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GENDER RELATIONS II

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ii. IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC

Gender relations in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) are contentious and volatile. It is difficult to provide a single, comprehensive explanation of the ideology of gender in Islam or the Islamic Republic. Even in religious circles, interpretations of "women in Islam" have been influenced by an individual's specific historical circumstances and considerations as well as by koranic axioms and Hadith narratives. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, for example, had reacted vehemently in 1961 to the enfranchisement of women. Yet in 1979, he accepted the political role of women and solicited their vote for establishing an Islamic republic. In both cases, his ideas were based on Islamic principles: different times and circumstances, however, made conflicting interpretations possible. In recent years, Muslim reformists have similarly attempted to revise Islamic discourse in response to internal societal changes, political exigencies, and international opinion (for a detailed account of the debate on gender relations among the *ʿolamāʾ* see Mirhosseini).

One must read the gender ideologies of the Islamic fundamentalists (*oṣūlgarā*) in Persia not as reflections of Persian "popular beliefs," but as delineating parameters of the Islamists' aspirations and gender policies in the IRI. These articulations may reflect some social norms, but even among Islamic

fundamentalists it is hard to find total conformity. The legal implications of many Islamist concepts potentially affect all women, yet many families do not adhere to them in actual practice.

The IRI came into being following decades of changes in gender relations. Albeit limited, women's role in culture, politics, and the economy had increased steadily in the years preceding the revolution. Men's power within the family was curbed, especially in terms of rights to polygamy and arbitrary divorce. New opportunities for interaction between the sexes emerged, particularly among the middle- and upper-class urban youth. Gradual reforms had created channels for expressions of sexuality prohibited or severely restricted in earlier periods. In reaction to this, the ideology and policies of the IRI have generally sought to reinforce the authority of the husband within the family, to reinstate the gender prerogatives of men that had been compromised under the Pahlavis, and to confine women primarily to the private roles of wife and mother. However, the social advances made by women in pre-revolutionary Persia made it impossible for women to be again confined strictly to the home. Though successful in passing some legislation injurious to women, Islamic fundamentalists have been forced to accept at least a limited presence of women in public life, so long as this did not compromise their familial duties.

Pressure to comply with the moral codes of Islamic fundamentalists continues in varying degrees in the IRI, but without always yielding the desired results. More than two decades after their triumph in the Islamic revolution in Persia, the Islamic fundamentalists have not been able to suppress completely the aspirations, expectations, and lifestyles of women that emerged prior to the revolution. Resistance has also forced the regime to modify some policies. In education, for instance, the IRI had to revise its initial banning of numerous courses of study for women. In employment, the regime had to compromise women's exclusion from holding judgeships and accept them into this position—in a limited capacity, of course. Although unilateral divorce rights for men were restored, it has also been possible for marriage contracts to list stipulations under which a woman could initiate divorce. In many areas officials have been forced to justify their praxis through reinterpretations that acknowledged discriminations and pledged change. In short, a "dual society" has emerged—i.e., an idealized, official one representing the views of the ruling clergy, which they would like to make obligatory for men and women; and a de facto, personal one wherein women and men make their own

arrangements, away from the watchful eyes of government officials.

Gender relations in post-revolutionary Iran must be understood in terms of this dialectic between Islamic fundamentalists who seek to reinforce the authority of men and confine women to domestic roles, and the individual women and men who attempt to safeguard and expand their rights. To this complex dynamic, one must also add the factor of factional politics in the IRI. While fundamentalists propose strict regulation of gender relations, reformists accept the incompatibility of such regulations with contemporary life. The latter contend that to save the Islamic system, the economic and political presence of women must be increased, the prerogatives of men within the family must be curbed, and the strict policing of gender relations avoided. The reformists have relayed, in a sense, popular concerns to IRI leaders. While reflecting these demands, they have also benefited from popular support. A prime example is the 1997 presidential election. The candidate most favored by the clerical leadership was ʿAlī-Akbar Nāṭeq Nūrī, a member of the clergy who was then speaker of the Majles. His campaign promised tougher policies on gender relations. His opponent, Moḥammad Ḵatamī, promised moderation and less social control over women. Ḵatamī's promises helped win him an overwhelming majority, some 70 percent of the votes) a considerable portion belonging to women.

Despite these vicissitudes, the Islamic interpretation of gender cannot be ignored. Religious imperatives constitute a fundamental concern of all Islamists—fundamentalists and reformists alike. Several common threads—e.g., the role of women in the family, natural foundations of sex roles, and the assumption that women need protection—link diverse articulations. To accomplish these aims, fundamentalists propose seclusion; reformers, a "safe," regulated social space for women. Women have continued, at any event, to resist restrictions on their perceived rights.

Family law and theory. Key to the fundamentalist gender ideology is a teleological universe. God has predefined a perfect order. People are born sexed and gendered. They have responsibilities corresponding to their nature. Being a Muslim means understanding one's role and living accordingly. A Muslim woman recognizes her function, which in turn defines her identity (Ommī 1987; Javādī Āmolī, 1993). The IRI acknowledges man as head of the family. In return for his wife's submission, he is responsible for her expenses (*nafaqa*). "Every morning, the woman is entitled to the *nafaqa* of that day, but only to the amount she spends that day" (Khomeini quoted in Maʿsūmī, 1998,

37). She must reside in his house unless the husband grants her a choice, or unless living together poses a threat to her well-being. *Tamkīn,* a woman's duty to her husband, in its general sense, means cohabitation. A woman is *nāšeza* (recalcitrant, persistently disobedient) when she does not conform to the requirements of *tamkīn* (Maʿsūmī, 1998, p. 90). The husband can refuse to provide for his *nāšeza* wife. A man will be *nāšez* if he does not pay his wife's *nafaqa*. But her only recourse is to advise or sue him. She does not have his rights to ignore (*qahr*) or beat the spouse (ibid, p. 95). In less extreme interpretations, the man is portrayed as a benevolent boss, punishing or charitable as he sees fit (Ḥojjat-al- Eslām Hāšemīnežād, quoted in *Zan-e rūz,* 19 January 1997).

A husband can prevent his wife from working if the "nature" of her profession is injurious to family honor. Provided both parties agree, a woman *can* stipulate her right to work in the marriage contract. If the husband reneges, however, her only recourse is to seek a divorce. The wife is supposed to obtain permission from her husband, verifiable by IRI authorities, in order to travel abroad. Within Iran, an unaccompanied woman must obtain authorization from local officials to stay in a hotel. Those authorities have then the right to control her movements (Kār 1999a, p. 60).

A man inherits one fourth of his wife's wealth if she has children by him, and half if she does not. Partners in a temporary marriage receive no inheritance. In polygamous marriages, wives must divide among themselves the allotted inheritance which can never exceed their designated fourth or eighth (Markaz-e mošārekat-e zanān, pp. 30-31).

A Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim under any circumstances. A man, however, can marry a non-Iranian woman, and only under special circumstances need seek official permission. Offspring of a marriage between a Persian and non-Persian are treated according to the laws of the father's homeland.

Temporary marriage (*motʿa* or *ṣīḡa)* is legal, as is polygamy when the man is certain he can treat his wives equally (something now decided by an Islamic court). A woman can object to her husband's remarriage and the court might uphold her protest, but only if she can prove him incapable of caring for more than one family.

Men have certain rights to divorce that are not available to women. Upon

divorce, he must pay the *mahr* (a bridal gift stipulated in the marriage contract), her *nafaqa* for three months and 10 days, and, should the court decide, payment for prior housework. Women may seek divorce under conditions of *ʿosr wa harj* (penury and hardship), so that living with the husband is absolutely unbearable. Proving that, however, is extremely difficult. Many women forego economic compensation to buy a husband's approval for a divorce (Kār, 1999b, p. 343).

In 1986 and 1992, the Majles amended the divorce law (Markaz-e mošārekat-e zanān, pp. 58-60). But revisions merely changed procedures without limiting men's rights. If the wife objects to divorce, the husband must take his case to the Special Civil Tribunal (Dādgāh-e madanī-e ḵāṣṣ). The Tribunal attempts to reconcile the couple. Should this process fail, the Tribunal issues permission to terminate marriage (see family law iii).

The mother has custody (*ḥeżāna*) of her son until the age of two and of her daughter until seven unless she forfeits custody due to remarriage or insanity. From the child's birth, the father has legal guardianship and obtains custody when the mother's term expires. In the father's absence, the paternal grandfather receives guardianship. Guardians can bequeath their guardianship, even when the mother is still alive (see children iv).

Domestic Work. Though the role of women in the home has always been revered in Persia, under the Islamic Republic it has been accentuated and ruled sacrosanct. Government officials emphasize the primacy of being a wife and mother among the responsibilities of women. Ayatollah Khomeini placed mothering above all other female duties. Conservative Islamist magazines warn readers that crises befall families that inadequately supervise their children and that working mothers might fall short in this regard. Many women, however, have no choice between domestic and other work; they must do both. Of Persian women employed in the mid-1980s, 62 percent were between 15 and 35 years old; 60 percent of this cohort were married, thus working inside *and* outside the house (Kār, 1994, p. 142). According to a survey of 200 married female nurses in Tehran, housework claims 91 to 297 hours of their time monthly. On average, these women spend 178 monthly hours doing housework, in addition to their 140-hour workload (*Zan-e rūz*, 27 October 1996, p. 13; Šāmbayātī). A woman may seek remuneration for household tasks outside her wifely duties, undertaken at the husband's "order" (*dastūr*). However, this requirement, and the lack of procedures determining her labor value, make observers skeptical about the actual benefits to women under this

law (*Zan-e rūz,* 18 December 1993, p. 19). It should be noted that while a man's employment is a source of pride, a women's employment "creates an artificial feeling of not paying adequate attention to the responsibilities of a wife and mother" (Šāmbayātī, p. 93).

Education. The success of the Islamic Republic of Iran's gender policies depend on the availability of female personnel to provide services for women. Government educational policy has been shaped accordingly, reflecting two fundamental Islamic assumptions: the natural differences between the sexes and women's primary role as wives and mothers. In 1982, for instance, the Ministry of Education introduced the *Kād* (*kār o dāneš*, "work and knowledge") Plan as a step toward self-sufficiency. According to the *Kād* Plan, students were to be sent to various technical centers one day a week to receive hands-on training. Yet training for female students was restricted to their high schools and limited to such fields as hygiene, first aid, sewing, cooking, and knitting (*Zan-e rūz*, 16 March 1984, p. 15).

Based on data projected for the year 2000 (UNESCO, 1999), illiteracy is 30 percent for females 15 or over and 16.3 percent for males of the same age. Females aged 15 through 24 years have only an 8.2 percent illiteracy rate, a clear indication of increased availability of education. Illiteracy for boys of the same age is 3.7 percent.

Moderate but steady changes can be traced in female education at both pre-college and college levels. Female enrollment in primary schools increased from 38 percent in 1975 to 47 percent in 1996. Secondary enrollment rose from 36 percent (1975) to 46 percent (1996). At the tertiary level, enrollment remained between 28 percent in 1975 and 27 in 1990, but rose to 36 percent in 1996 (UNESCO, 1988, 1998). The closing of coeducational schools negatively affected women's technical education. In 1997, only 31 of 540 technical schools were for girls. Females lacked access to 73 agricultural schools (Iran Statistical Center, 1997).

Vast differences exist between urban and rural education and among provinces for both males and females (see education vii, xxiv, xxvi). The higher the education level, the lower the rural access. Opportunities are unavailable for rural girls to pursue technical and agricultural education or technical and rural teachers' training programs unless they live near a city with educational facilities. But the gap between boys' and girls' education in rural primary schools has narrowed since the revolution. Considering the

shortages of rural education facilities, the government allowed mixed primary schools (Shahidian, 1991; Šādīṭalab, 1995) Access for women to mathematical and technical sciences, experimental sciences, law, and management at the college level was similarly curbed in the 1980s. Restrictions in most fields were eased in the late 1980s and early 1990s as the result of a campaign launched by the reformist faction (Jalālī Nāʾīnī, 1994, pp. 27-43; Kār, 1999b, pp. 213-17).

The majority of women in higher education are enrolled in BA/BS and postgraduate programs, while men constitute a higher percentage in programs offering a technical certificate (*kār-šenāsī*). Medical sciences attract a high proportion of women, who by the mid-1990s constituted over half of medical school enrollment (UNESCO, 1998). The government seeks to create sufficient skilled female health care staff to provide services to women.

Males with at least a bachelor degree are eligible for study abroad. Women applying for such scholarships must be accompanied by their husbands (Markaz-e mošārekat-e zanān, 1999, p. 310). Under equal conditions, married men have priority.

Employment. The Islamic Republic of Iran initially aimed to confine women to the private sphere so that they could attend to their duties as wives and mothers. Asserting this objective in 1979 evoked a strong reaction. Since then, though women's employment has significantly declined compared to the pre-revolutionary period, the government found resistance too strong to confine them to the private sector. As in many other areas, in employment, too, rights and privileges for women gained under the Pahlavis (e.g., increasing female employment and education) have stunted the implementation of many exclusionary policies of the IRI. In addition, economic hardship under the IRI has left no choice for many families other than reliance upon two incomes (and often, more than one job per partner). These considerations notwithstanding, the Islamic sexual division of labor has taken its toll on women's employment.

Women work only in areas the IRI deems appropriate (e.g., midwifery, medicine, teaching), compatible with their physical and psychological capacities (e.g., laboratory sciences, electronic engineering, pharmaceutical, and social work), or in fields where gender does not affect performance (e.g., unskilled work in industries or services). Women's work, however, must not interfere with their familial role (Markaz-e mošārekat-e zanān, 1999, p. 343-46).

In general, conditions for the employment of women in the IRI have not been favorable declining from 12.9 percent active in 1976 to 8.9 percent in 1986 and 8.7 percent in 1991 (but rebounding in recent years to 14.4 percent). The rate of unemployment for women was at the very high level of 24.4 percent in 1991. It must be remembered, however, that students and housewives are counted as economically inactive; thus the rate of unemployment for women has been affected by two other important trends, declines in the rates of marriage and the pursuit of education, which have the effect of pushing women into a labor market incapable of absorbing them (see employment).

The IRI prefers skilled and educated to non-skilled female labor. In 1996, while women constituted about 40 percent of the “professionals” category, they accounted for only 1.15 percent of plant and machine operators, assemblers, and drivers, and 4.35 percent of unskilled workers (Iran Statistical Center, 1999, p. 102). Women wage-laborers are mostly selected from the unmarried pool, to reduce production costs such as childcare expenses. Factories often lack daycare facilities (Moḥsenī, 1998).

Iran’s economy is divided into private, public, and cooperative sectors. In 1996, over half of employed women worked in the private sector. This percentage included self-employed as well as unpaid family female workers, which jointly composed 73 percent of women’s employment in this sector. Women constituted 3 percent of employers and 7.64 percent of wage and salary earners. The public sector employed about 40 percent of all female employees; the cooperative, only .5 percent (Iran Statistical Center 1999, p. 103).

A supposed alternative to public employment, women’s cooperatives require limited or no contact between the sexes and only meager capital. The government urges women to use their homes as co-op centers, so as to work without neglecting domestic tasks (Ḵodāparast; Šaʿbānī, 1996). By 1999, 11 percent of all cooperatives were women’s. Women still face economic hurdles, restricted capital especially. The Islamic Republic recommends women’s co-ops have only a small percentage of total capital for loans. Yet most banks refuse even to that extent (Moqaddam).

The government is the biggest single employer of women. Less than one-third of all full-time, permanent government employees are women. The ministries of Education, Culture and Higher Education, and Health and Medical Education rank among the largest employers of women among the

government agencies.

Women are primarily concentrated in education (44.1 percent), and health and social work (39.3 percent). Few work in construction, the restaurant and hotel business, wholesale and retail trade, and mining (from less than 1 percent to 4.2 percent). 23 percent of employees in manufacturing are female (Iran Statistical Center, 1999, p. 94). Skilled female labor in the industrial sector has been slight.

In the mid-1980s, preoccupied with domesticity, the government offered women part-time employment options. Women could reduce their working time one-fourth and accept reduced salary and benefits, contingent on employers' agreement. That contingency effectively bars some women from this option. In addition to the financial burden, women lose rights to many fringe benefits, and their promotion time—even their position—is jeopardized. Furthermore, the availability of part-time employment to females reinforces fundamentalist attitudes that women take employment lightly (*Zan-e rūz*,30 November 1991, p. 9).

Sexuality and marriage. Gender and sexuality are interconnected in the fundamentalist outlook. Sexuality not only renders reproduction possible, but also becomes a means for men and women to play their gender roles, securing well-being for family and society. Marriage is the only proper context for sexual gratification (Javādī Āmolī, 1993). That women, like men, are sexual beings is accepted in the traditional Islamist view, but it is equally regarded as axiomatic that the sexual instinct remains dormant in "good women" until marriage. Women are supposed to have two mutually exclusive sexual selves. One, uninhibited and pleasing; the other, demure, practically non-existent. The sexual and asexual woman live in one, but when the sexual is present (i.e., with the husband), the asexual should depart. Conversely, woman should show no sign of sexuality before marriage or in public. Restricting sex to marriage necessitates strict moral codes. Ideologues expend energy delineating the whos, whens, wheres, and whys of legitimate sexual activity. Deviation is tantamount to anarchy. Any "premature" sexual awakening, i.e., before marriage, is thought to lead to anguish and moral degeneracy (Safarī, pp. 36-38).

One result of this system of values has been that young people are encouraged to marry soon after puberty (Fażl-Allāh, 1998; Kāẓemī Ḵalḵālī, 1991, pp. 109-18). The legal age for marriage is 9 for females and 18 for males. Since

1979, the number of married girls between 10 and 14 has considerably increased. Nearly 50 percent of all women marry before 19 (Šādīṭalab, p. 9). Most authors, however, recognize that economic factors such as high unemployment and skyrocketing inflation seldom make early marriage practical.

In this context, however, the question of temporary marriage (*moʿta*) has attracted much attention. Former President ʿAlī-Akbar Hāšemī Rafsanjānī, for example, encouraged youth to use temporary marriage as a safe, sanctioned zone for interaction between the sexes.

Though temporary marriage for sexual pleasure in exchange for remuneration is legal, sexual liaisons without religious sanction is not. Women engaging in illegitimate sex—either for money or due to "not adhering to moral and social values" (Markaz-e mošārekat-e zanān, 1999, p. 261)—are sent to rehabilitation centers.

Veiling. The veil (*ḥejāb*, q.v.) is best understood in the context of modesty, applicable equally to both sexes. "A Muslim wears clothes not to present, but to conceal the body" (Ḥaddād ʿĀdel, p. 40). However, women must care about concealment more than men because men respond more to visual stimulation (ibid, p. 63).

Legal ambiguity in the IRI about the requirements of "proper *ḥejāb*" and the means of enforcing it creates opportunities for individuals to negotiate proper behavior (Shirazi-Mahajan, 1995), but it also makes women vulnerable. What is acceptable one day might be outlawed the next, and the line between acceptable and unacceptable may be crossed, in the eyes of some, by the slippage of a scarf or an overbold use of lipstick. The IRI often exploits this uncertainty, especially during politico- economic crises.

Gender-based domestic violence. Though family violence is officially condemned, little is known about its actual extent (ʿAbbāsqolīzāda, p. 141). Violence against women in this regard is thought to stem from structural inequities between the sexes (Eʿzāzī). The disproportionate power of men in terms of rights to divorce and custody limits women's freedom to leave abusive relationships. The concept that men rule the household justifies spousal abuse, "jeopardizing thousands of women due to men's use of instruments of power and violence" (*Ḥoqūq-e zanān* no. 2, May-June 1998, p. 27).

According to Ayatollah Aḥmad Beheštī (*Zan-e rūz*, no. 40-41, 5 October 1985), a husband's fair supervision guarantees a happy marital life. Beheštī instructs the husband that authority makes him ultimately responsible for his wife's morality. Repeating the Qurʾān's three-step "remedy" for a wife's insubordination (advice, refusing to share a bed, and beating), Beheštī recalls the Prophet's dicta, "do not beat her unless the beating does not injure; do not leave her unless inside the house." Ayatollah Moḥammad Bojnūrdī has attempted to define the limits of the right to "beat" the wife: Beating is vengeful, and Islam only approves of chastisement, *taʿzīr*, which can only be administered by the proper authorities. Thus if a husband cannot persuade his wife to comply with his wishes, he must go to court to determine her guilt and any consequent physical or financial punishment (*Ḥoqūq-e zanān* no. 3, June-July 1998, p. 9).

Opposition to gender policies. Secular and Muslim women have challenged various aspects of the gender policies of the IRI. Muslim reformists, known as "Islamic feminists," express themselves in such journals as *Payām-e zan* (Woman's message), *Zanān* (Women), *Farzāna* (Sage), and *Ḥoqūq-e zanān* (Women's rights). "Islamic feminism," however, is an imprecise term. Like other movements, "Islamic feminism" unites a number of convergent streams. Some, led by token women in the higher echelons of the Islamic government, fundamentally agree with the Islamic Republic of Iran's gender policies, but recommend modifications to appease national and, especially, international critics (Aḥmadī Ḵorāsānī, 1999a). Others, more critical, offer new interpretations of Islam to save it from male-oriented "misconceptions." And there are others still, non-religious thinkers trapped in the confines of an Islamic state, who seek some way to express their criticisms. Among these are lawyers who must work within the existing legal system or intellectuals who, to avoid censorship and censure, shroud their ideas in an Islamic discourse, or at least a discourse that does not overtly and fundamentally challenge Islam (Shahidian, 1998b). They share an objective: to reform IRI gender policies, especially in education, employment, politics, and law. Most acknowledge distinctions between sexes, but contend that inequalities derive from society and thus denounce biological justifications for discrimination.

It is difficult to assess the influence of "Islamic feminists" in Persian politics in the absence of empirical evidence. But "Islamic feminists" and the "moderate" or "reformist" faction of the IRI have been mutually supportive (see, e.g., *Zanān* no. 43; Saʿīdzāda, 1998). Such a relationship has undermined the

autonomy of "Islamic feminists," making women's gains contingent upon the regime's internal conflicts. For example, after the election of President Ḵaṭamī in 1997, the "conservative" Majles representatives passed laws to segregate hospital services, to forbid using pictures of women on the front pages of magazines, and to curtail discussions of women's rights outside the *šarīʿa*. Some women activists, like Šīrīn ʿEbādī and Mehrangīz Kār, have received death threats; both, as well as Šahlā Lāhījī, an active publisher, were imprisoned in spring 2000; and Moḥsen Saʿīdzāda, a clergyman authoring revisionist interpretations, has been defrocked.

Secular women have had still harder struggles. Secular feminists as well as female nationalists and leftists, opposed the IRI from early on (Shahidian, 1997; Moghissi; Tabari and Yeganeh, 1982). With increasing suppression, secular women ceased organized activism. Located outside accepted political frameworks, deprived of many resources available to reformists, wary of persecution, and hindered by theoretical uncertainties, they have continued intervening through informal friendships, research circles, formal and informal associations, cyber communities, and contacts abroad. Though resilient, these individuals are fragile; their effectiveness must not be overemphasized. They are isolated and cliquish, and thus of limited efficacy.

Repudiating the claim that "the Muslim woman is the Persian woman," secular writers have exhumed the past, revived censored or forgotten figures, and explored various experiences of Persian and non-Persian women. Particular attention has been paid to narratives of working women. The concept of a primarily domestic role for women has been criticized for restricting their financial independence and limiting their opportunities outside the home (Keshāvarz; Aḥmadī Ḵorāsānī, 1997; Shahidian, 1998a). Clashes between traditionalism and modernity in this regard have been frequently noted (Samīʿī, 1999; Najmabadi, 1998; ʿEbādī, 1999; Aḥmadī Ḵorāsānī, 1999b; Shahidian, 1999). Women have been warned of the negative socio-political implications of attempts to marginalize them, but the discontent it causes also has the potential to mobilize them in the vanguard of those struggling for humanism, democracy, and internationalism (Najm ʿErāqī).

The emergence of Ḵaṭamī in the 1997 elections tended to sharpen the divisions between the secular feminists seeking an alternative to the IRI from the Islamic reformers searching for a remedy within the existing framework of the state (Shahidian, forthcoming). Ḵaṭamī supporters opt for greater freedom and equity for women through legal complaints that effect "incremental

progress" (Aḥmadī Ḵorāsānī, in *Zanān* no. 51, p. 4). Others criticize this orientation, holding that such limited demands reinforce conservatism and that supporting any faction of the government only jeopardizes women's autonomy. These critics welcome working with Muslim women on specific issues, but see a fundamental difference between their objectives and those of the various reformists.

Political Participation. Women have made incremental gains in terms of their political role under the IRI. the right of women to vote was not restricted, and indeed government officials frequently exhort Muslim women to participate in politics *as a religious duty*. This tends to legitimate their political activity, but the subordination this political role to their domestic responsibilities remains emphasized. Of course, women who advocate opposition to policies of the IRI are often condemned for crossing social and moral boundaries. Thus, the women who demonstrated in March 1979 against compulsory veiling were likened to prostitutes (e.g., *Eṭṭelāʿāt*, 6 July 1980).

Since a woman is constitutionally ineligible to serve as *walī-e faqīh* (the supreme religious leader), a man will always overshadow the political life of women in the IRI. In practice, men have also had a hold over the presidency. Several women have applied to run for president, but as of this writing all such applications had been rejected.

Women are absent at the highest levels of government. Only 11 of 290 deputies in the Sixth Majles were women. The highest political position held thus far by a woman is Vice-Presidency for Environmental Affairs. There are now three women presidential advisors and one university president; few other women have been appointed to directorships of governmental offices.

In state-related politics, rank-and-file women have gained experience and claim more prominent positions. In 1999, 2 percent of municipal candidates were women; 297 in urban areas and 484 in rural areas were elected (*Zanān*, no. 51, March 1999, p. 65).

There are over 90 ostensibly non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for women. A bureau within the president's office, essentially a control agency of the IRI, was established to supervise them (Jalālī Nāʾīnī). The overwhelming majority of NGOs are in fact built from the top.

The IRI has mobilized women to promote its political agenda. Women

employed by various control agencies such as the Zaynab Sisters roam the streets checking for *ḥejāb* compliance. During the war with Iraq, Islamist women garnered material and spiritual support. They sewed, prepared meals, collected financial assistance, and promoted the war.

Conclusion. Under the Pahlavis, traditional and non-traditional models of gender relations co-existed, with varying degrees of acceptability. After the revolution, many aspects of non-traditional gender relations were deemed counter-revolutionary and restrictive measures were enforced. Post-revolutionary developments also sharpened the conflict between rigidly defined Islamic norms and values and the constantly changing lifestyles of modern society. Segregated public spaces have actually tended to afford women, especially from traditional families, the opportunity to utilize cultural resources (e.g., art or computer classes, sport centers, education, television programs, and videos) that might otherwise be inaccessible to them. These resources expose young people to different lifestyles and encourage them to pursue goals that are not compatible with the views of Islamic fundamentalists. Living amidst multiple lifestyle choices thus breeds doubt about tradition and long-held values, and ceaselessly intertwines customary and innovative practices. Local and global interweave so that cultural "authenticity" and "purity" become impossible.

Two contradictory gender patterns have thus emerged in the IRI. The traditional model, existing prior to the revolution, has gained considerable power after the rise of the IRI. The other, non-traditional model, also deriving from the pre-Revolutionary era, has since been significantly reshaped, to become at once more vulnerable and more resilient. Politically suspect, it is predominantly clandestine, becoming visible on occasions, but only at the risk of liability. Nonetheless, as new social spaces become available to young women, especially among the lower social classes, they gain more opportunities to question established norms and vie for alternative living arrangements. Public parks, for instance, enhance interactions between the sexes. College life offers young people, especially young women, less parental control over daily life.

Many fundamentalist concerns about such issues as marriage, sexual morality, and women's chastity do indeed reflect the sentiments of many Persians. Two decades of constant exposure to Islamic propaganda has also inevitably affected the attitudes of ordinary people, either reinforcing old beliefs or increasing acceptance of fundamentalist assumptions. Nonetheless, many

individuals, particularly among the urban educated middle and upper classes, find Islamic fundamentalists "too extreme," "dogmatic," *ommol* (antiquated), and *sonnatī* (traditionalist). The tension between these positions has profound implications for gender politics in the IRI. The space between them creates an arena for the expression of gender alternatives; makes visible the diversity of women's roles, experiences, and identities; and legitimates their concerns and grievances.

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