, the tyranny of the constraints on her intellectual development has destroyed her ability to properly manage her own children:

To be a good mother, a woman must have sense and that independence of mind which few women possess who are taught to depend entirely on their husbands. Meek wives are in general foolish mothers, wanting their children to love them best. I now only mean to insist that, unless the understanding of woman be enlarged, and her character rendered more firm by being allowed to govern her own conduct, she will never have sufficient sense or command of temper to manage her children properly.

⁶⁷⁰ Donovan, J. *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions*. Fourth edition. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010, 1

⁶⁷¹ Wollstonecraft, M. 2004, 187-189; “Sacred Arrogance” (*Khoda Parastiy Ha Ye Moghadam*), *Zanan*, April 1992, No. 4, 16-19

In order to rectify this misfortune, Wollstonecraft advocates educational reform as a fundamental “duty” benefiting future generations and releasing women from a life of bondage to “unprincipled prejudices.”

This time-honored feminist outlook is amplified by British feminist Virginia Woolf’s (1882-1941) “Professions For Women,” an abridged version of her emotionally charged 1932 speech, “Killing the Angel in the House,” a response to the narrative poem by British poet Coventry Patmore (1832-1896).⁶⁷² As one of the foremost feminist literary figures, Woolf brilliantly mocks Patmore’s description of his docile, perfect, and “ideal” wife. Satirical in tone, this remarkably clever parody ridicules the image of the “angel” — a reference to the poet’s proper Victorian spouse, by professing the need to “kill” this selfless, obedient, and devoted creature, whose sole purpose in life was to accommodate the needs of her husband and children. Woolf provides a metaphor conveying that the annihilation of this feeble and submissive being was essential for all women who were prohibited from revealing their true selves and developing “a mind of [their] own”:

It is true I am a woman; it is true I am employed, but what professional experiences have I had? My profession is literature, and in that profession there are even fewer opportunities for women... I discovered that if I were going to review books, I should need to do battle with a certain phantom. And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better, I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, The Angel in the House. It was she who used to come between me and my prayer, when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me.

In the following passage, Woolf recites the venerated qualities of this adored “heroine” to her audience:

⁶⁷² Noddings, N. *Women and Evil*. Berkeley, London & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989, 3, 59, 142; “Angel in the House” (*Fereshte-ye Khaneh*), *Zanan*, May 1993, No. 11, 41-43

I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. If there was chicken, she took the leg, if there was a draught she sat in it — in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others.

For Woolf, the only solution was to destroy this “phantom,” no matter how severe and difficult the struggle might be, and in an exhilarating finale, she describes the outcome:

I killed her... The Angel was dead — She died hard. Had I not killed her, she would have killed me!

In a genuinely forceful feminist tone, she calls on all women to summon the courage and strength to consciously release their minds as part of a continuous struggle to disentangle the imprisoned soul:

Those aims cannot be taken for granted; they must be perpetually questioned and examined. You have won a room of your own in the house hitherto exclusively owned by men. But this freedom is only the beginning. The room is your own but it is still bare. It has to be furnished; it has to be decorated; it has to be shared.

The emphasis on women’s solidarity and the effort to continuously combat this common affliction in order to maintain the drive for freedom, reverberates in the painful expressions and inspirational declarations of African American author Alice Walker (born 1944). *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* (1983) a collection of 36 essays, presents a gripping story of survival amidst the unimaginable injustice, the degrading and inhumane treatment of the enslaved woman. The introductory portion of the excerpt published by *Zanan* highlights the significance of this exquisite collection:

The beauty and creativity of this piece lies in the fact that this time, it is not from the point of view of the middle class white woman, nor the affluent European woman, but

from the mindset of an African American woman with a 200-year history of slavery...⁶⁷³

The multiple burdens of racial and gender discrimination and the creativity of the black woman despite her dark days, is dramatically brought to life in the opening passage of this “Womanist Prose”.⁶⁷⁴

The discovery of a curious thing by the poet Jean Toomer during his travels through the South in the early 1920’s: Black women whose spirituality was so intense, so deep, so unconscious, that they were themselves unaware of the richness they held. They stumbled blindly through their lives; creatures so abused and mutilated in body, so dimmed and confused by pain, that they considered themselves unworthy of even hope.⁶⁷⁵

Walker’s astonishment at the unexpected description of these women, who despite their challenging circumstances managed to retain their spirit, conveys a profound will to survive in the face of adversity:

For these grandmothers and mothers of ours were artists — driven to a numb bleeding madness by the springs of creativity in them, for which there was no release. They were Creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste...

Walker, who personalizes her narration by referring to these women as “our grandmothers and mothers,” applauds the achievement of many strong women, including the enslaved poet Phyllis Wheatley (1753-1784) and British novelist Virginia Woolf, in order to illustrate their extraordinary talent and resilience during an era when women were deprived of the opportunities for self-expression. Walker blurs the distinction between Wheatley, a black woman, and Virginia

⁶⁷³ “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens” (*Dar Josto-ju-ye Baghhaye Madaranemoun*), *Zanan*, March 2007, No. 141, 28-32

⁶⁷⁴ Walker, A. *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*. New York, Orlando & London: Harcourt Brace, 1983

⁶⁷⁵ *Zanan*, March 2007, No. 141, 29

Woolf, a white woman, when she refers to Woolf's well-known essay "A Room of One's Own" (1929) in which Woolf infamously declared: "A woman must have money and a room of her own to write fiction." In making this reference, Walker ponders: "How was this slave able to become a writer, if she not only had no money and a room of her own, but didn't even own herself?"

In order to shed light on this monumental achievement, Walker refers to her own mother's love of gardening, to commemorate the legacy of all enslaved women, who were able to rise above their oppression by finding refuge in a creative outlet nourishing and empowering their souls:

...its design is so magnificent with life and creativity, that to this day people drive by our house in Georgia and ask to stand or walk among my mother's art... Guided by the heritage of a love of beauty and the respect for strength — in search of my mother's garden, I found my own.⁶⁷⁶

The vivid rendition of a mother's tremendous will to survive, preserved in the metaphor of her delightful garden, is imprinted on, and honored in the spirit of her loving daughter and generations of women, who have courageously travelled this path.

Sherkat adds to this scintillating portfolio with an overview of prominent 20th century European and American feminist writers, including Adrienne Rich, Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous, Kate Millet, Susan Faludi, and Erica Jong.⁶⁷⁷

An abstract of an article by feminist critic Lorna Sage (1943-2001) entitled, "A Critical Evaluation of Feminist Literary Works" (*Naghd Hay-e Adabiye Feministi*), provides a brief

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid., 32

⁶⁷⁷ *Zanan*, Aug. 1999, No. 54, 52-53; Jan. 1997, No. 32, 32; July 1997, No. 35, 50-51; Sept. 1993, No. 13, 14-17

summary of relevant authors and the impact of their contribution to a liberation discourse.⁶⁷⁸ The synopsis of a poem by Adrienne Rich (1929-2012) brings the oppression of American women to the forefront in a seasoned poetic diction disclosing “the culture of manipulated passivity.” Excerpts from the works of French novelists Julie Kristeva (born 1941) and Helene Cixous (born 1937) expose the irrational premise of women’s subjugation in a comprehensive argument that “woman does not exist, except as constituted in opposition to the male.” American feminist Kate Millet (born 1934), the best-selling author of *Sexual Politics* (1970) condemns the sexist literature of western societies by heavily implicating numerous well-known male authors including D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, and Norman Mailer. Forcefully fueling the second wave of the feminist movement, Millet berates the chauvinist novelists for being “a mirror and a connection within the larger society: a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole.”⁶⁷⁹

Excerpts from journalist Susan Faludi’s 1992 study, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, is presented to elucidate the complexity of feminism in western nations and to demonstrate that even in liberated nations like the United States, women need to constantly cultivate their “garden”:⁶⁸⁰

Women continue to suffer from the absence of fairness because of their gender. Feminism implores the world to recognize that at long last women are not merely decorative ornaments... They account for half of the world’s population, and are therefore just as deserving of rights and opportunities... The feminist agenda is very basic: It asks that women not be forced to choose between public justice and private happiness. It asks that women be free to define themselves, instead of having their identity defined for them, time and again, by their culture and by their men.

⁶⁷⁸ *Zanan*, Aug. 1999, No. 54, 52-53

⁶⁷⁹ *Zanan*, Jan. 1997, No. 32, 32

⁶⁸⁰ “Women and Society in America: What Difficulties Do They Face?” (*Jame-ye Zanan-e Amrica Che Moshkelati Darand?*), *Zanan*, Sept. 1993, No. 13, 14-17

Erica Jong (born 1942) also discusses the numerous conflicts faced by western women in the 20th century, declaring that “in a society in which everything is for sale, writing for one’s own personal gratification is the only freedom left.”⁶⁸¹ While this article on writing is not altogether relevant to feminism, Jong’s well-known novels, including *Fear of Flying* and *Fanny*, listed at the bottom of the finished piece, are apropos, as they address themes of female autonomy and sexuality.⁶⁸²

In yet another bold initiative by Sherkat, her determination to broadcast the deleterious consequences of patriarchy is reflected in a collection of short stories by acclaimed feminist writers. The anthology of fictional narratives conveying the spiritual and psychological malaise arising from human degradation are stunningly presented in the works by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Katherine Anne Porter, Kate Chopin, Judy Syfers, and Dorothy Parker:

Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1899) is the horrific tale of a housewife whose husband has locked her in the second floor bedroom of their summer rental home. As one of the earliest American feminists, Gilman’s first person narrative of a woman’s descent into madness is seemingly a metaphor for the senseless entrapment of women in the domestic sphere.⁶⁸³ The woman in the story describes her obsessive fascination with the color and design of the yellow wallpaper in her bedroom. Apprehended under lock and key, and deprived of any mental stimulation, she resorts to analyzing every facet of an old and shabby wall covering:

⁶⁸¹ “Writing — The Only Freedom Left” (*Neveshtan — Tanha Azadi Bahi Mondeh*), *Zanan*, July 1997, No. 35, 50

⁶⁸² Jong, E. *Fear of Flying*. New York: New American Library, 1973; Jong, E. *Fanny*. New York & London: W.W. Norton, 1980

⁶⁸³ “The Yellow Wallpaper” (*Kaghaz Divariy-e Zard*), *Zanan*, April 1992, No. 4, 50-54

This wallpaper has a kind of sub-pattern in a different shade, a particularly irritating one; ... The front pattern does move... and I assure you... that I will follow that pointless pattern to some sort of conclusion...

Her eventual spiral into insanity reaches the point where she starts to imagine different women in and around the vicinity of the wallpaper:

Sometimes, I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast and her crawling shakes all over. Then they get through and then the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside down, and makes their eyes white!

The erratic nature of the story draws the reader into her incessant delusional tirade until she is finally convinced that her only salvation lies in peeling off the ugly strips of yellow paper. In the final scene, when her husband unlocks the door, he finds her slithering across the room repeatedly saying, "I've got out at last... in spite of you... and I've pulled off most of the paper so you can't put me back." While this tragedy is an obvious exaggeration of women's confinement, its overall message that man has reduced the "weaker sex" to a pathetic creature makes a profound emotional statement highlighting the consequences for women of androcentric societies.

The Rope (1928), a psychological drama by Pulitzer Prize winning American author Katherine Anne Porter (1890-1980), is a conversation of a miserable young married couple, in which an obviously frustrated wife is unable to deal with her husband's innate inability to understand her deep-seated resentment towards his lack of contribution to household chores.⁶⁸⁴ In the following dialogue, the wife is incensed when her husband brings home a rope instead of the coffee she had asked for:

⁶⁸⁴ *The Rope (Tanab)*, *Zanan*, Sept. 1993, No. 13, 25-28

Wife: "Did you buy the coffee?"

Husband: "No, I forgot."

Wife: "You just forgot to buy the coffee? Why? Because you don't drink it? How come when you finish your cigarettes, you don't forget to buy them?"

"Why did you buy that rope?"

Husband: "I thought it might be useful for hanging clothes."

Wife: "Why? Are you thinking of opening a laundromat? We already have a rope. Why don't you pay attention?"

Husband: "Why do you talk this way? Don't you realize that it makes you look stupid? I wish we had a few children so that you could take all your frustrations out on them... God only knows what this is really all about."

Wife: "Housework is just as much a man's responsibility as it is a woman's."

In the exchange that ensues, it becomes abundantly clear that the husband's views are those of a traditional breadwinner who is incapable of understanding what lies behind his wife's "irrational" outbursts. While there is no resolution to their dispute, the story underscores the insurmountable barriers created by stereotypical gender roles, culminating all too often in destroying the relationship between two people who obviously love one another.

American novelist Kate Chopin's (1851-1904) black comedy, *The Story of an Hour*, is perhaps most famous for its unexpected ending.⁶⁸⁵ Published in 1894, the story covers one hour in the life of Mrs. Louise Millard, who appears to be in a terrible state upon hearing the news of her husband's sudden death. Given Louise's heart condition, her sister and her friend become extremely worried when she locks herself in the bedroom to "mourn" her loss. Instead, the reader slowly begins to realize that Louise is in fact overjoyed and invigorated at the thought of regaining her freedom:

⁶⁸⁵ *The Story of an Hour* (*Dastani Dar Yek Saat*), *Zanan*, Dec. 1998, No. 49, 24-25

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it... What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her... She said it over under her breath: "FREE, FREE, FREE!" Her pulse beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body. She would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers... Body and soul free! she kept whispering.

This euphoric episode is short lived, as she is soon informed that Mr. Millard is still alive. Mrs. Millard abruptly has a heart attack and dies!

No matter how entertaining this story may be, the despondent vision of an obviously unhappy housewife, harnessed and held captive by social norms, overshadows the protagonist's humorous departure, in effect symbolizing that the only way for poor Mrs. Millard to hold on to her new found freedom would be through death.

"Why I Want a Wife" (1971), originally appeared in the inaugural issue of *Ms. Magazine* in 1972, and was so popular and well received that it was reprinted again in 1990.⁶⁸⁶ This classic feminist essay by Judy Syfers enumerates the enormous benefits of married life for men in the sarcastic monologue of an exhausted wife and mother:

I belong to the classification of people known as wives. I am a wife, and not altogether incidentally, I am a mother... It suddenly occurred to me that I, too, would like to have a wife. Why do I want a wife? I would like to go back to school, so that I can become economically independent, and support myself... And while I am going to school, I want a wife to take care of my children... I want a wife who will take care of my physical needs... I want a wife who cooks the meals,... I want a wife who will not bother me with rambling complaints... I want a wife who is sensitive to my sexual needs... My God, who wouldn't want a wife?

In her sardonic wit, the wife is able to shrewdly communicate the nature of the life that she so genuinely loathes — that of a slave!

⁶⁸⁶ Syfers, J. "Why I Want a Wife," *Ms. Magazine*, Spring 1972; "Why I Want a Wife," (*Man Ham Zan Mikhaham*), *Zanan*, Dec. 1999, No. 58, 44-45

“A Telephone Call,” a classic short story by American satirist Dorothy Parker (1893-1967), is the anxious monologue of a desperate single woman eagerly awaiting a telephone call from a man she has recently met.⁶⁸⁷ The sequence of events is typical for many hopeful single women: Woman meets man, man has a change of heart, and woman becomes restless while anxiously waiting for a call:

Please God, let him telephone me now. I won't ask anything else of you. It isn't very much to ask....

Her frenzied appeal to a higher power shows the extent of her despondency:

Please God. Please, please, please. If I don't think about it, maybe the telephone will ring. Sometimes it does that. Are you punishing me God because I have been bad?

The woman's scattered thoughts pervade her absurd mental tirade, in an incoherent monologue of a woman so emotionally insecure that she has given over all power to a man.

In 1994, feminist Julia T. Wood declared: “The question may not be whether you are a feminist, but what kind of feminist you are.”⁶⁸⁸ The publication of a diverse ensemble of women's literature is an ingenious strategy for targeting an audience burdened by societal constraints and in dire need of mentorship. This myriad of empowering feminist narratives immortalized in the voices of revered figures, elucidates the realm of gender socialization in a raw and emotionally charged chorus, annihilating a venomous ideology permeating the lives of all women.

⁶⁸⁷ “A Telephone Call” (*Tams-e Telefoni*), *Zanan*, March 2006, No. 130, 49-50; “Literary Wit Dies,” *New York Times*, June 8, 1967

⁶⁸⁸ Krolokke, C. & Sorensen, A.S. *Gender Communication Theories and Analysis: From Silence to Performance*. London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006, 15

By indirectly imploring the reader to reject and renegotiate an inferior status, the dominant rhetoric of *Zanan* takes an intermediary position between the subordinate and the superior. *Zanan*'s analysis of women's speech challenging historical oppression reveals the breadth of discriminatory practices in a way that creates intimacy between the author and the reader, while documenting a woman's innate right to intellectual, social, and moral autonomy. For a generation denied access to a forbidden realm, passionate reflections accumulated over centuries convey the versatile nature of a feminist ideology, commemorated in the pages of *Zanan* in a journey to eradicate the status quo. For nearly two decades, this liberating medium was employed by the nation's premier woman's publication as a means to renegotiate a life of confinement authenticated only by male-drive authority. Presenting the intellectual parameters of the western feminist prescription significantly narrows the area of apparent conflict between Islamic and secular agendas, and in turn provides supplementary ammunition for a youth culture determined to transgress beyond the imposed limitations. Reconciling the "old" with the "new" through a framework of texts that delineates the interconnection of multiple dimensions, provides an invaluable lesson demonstrating that patriarchy does not in fact discriminate among women. *Zanan*'s presentation of western feminist rhetoric reveals a harmonious compatibility between an indigenous Iranian construction and an expansive model reflecting Sherkat's personal philosophy. Intimate accounts, sealed in the wisdom of Virginia Woolf, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Simone de Beauvoir, produce a stunningly realistic depiction of manipulated "truths." Nancy Friday, Evelyn Reed, and Alice Walker's intellectual streams of consciousness further illustrate the depth of abuse and individual martyrdom in a disturbing portrayal of sexual and racial subjugation. The *mélange* of western childrearing and marital concepts countering the image of women as solely wives and mothers is interwoven with fictional anecdotes of flawed

lives in the portrait of a confined housewife who spirals into delirium, the miserable rants of a frustrated wife, the dramatic vignettes of a forlorn spouse, and the manic fixation of an unattached woman, to show that the verdict is an inflicted life sentence. The decisive strategy to augment the scope of feminist interventions into Iran is successful because the narrative format creates rapport, drawing the reader into an intangible yet parallel universe previously denigrated for its “immoral” standards. In numerous ways, *Zanan*’s assembly of leading mentors replicates an approach pioneered nearly six centuries earlier by *La Querelle des Femmes*, confirming the power of shared knowledge to enhance the consciousness of all women. Explicit assertions challenging the wrongful subordination of women and their onerous burden defined from birth, show the importance of communicating this tradition and familiarizing the audience with the cardinal themes in feminist genres. For adolescent women in particular, a triumphant symphony building on the platform of its predecessors provides a safe haven for amassing strength and insight through women’s lived experiences. Sociologist Françoise Lionnet states,

Literature, as a discursive practice that encodes and transmits as well as creates ideology, is a mediating force in society: It structures our sense of the world, since it allows the writer and reader to engage in a constructive rewriting of their social contexts.⁶⁸⁹

For 16 years, Sherkat, who openly “articulated her interest in receiving reviews and articles from the United States on sexuality and feminism,” intuitively choreographed this presentation, while maintaining her allegiance to the true spirit of Islam.⁶⁹⁰

In her first editorial, Sherkat defined her objective in the following way:

⁶⁸⁹ Lionnet, F. “Geographies of Pain: Captive Bodies and Violent Acts in the Fiction of Myriam Warner-Vieyra, Gayl Jones, and Bessie Head,” *Callaloo*, 16(1), Winter 1993, 132-152

⁶⁹⁰ Sedghi, H. 2007, 269

It is time now for the sage and the intellectuals caring for religion, in their contemplation of *fiq'h* and its edicts, to think more seriously about issues related to women, so that after centuries of the decline of Islam, the Muslim woman can rid herself of disorientation, distraction, and multiplicity of orientation [*chandgunegi*] toward her religion and at times even her God. This is to uncover the kind, rational, and progressive vision of religion in the tired souls of women, thereby substituting love for force, respect for fear, prayer for hypocrisy, and tranquility for anxiety.⁶⁹¹

In many ways, the groundwork for a comparable definition of “womanhood,” addressing the intellectual capacity of the western conception, had already been established by Ali Shariati, who intuitively predicted that an accelerated motion from the traditional model would lead into an “identity crisis” among the pious segment of the population.⁶⁹² The son of an Islamic scholar, Shariati, who earned a Ph.D. in Sociology from Sorbonne University, achieved instant popularity during the 1960s when his sermons attracted women and youth en masse. Inspired by the great existential philosophers, his “hybrid discourse” emphasizing a woman’s intellectual awakening was particularly alluring for young women from middle class traditional families, who were drawn to an approach that enabled them to maintain their allegiance to Islam.⁶⁹³ Dr. Shariati’s objection to disregarding female scholars like those at “Cambridge, the Sorbonne, or Harvard — women who have spent their lives in the archives studying historical, scientific, and religious texts,” would reverberate in the voices and language of women well into the revolutionary years.⁶⁹⁴

Although numerous authors including Sanam Vakili and Janet Afary have recognized Shariati’s contribution to the younger female generation of the 1960s and 1970s, they have minimized the impact of his rhetoric by concluding that he was in fact “addressing an audience

⁶⁹¹ Shahidian, H. 2002, 71

⁶⁹² Afary, J. 2009, 240

⁶⁹³ Vakili, S. 2011, 47, 70; Afary, J. 2009, 240-243

⁶⁹⁴ Afary, J. 2009, 241

that was ambivalent about the changing gender roles of the period.”⁶⁹⁵ While this supposition is meritorious in its overall assessment of a watershed in Iran’s history, the gradual penetration of his approach cannot be disregarded altogether. In fact, not surprisingly, Shahla Sherkat, Zahra Rahnavard, and Massoumeh Ebtekar were devotees of Dr. Shariati.⁶⁹⁶ Therefore, to minimize the impact of this ideological construction, given that the leading pioneers of the post-revolutionary women’s rights movement were supporters of Dr. Shariati, would be to underestimate the ripple effects of his work, which replicates the framework of the western paradigm.

In light of a transformed Iranian society — owing in part to the Pahlavis’ precipitous effort to furnish a conventional image of modern womanhood — the momentum created by the Islamization of a nation and an idealistic reformist agenda in the Khatami years, indisputably demonstrates that the power of a women’s rights objective remains strong. This is particularly true for a generation with no recollection of the autonomy once bestowed under the Pahlavis. Author Jane Howard maintains that regardless of such setbacks, “the genie is out of the bottle.”⁶⁹⁷ In the synthesis of a language developed by this enlightened expedition and the first and second waves of western development, *Zanan* has unequivocally demonstrated the plastic nature of the feminist movement. While Sherkat does not employ the concept of the plasticity of the movement, its implication for a generation of women who seem most amenable to western conventions is priceless. One of the youngest members of this movement, Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, substantiates this conclusion:

⁶⁹⁵ Vakili, S. 2011, 70; Afary, J. 2009, 244

⁶⁹⁶ Howard, J. 2002, 143; “Profile: Zahra Rahnavard,” *BBC News*, June 16, 2009; Bowden, Mark. *Guests of the Ayatollah: The Iranian Hostage Crisis: The First Battle in America’s War with Militant Islam*. NY: Grove Press, 2006, 161

⁶⁹⁷ Howard, J. 2002, 142-143

I don't know what it is like in the West, and you don't learn much about these issues in the universities. People here have to pursue information on their own. We have to learn independently.⁶⁹⁸

In many ways, this “indigenous” prescription is in sync with a post-modernist feminist perspective, which seeks to dissolve the numerous distinctions within the women’s movement by recognizing that each classification “highlights different areas of inquiry, [which] by [themselves] would draw an incomplete picture.”⁶⁹⁹ Shirin Ebadi believes “the beauty of the women’s movement [in Iran] is that it is spontaneous and self-made. It doesn’t have a leader, and as a result it cannot be defeated.”⁷⁰⁰ Mehrangiz Kar explains that prior to the reformist movement, feminism was seen as an “infatuation with modernity and western permissiveness.”⁷⁰¹ Sherkat’s role in rectifying this anomaly is frontline journalism at its best. The ability to empower a new generation of women to visualize an alternate self may be the light within the perceived “dark picture,” contributing to what is certain to become the future agenda of “feminism” in Iran. Author Hamideh Sedghi maintains that despite *Zanan*’s wrongful termination, “Sherkat’s influence remains potent, ... as she has made her mark; she has proven affirmatively that the revolution has failed women.”⁷⁰²

⁶⁹⁸ Interview with Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, *First Edition*, March 13, 2000

⁶⁹⁹ Kramer, L. *The Sociology of Gender: A Brief Introduction*. Third edition. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 13

⁷⁰⁰ Interview with Shirin Ebadi. “The Bitterness of Politics, the Sweetness of Peace” (*Talkhiy-e Siasat Shirini-ye Solh*), *Zanan*, Dec. 2003, No. 105, 6-3

⁷⁰¹ Kar, M. in Nouraie-Simone, F. 2005, 224-225

⁷⁰² Sedghi, H. 2007, 270

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has argued that although the Islamic revolution had an enormous impact on the overall status of women in Iran, the unanticipated consequences of modifications in the educational system made under the IRI led to the enormous growth of women's education and in turn contributed to a growing feminist movement. The Islamization of Iranian society, including compulsory veiling and the mandate for single-sex schooling at the pre-university level undoubtedly paved the way for daughters of traditional families to enter the academic mainstream in droves. Contributing to the evolution of women's consciousness was the presidency of Mohammad Khatami, a liberal cleric whose tenure in office enabled the infiltration of a variety of feminist publications to create a new atmosphere for women in Iran.

In 1923, a prophetic forethought by Clara Colliver Rice on the future of the Iranian woman hauntingly captured the essence of the current episode:

After spending so much time and thought on the Persian woman and her attitude to life in the past and present, it seems fitting that we should consider the future... For this, however, we have very little data to go upon; all we have to guide us is the present trend of thought and action, and for the rest, surmise... It is difficult to find many bright spots in the lives of Persian women... Their liberty of movement, of action, and of speech is curtailed... The majority have never thought of doing their bit for their country; they have not even seen any need for them except as the playthings or the drudges of men... In the prevailing social condition, ... they could not do anything unless [they were] helped by men. [But], many of Persia's women do not agree, for they know what the help of Persia's men is worth. For the present, separate work seems the only possible thing, but some of the women maintain and I agree with them, that their wisest plan is to go ahead and show what they can do. The day will come when the men will ask for their help.⁷⁰³

In deliberating on the event baptized by philosopher Michel Foucault (1928-1984) "as the first postmodern revolution of our time," Asef Bayat concludes: "The irony of Iran was that its

⁷⁰³ Rice, C.C. 1923, 269, 273, 274, 277

Islamic revolution emerged not out of a strong Islamic movement but because of the absence of one.”⁷⁰⁴

The election of reformist candidate Mohammad Khatami in May 1997 signaled what may have been a historical watershed. While on a multitude of levels it appears that the restoration of the Iranian nation to a traditional religious mentality has betrayed the revolution’s initial wave of optimism, it is essential to ask whether the reformist movement was the climactic stage of a revolutionary upheaval or a transient moment that has effectively been suppressed. Author Ali Ansari stipulates that although in principle Khatami’s election “began a new chapter in the political history of Iran, [as a] social phenomenon it was the culmination of a century of political agitation,” a juncture which for all intents and purposes “did not signal the end but the beginning of an intense struggle to define the meaning of the modern Iranian State.”⁷⁰⁵ This political unrest illuminates the conflict between “modernity” and “political Islam,” and highlights the “passing of a traditional society which includes greater rights for women [in the] questioning and challenging of religious authority.”⁷⁰⁶ This legacy, he continues, “remarkably risks being squandered if its social gains are not institutionalized, so that they become the norm rather than the exception.”⁷⁰⁷ This “displacement,” fueling a “paradigm shift” against the Islamist ideology, puts in relief the reality that confrontation between Iran and the West is inherently unavoidable. The Pahlavi regime’s efforts along these lines were, for better or worse, ultimately forsaken.

⁷⁰⁴ Bayat, A. *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007, 49, 51

⁷⁰⁵ Ansari, A.M. 2003, 249

⁷⁰⁶ Hashemi, N.A. “Islamic Fundamentalism and the Trauma of Modernization: Reflections on Religion and Radical Politics,” in Browers, M. & Kurzman, C. *An Islamic Reformation?* New York & London: Lexington Books, 2004, 164

⁷⁰⁷ Ansari, A.M. 2003, 251

Khatami's appraisal of the West as today's "predominant civilization" underscores the need to look at Western civilization and its notions of progress and advancement:

Indeed those who claim that adopting Western thinking and values is a necessary precondition of development are not misguided. And alongside Western thinking and wisdom, the Western temperament and ethic must also be adopted... [For while] we are by no means doomed to dissolve into modern civilization, we cannot ignore its many great scientific, social, and political achievements.⁷⁰⁸

However, despite his sermon advocating this all-important position, he concedes:

Do not expect me to provide a manifesto on this, for I admit my own mental incapacity before such a grand task... We must confess in all sincerity that life is a collective effort which cannot go forward except through cooperation... We need more open debate and thoughtful and sincere participation in the process of serious questioning and a more concerted effort in finding answers.⁷⁰⁹

Recent years have witnessed a discussion delineating analogies between Iran's religious ideology and rehabilitated theological conventions in Western nations. Historians have dissected such comparisons by diagnosing the manner in which modifications of established practices have been instrumental in preventing disintegration of traditional orthodoxy. Indeed, recognition of "tradition" as "the greatest obstacle to development" has prompted reflection on the philosophical creed of the visionary German priest Martin Luther (1483-1546), whose bold criticism of abuses by the Christian Church in his Ninety-Five Theses is a testament to man's ongoing quest to decipher the word of God.⁷¹⁰ The reformation analogy currently incorporated in discussions of the crisis at hand extends to reformer Abdolkarim Soroush, who has been referred

⁷⁰⁸ Khatami, M. *Islam, Liberty and Development*. Binghamton: NY: Global Academic Publishing, 1998, 4,5,37

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 34

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33-35; Bagchi, D. & Steinmetz, D., *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004

to as “the Martin Luther of Islam.”⁷¹¹ In a recent writing, Soroush expounds his “alternate belief” that the Koran was a “prophetic experience,” relegating compilation of the sacred text to a mortal seen as both “the subject and object of revelation”:

When you read the Koran you feel that a human being is speaking to you - the words, images, rules and regulations and the like are all coming from the human mind.⁷¹²

Such a credo not only exonerates God, but also frees man from strictly adhering to that which is traditionally considered to be an eternal covenant and the finite word of God. Soroush, like many radical theologians, shows acumen and foresight in challenging the antediluvian character of traditional dogma, daringly referred to by his counterpart Mohsen Kadivar as “the reign of political charlatanism in the name of Islam.”⁷¹³

While on one level this journey is unique to Iranian society, other historical moments in which atrocities committed under the alleged aegis of the Almighty have prompted transcendence over intolerance and the hegemony of the dominant order to alter and renew conceptions of deity. Take for example Friedrich Nietzsche’s (1844-1900) stunning yet contentious nineteenth century proclamation that “God is dead,” a most painful and even inconceivable declaration responding to the “collapse of transcendence.”⁷¹⁴ Despite its fleeting presence, this passionate polemic shook the traditional apparatus to the core and left an enduring

⁷¹¹ Wright, R. “An Iranian Luther Shakes the Foundations of Islam,” *Guardian*, Feb. 1, 1995; Wright R. “Islam and Liberal Democracy: Two Visions of Reformation,” *Journal of Democracy*, 7.2, 1996, 64-75

⁷¹² “Who Wrote the Koran?” *New York Times*, Dec. 5, 2008

⁷¹³ Interview with Mohsen Kadivar in the 2010 documentary, *The Green Wave*

⁷¹⁴ Fritzsche, P. *Nietzsche and the Death of God: Selected Writings*. Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007, 2; Lindberg, C. *The European Reformations*. 2nd edition. U.K.: Blackwell Publishing, 2004; Dillenberger, J. (ed.) *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings*. New York: Anchor Books, 1962

legacy, a legacy that was resurrected by leading theologians during the 1960s Death of God movement, and found consummation in the gospel of a postmodern liberation theology, which distinguished the organic nexus of spiritual and doctrinal views in which God is a historical process.⁷¹⁵ While the death of God was not implied in the literal sense, it fundamentally symbolized liberation from whatever fetters the mind and the spirit, much in the same manner that Christian reformists were able to “find new destiny by destroying the old faith.”⁷¹⁶

Author Nader Hashemi maintains: “To compare religious traditions is not to equate them... [But] the study of history would be meaningless unless we can draw upon relevant historical analogies to illuminate contemporary phenomena”⁷¹⁷ Sociologist and postmodern philosopher Jean François Lyotard (1924-1998) describes this as “a process of developing a new epistemology responding to new conditions of knowledge.”⁷¹⁸ This new epistemology conveys a powerful message for a divine order like that of Iran’s Islamic Republic intent on exploiting and sacrificing the sanctity of the Creator for the sole purpose of instilling its draconian ideology. The underlying message of a “God” hypothesis underscores “man is free,” indicating the

⁷¹⁵ Rubenstein, R. *After Auschwitz: History, Theology, and Contemporary Judaism*. 2nd edition. Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966, 293-306; Greenfield, T. *An Introduction to Radical Theology: The Death and Resurrection of God*. U.S. & Canada: O Books, 2006; Van Buren, P. *The Burden of Freedom: Americans and the God of Israel*. New York: Seabury Press, 1976; Altizer, T.J.J. & Hamilton, W. *Radical Theology and the Death of God*. U.S.: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966; Hamilton, W. *The New Essence of Christianity*. New York: Association Press, 1966; McCullough, L. (ed.) *The Call to Radical Theology: Thomas J.J. Altizer*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2012; Daly, M. *The Church of the Second Sex*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985; Daly, M. *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1973

⁷¹⁶ Kurzman, C. & Browsers, M. “Introduction: Comparing Reformations,” in Browsers & Kurzman (eds.) *An Islamic Reformation?* New York & London: Lexington Books, 2004, 6

⁷¹⁷ Hashemi, N. in Browsers & Kurzman (eds.), 2004, 161

⁷¹⁸ Kellner, D. “The Postmodern Turn: Problems and Prospects,” in Ritzer, G. (ed.) *Frontiers of Social Theory*, 1990, 263

necessity to redeem the originating stature of what Emile Durkheim considered to be “the most fundamental institution of human kind.”⁷¹⁹ Nietzsche’s proclamation of God’s death denotes a renewed sense of purpose:

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. Yet his shadow still looms. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: Who will wipe this blood off us?⁷²⁰

This reference to a seemingly blasphemous contention is not intended to denigrate Islam, but quite the contrary to honor the benevolent creator and preserve the path towards spiritual redemption, a vindication of sorts for those Iranian reformers accused of casting aspersions upon the authority of venerated scriptures. To resurrect this debate in light of the precarious state of Islam in Iran today, particularly where an apathetic generation is concerned, and where the final verdict between enlightened and traditional forces remains unresolved, is to herald a “responsible theology” and “a radical questioning of tradition; not [as a form of] negative rebellion, but [as part of that which] contains the seeds of affirmation of the esoteric tradition,” a passage by which prominent Death of God theologian Richard Rubenstein acknowledged the cultivation of a new language to redeem faith in humanity by altering a consciousness imputed to relics of the past.⁷²¹

Here we are reminded of Khatami’s assertion that Islam suffers from a “vacuum social theory.”⁷²² The postmodern turn of mind can provide a “theoretical bridge” between the past and present that can at least partially compensate for this void by invoking fluidity regarding fixed and absolute notions of deity. While Khatami accepts that “a Godless life is dark and narrow,” he

⁷¹⁹ Durkheim, E. 2008, 42-44

⁷²⁰ Nietzsche, F. *The Gay Science*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006, Section 125, 90-91

⁷²¹ Van Buren, P. 1976, 56; Rubenstein, R. 1966, 293-294

⁷²² Mohammad Khatami cited in Asef Bayat, 2007, 85

recognizes that “the limitations and relativity of all perspectives,” the “ultimate proof” of which lies in “continuous transformations at varying speeds all over history,” is in and of itself an important indication that “old interpretations do not suffice anymore.”⁷²³

A counterpart to a religious sensibility and the boundlessness of human evolution on all frontiers is the feminist discourse disclosing new realms within immutable doctrines. On the one hand this discourse is indebted to the Islamization of society, yet simultaneously it is nourished by social trends emanating from the path organically envisioned by an abandoned Pahlavi era. In contemplating a nebulous future and a fragile religious landscape reflected in a moral, social, and political retaliation, Mehrangiz Kar is confident “that the new generation raised by cooperating religious and non-sectarian women will be able to dismiss the superstitions and patriarchal traditions... and not bend to the regime’s restrictions against individual freedom.”⁷²⁴ This phenomenon in and of itself is a great indicator that with the emergence of new institutions, religion no longer constitutes the predominant unifying force.

Consider the following statement by Abdolkarim Soroush:

The very fact that it is now accepted that a woman’s presence in society doesn’t violate her womanhood and Muslimhood is due to the immense changes that have occurred in the realms of thought and practice; these have also found their way into our religious consciousness and our society. Women’s presence in society is now as natural and logical as their absence once was. This tells us the extent to which, in our understanding and practice of religion, we act unconsciously and involuntarily; this isn’t to be taken negatively but in the sense that we are guided by elements that aren’t in our control. They do work, shape our lives, our mind, our language.⁷²⁵

⁷²³ Khatami, M. 1998, 34, 84, 93

⁷²⁴ Kar, M. 2001, 194-196

⁷²⁵ Amin, C.M., 2002, 246

Nevertheless, one needs to pay close attention to the cautionary observation of postmodern theologian Paul Van Buren (1924-1998):

The problem is not simply that of women having slipped into a role of passivity, subservience and dependence from which they have to free themselves. The problem is that they have to live in a world with men who have become enslaved to roles of domination.⁷²⁶

Simone de Beauvoir's contention against religious rhetoric reducing "woman" to the "second sex" illuminates the possibility of altogether abandoning one's religious allegiance:

It is easier for me to think of a world without a creator, than a creator loaded with all the contradictions in the world.⁷²⁷

In the same light, Bibi Khanum Astarabadi courageously said of a cruel and unjust sentence handed down by the creator: "Is this God's compassionate decree?"⁷²⁸

A tactic against the stifling limitations of the past compels the believer to inquire what kind of God views his own creation as inferior? And how is it possible to understand that this subordinate creature has been entrusted with the most fundamental task: That of procreation?

I will conclude by predicting the challenges to the doctrine of clerical rule during an era in which religion in the proverbial sense no longer constitutes the "opiate of the masses."⁷²⁹

Amidst the nuances reflecting Islam in transition and the erosion of religiosity as a moral

⁷²⁶ Van Buren, P., 1976, 49

⁷²⁷ Haynes, S.R. & Roth, J.K. "Introduction: The Holocaust and the Death of God — Encounter or Reencounter?" in *The Death of God Movement and the Holocaust: Radical Theology Encounters the Shoah*. Westport, CT & London: Greenwood Press, 1999, 4

⁷²⁸ Javadi, H. & Floor, W. 2010, 112

⁷²⁹ An abridged version to Karl Marx's infamous proverb, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the masses." Marx, K. "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," first published in "*Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, 7 & 10, February 1844

compass, it becomes relevant not to lose sight of the fact that Iranian women were profoundly influential in bringing about the triumph of this regime, and it is therefore a strong likelihood that they, along with a querulous youth, will be an instrumental force in accomplishing its dissolution. Asef Bayat identifies “the art of persistent presence... and an active citizenry as the most crucial elements in democratic reform.”⁷³⁰ In the breakdown of morality and humanity, the wisdom of Nietzsche once again offers hope in forecasting that “the dice will be rolled again.”⁷³¹

It would be most unrealistic to expect women, who have made such significant strides in their personal emancipation and in the evolution of their consciousness to unconditionally accept defeat and surrender the foundational principles of what constitutes a “home-grown feminist movement.”⁷³² In this respect while “a few drops of water do not make a monsoon, they presage it.”⁷³³ In the pursuit of a renewal of Islam and the healing of self-inflicted wounds, the retort of Mohammad Khatami against the tide of religious suffocation provides guidance: “If religion goes against freedom, it will lose.”⁷³⁴ Iranian women have demonstrated that religion, like all other categories, must evolve in time and space, and dispense with its absolutist tendencies in order to ensure its propagation and to maintain the integrity of its presence. However, until the human mind is able to liberate itself from the ties that bind, freedom is merely an illusion. Janet Afary’s sobering conclusion that visions and aspirations of an Islamic utopia have effectively

⁷³⁰ Bayat, A. 2007, 201-202

⁷³¹ Fritzsche, P. 2007, 34

⁷³² Author and feminist Ziba Mir-Hosseini identifies Shahla Sherkat as a key figure in a “home-grown feminist movement.” Cited in Howard, J. 2002, 145

⁷³³ Barker, A.T. *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*. Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1992, Letter number 66, p. 83. The Mahatmas were the direct instructors of Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891), controversial scholar and founder of Theosophy (“divine wisdom”), whose reigning philosophy was “there is no religion higher than the truth.”

⁷³⁴ Khatami’s oft-quoted claim, cited in *The Intellectual Bases of the Khatami Phenomenon in Iran*. New York: Middle East Institute, Columbia University, 1999, 7

been shelved, brings forth a simple yet poignant reminder that in religious life “every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness.”⁷³⁵

⁷³⁵ Afary, J. 2009, 322; Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968)

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