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## About This Issue

On May 12-13, 1990, Iranian Women's Studies Foundation held its first annual conference in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The conference was co-sponsored by the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University. Nimeye Digar is pleased to publish the papers presented in this conference. We hope this to be the first collaborative effort between our journal and Iranian Women's Studies Foundation. The Foundation is holding its second annual conference on May 24-26, 1991 (Cambridge, MA.).

We have asked authors of articles to provide us with brief summaries of their papers in English which we here publish. Golnaz Amin Ladjevardi has translated the founding statement of the Foundation and the seminar program.

## بنیاد پژوهشهای زنان ایران

Iranian Women's Studies Foundation

P.O. Box 882

Cambridge, MA 02238

617-259-0508

The Iranian Women's Studies Foundation was established in the summer of 1989 after much discussion and exchange of views through the collaboration of Shahla Haeri, Golnaz Amin Ladjevardi and Afsaneh Najmabadi, and was incorporated on August 8, 1989, with the legal assistance of Dr. Fereidoun Abtahi. The principle objective of the Foundation is to support and encourage the production and preservation of literary, cultural, artistic, religious, political, economic, and scientific research on the status of Iranian women. The goals of the Foundation include the following:

1) The purchase or rental of a center for the preservation and safekeeping of documents, books, photographs, film, poetry and music of women to assist research of interest to the Foundation. An example of such a center is the Schlesinger Library of Radcliffe College, Harvard University in which works on American women have been collected and categorized. This library is now one of the most important centers of study and research dealing with the lives of women in America.

2) The organization of seminars on various aspects of social, economic, political and artistic life that have a direct relationship with the everyday life of women in Iran. To this end, the Foundation has organized a two-day seminar for May, 1990, that deals with the post-revolutionary life of Iranian women inside and outside Iran. The first day of the seminar considers the life of Iranian women after the 1979 revolution in Iran and the second day studies and discusses the life of Iranian women in exile or as immigrants.

3) The Foundation, along with the financial and moral support of interested individuals, hopes to assist in the publication of journals, books, and other publications on women, for women, and by women. One of the reasons for

the dearth of women's publications throughout history has not necessarily been a lack of material or its low quality. The printing of books and works on women has been often faced with special disinterest.

4) The history of Iran, like other written modern histories, has always been male dominated, being comprised of the biographies and conquests of men and the consequences of the actions of men on society. The Foundation intends through oral history and autobiography to compensate for the one-dimensional nature of history and to make it possible to see the world that we live in through the eyes of women, to hear their voices and to communicate it to others.

5) Many women, because of family and financial problems, are unable to participate in conferences organized on women. The Foundation hopes to offer small financial aid (such as payment of air tickets) so that individuals with potential and competence can participate in such conferences and through the exchange of opinion with other women and men be enriched while enriching others.

6) In the long term the Foundation hopes to develop its own research projects and to provide grants to interested researchers through a competitive process. In this case the researchers will conduct their work with the financial and moral support and under the auspices of the Foundation.

7) The Foundation is to establish a network among the various Iranian women's groups and organization in Europe, the United States and Iran.

The Iranian Women's Studies Foundation is a non-profit organization that hopes to encompass all activities of Iranian women. All interested individuals, women and men, Iranians and non-Iranians can participate in the organization's activities and benefit from its programs. Interested individuals can assist the Foundation in the achievement of its goals by sending any kind of book, photograph, film or document related to Iranian women to the Foundation.

Nimeye Digar

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**The Board of Directors of the Foundation:  
Shahla Haeri, Golnaz Amin Ladjevardi, Afsaneh Najmabadi**

**January, 1990, Cambridge, Massachusetts**

## **Iranian Women after the Revolution**

May 12 & 13, 1990

First Day: Women in Iran after the Revolution

8:30 - 9:00 Registration

Morning Moderator: Golnaz Amin Ladjevardi

9:00 - 9:15 Introduction to the Foundation and the Seminar Program, Golnaz Amin Ladjevardi

9:15 - 9:55 Manijeh Saba, "An Analysis of the Editorials of *Zan-i Rūz* during the Period after the Revolution"

9:55 - 10:10 Discussion

10:10 - 10:30 Tea & Coffee

10:30 - 11:10 Shahrzad Mojab, "Government Control and Women's Resistance in Iranian Universities"

11:10 - 11:25 Discussion

11:25 - 12:05 Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, "There Was a Woman, There Was Not a Woman: Rereading of Yujūb-i Niqāb & Mafāsīd-i Sufūr"

12:05 - 12:20 Discussion

12:20 - 1:30 Lunch

Afternoon Moderator: Haleh Esfandiari

1:30 - 2:05 Farzaneh Milani, "Women's Literature after the Revolution"

- 2:05 - 2:20 Discussion
- 2:20 - 2:35 Tea & Coffee
- 2:35 - 4:15 Screening of "Khārij-i Mahdūdah" directed by Rakhshan Bani-'Itimad
- 4:15 - 4:55 Hamid Naficy, "Women in Postrevolutionary Cinema"
- 4:55 - 5:10 Discussion
- 5:10 - 5:30 Discussion of the Day's Program
- 5:30 - 6:00 Screening of "Faryād dar sukūt," a film about the Iranian Refugees in Turkey and Pakistan

## Second Day: Iranian Women in Immigration and Exile

- 8:30 - 9:00 Registration
- Morning Moderator: Emma Dolkhanian
- 9:00 - 9:35 Mahnaz Afkhami, "The Oral History of Iranian Women Abroad"
- 9:35 - 9:50 Discussion
- 9:50 - 10:10 Tea & Coffee
- 10:10 - 10:45 Nayereh Tohidi, "Analysis of the Effects of Immigration on the Life of Iranian Women in Southern California"
- 10:45 - 11:00 Discussion
- 11:00- 11:35 Minoo Moalem, "Beyond the Private and Public Realm: The Experience of Immigrant Iranian Women in Montreal"

11:35 - 11:50 Discussion

11:50 - 1:00 Lunch

Afternoon:

Round Table I Moderator: Parvin Abyaneh

"The Experience of Organizations and Groups of Iranian Women"

1:00 - 1:50 Elaheh Amani, Gohar Farahani, Marjan Mohtashemi, Faranak Miraftab, Zohreh Nejad

1:50 - 2:50 Discussion

2:50 - 3:10 Tea & Coffee

Round Table II Moderator: Homa Sarshar

"Publishing Activities of Iranian Women"

3:10 - 3:50 Shahin Asayesh, Mahnaz Anissian, Mehrmoosh Mazarei, Afsaneh Najmabadi

3:50 - 4:30 Discussion

4:30 - 5:30 Discussion of the Second Day's Program and the Seminar



Special thanks to the following friends whose help made this seminar possible:

Khashayar Mohammad Atabaki, Shohreh Esfandiari, Simin Bakhtiar, Reza Behnam, Leila Jalinous, Fahimeh Khamenehi, Mehr Khamenehi, Emma Dolkhanian, Safoura Rafizadeh, Mojgan Sasoon, Pouneh Saberi, Farhad Sanatian (Shahrzad Restaurant), Christine Kelly, Habib Ladjevardi, Christine Molz.

We are grateful to the following who have provided financial support to the seminar:

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## Zan-i Rūz Editorials: An Analysis

Manijeh Saba

"Islam has stressed equality between men and women... If there is any difference it applies to both of them, and it is due to their natural differences," stated Khomeini. Statements such as this underline the Islamic Republic's belief regarding the position of women and men in Iran. Laws outlining such matters as polygamy, retribution, inheritance, etc., have ensured women's "natural" place in society. In view of this, how can a women's magazine in Iran address the question of "equal but different"? What are the possible implications of it?

According to the editorials of Zan-i rūz (Today's Woman), the major women's weekly magazine of Iran, true Islam will elevate women to their rightful position. This will be achieved through their active participation in every aspect of both private and public life. Zan-i rūz contextualizes women with respect to historical, socio-economic, political and cultural influences. It points out that the former regime, along with some zealous mullahs, have created a uni-dimensional and objectified image of women, resulting in the weakening of their position in society and their self-image.

Zan-i rūz considers motherhood as the means by which women can realize their potentials of prosperity and adversity. By rearing children, mothers become the guarantors of prosperity or adversity in society. Women, however, do not nurture their children in the abstract, they mother the next generation within the context of the complex social relations they live in. Therefore, success of either of the potentials is influenced by the broader societal context. It criticizes state institutions for limitations of women's activities, under representation of women and their concerns in the parliament, and the media's degrading portrayal of women.

While Zan-i rūz considers women as sexual being, it does not regard them as innately seductive. It argues that in a

society with poor economic planning, within which women's participation is limited to confines of home, women cannot be blamed for being compulsive consumers, not adhering to proper dress codes, and presenting themselves in a seductive way.

Zan-i rūz as a propaganda vehicle of the class-oriented patriarchal regime, which does not question the laws guaranteeing women's second class position, has also taken on the added responsibility to raise women's consciousness. These objectives are inherently contradictory. While the marriage between these two in the short term might be possible, its continuation in the long term is very questionable. The contextual analysis of Zan-i rūz can produce a background upon which its readers can expand their vision, ask questions, demand changes that Zan-i rūz dares not utter. This is what I consider to be Zan-i rūz's important contribution to the future of Iranian women's activism.

# **State Control And Women's Resistance In Iranian Universities**

**Shahrzad Mojab**

The introduction of modern Western, secular education to Iran is one of the numerous factors that has affected the destinies of Iranian women during the twentieth century. Women were systematically excluded from the traditional Islamic schools. When modern schools were established a struggle over women's access to education ensued. Traditionalists, especially the clergy, strongly opposed female education. This conflict has continued to this day.

This article examines the Islamic Republic's policy of restricting women's access to higher education and women's resistance to this policy. The first section provides information on those fields of study that are closed to women, open to women on a quota basis, or restricted to women only. It is argued that these restrictions are rooted in the Islamic state's ideology and policy of "restricting women's place to the household" and increasing segregation of Iranian society along gender lines.

Women's resistance to Islamicization policy is discussed in the second section of the article. Female faculty members of Department of Agriculture of University of Tehran challenged the decision of the "Headquarters of the Islamic Cultural Revolution" to close the fields of agricultural engineering to women.

In spite of an official policy of restricting women's access to higher education, available statistical data do not reflect any significant decline in women's participation in higher education. It is argued that the Islamic state has failed to return urban women to the household. This failure is due to significant changes that have occurred in Iranian society and economy such as the rise of an urban middle class,

urbanization, diversification of the urban economy and limited but steady industrialization. Under the circumstances, state policy on women's access to higher education is aimed at contributing to increasing segregation. Under the extremely repressive conditions prevailing in the universities, while women's resistance has been limited in scope, it reflects the consciousness and determination of women to challenge the state.

A Woman Was, A Woman Was Not:  
Reading The Necessity of the Veil and The Depravity of Unveiling

Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi

In the decades after the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909, women's body was constituted as a terrain of intensified cultural and political contestations and as an important metaphor for delineating self and "Other," Iran and Europe, Islam and Christianity. In these contestations, the veil was constituted as a marker of cultural, political, and religious difference and identity. The veiled and the unveiled women became the symbols of two antagonistic social, political, and gender relations. The veiled women provided the organizing element of an Islamic and anti-modernist discourse and the unveiled woman became a marker of secular-modernist discourse. In both discourses women's dress was equated to the integrity, independence, and progress of the nation (*millat*).

The antagonistic discourses constructed around the veil had as their sub-text two conflicting images of Europe (*Farang/Farangistân*). One viewed the West as *Farang-i bâ Farhang* (the cultured Farang) and the other as *Kufristân* (the land of the infidels). One was grounded in a positive notion of freedom (*âzâdî*) anchored to the memories of the French Revolution and called for the disciplining and unveiling of Iranian women. The other was grounded in a negative notion of freedom constructed on the "indecent" and "corruption" of European women and sought to protect Iranians and the nation of Islam from the maladies of the depraved eye (*mafâsid-i harzah chashmî*) which would result in fornication (*zinâ*), sedition (*fitnah*), bloodshed (*khûnrîzî*), syphilis (*siflîs*), and the discontinuation of the human race. In these contestations, the imagined Farangî-woman was often a displacement and a simulacrum for Iranian women.

For modernists, women of the West provided an ideal model for the education and unveiling of Iranian women and their participation in the public sphere. In contrast, for the

Islamicists, European woman was a metaphor for corruption, immorality, pornography, secularization, and deviation from the straight path of Islam.

The centrality of the veil in twentieth-century Iranian political discourse led to the emergence of a particular Islamic genre focusing on the dangers of unveiling and the Europeanization of Iran. "A woman was, a woman was not" focuses on two examples of this genre: Vujûb-i niqâb va hurmat-i sharâb (The necessity of the veil and the prohibition of wine) by Muhammad Sâdiq Fakhr al-Islâm, written in 1911; and Kashf al-ghurûr yâ mafâsid-i sufûr (Exposition of deceit or the depravity of unveiling) by Zabîh Allah Mahallâtî, printed in 1932. These two texts develop distinct dialogic narratives in which the dangers of unveiling and the indecency of European women were anchored to Islamic textual, sexual, and political strategies.

Fakhr al-Islâm argued that the veiling of women was sanctioned in Judaism, Christianity and Islam and that the unveiling of European women was against the divine law. He further noted that Christian priests and missionaries would burn in the fire of hell for allowing singing and dancing in churches. Fakhr al-Islâm concluded his essay by arguing that those who called for the unveiling of women were pimping for free.

To demonstrate the dangers of unveiling, Shaykh Zabîh Allâh used diverse narrative and poetic strategies in which modernists and Islamicists clashed with one another. Mafâsid-i sufûr ends with an Islamic novella, "The tale of Mîrzâ Sulaymân and his two daughters," in which the veiled daughters of Mîrzâ Sulaymân debate with two unveiled women who end by confessing that they have been suffering from syphilis and repent having gone to school, and so decide to readopt the veil.

The debates on the veil constituted women's body as a site of contestation between Iranian modernists and traditionalists, secularists and Islamicists. These encounters changed the meaning of the veil (*hijâb/châdur*) and transformed the notion of femininity (*zanânigî*) from a polar

opposite of masculinity (*mardânigî*) into a signifier of Western-mediated gender identity.



## Postrevolutionary Iranian Women Writers

Farzaneh Milani

The short term effect of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 on women's writing has been both dramatic and surprising. Paradoxically, women's literature has flourished in a proliferation of books by and about women, inside and outside the country.

The popular prediction that the Islamic Republic would strive to eliminate women from social and productive life has not quite materialized. Intentions and causes aside, women are assigned, or rather have demanded, an active, militant role in postrevolutionary Iran. If compulsory veiling was meant to segregate and silence women, then it has not been successful. Women's unprecedented visibility in literature is only one eloquent testimony to this failure.

Iranian women, whether veiled or not, at home or in exile, are writing more than ever before. They are extending their range, handling different themes, creating a distinctive atmosphere in which women resist and rebel against repression of any sort. They are telling their stories, lifting the veil of secrecy, describing their reality, articulating the previously unarticulated. They are reappropriating traditional space--literary or otherwise--and renegotiating old sanctions and sanctuaries. As survivors, as ultimate rebels, they prove to be articulate and vocal--irrepressible.

## Women and the 'Problematic of Women' in the Iranian Postrevolutionary Cinema

Hamid Naficy

In the postrevolutionary Iranian cinema there have emerged in a single decade more women directors of feature films than in all the eight decades preceding the revolution.

This achievement has been possible partly due to incorporation of a complex system of modesty (hijāb in its widest sense) at all levels of the motion picture industry and in the cinematic texts themselves. The chief aim of such a system was to decouple the direct discursive link between the Pahlavi cinema, women, corruption, and pornography in two ways: (1) Promote the "injection theory" of cinematic power according to which the mere exposure to unveiled or immodest women turns autonomous, centered, and moral male individuals into dependent, deceived, and corrupted subjects. (2) Insist on a direct correspondence between "reality" and its "representation" on the screen.

For the representation to be modest, reality had to become (or be made to appear) modest. This necessitated the institutionalization of a "purification" process which has carried its own cost: the film industry is open now to women as a legitimate profession so long as they continue to abide by the very specific and binding "Islamic" codes of dressing, looking, and behaving. These codes, first instituted in 1982, gradually and steadily have evolved and their interpretation liberalized. The evolution occurred in three phases: absence, pale presence, and dramatic presence.

During the first phase, immediately after the revolution, women were excised from the screens through self-censorship by a frightened industry unsure of official attitudes and regulations regarding cinema.

In the second phase, women appeared on the screen as

ghostly presences in the background or domesticated in the home environment. Narratologically, women rarely were the bearers of the story or the plot. An aesthetics and grammar of vision and veiling based on gender segregation developed, which governed the characters' dress (long, loose-fitting), behavior (dignified, no body contact between men and women), and gaze (averted look, not direct gaze). The evolving grammar of filming discouraged closeup photography of women's faces or exchange of desirous looks between men and women. Women and men were desexualized and cinematic texts became androgynous. Love and physical expression of love (even between intimates) were absent.

The third phase has appeared gradually in the last three to four years and it is marked by a more dramatic presence of women both behind the camera as directors and on the screen in strong leading roles. Women's presence as directors is hard won but it has not yet translated into a widespread or a deep penetration into all areas of the industry. Women are under-represented in many technical areas of film production, distribution, and exhibition.

The liberatory evolution of women in postrevolutionary cinema has been achieved through a contentious but relentless process of negotiation between film workers, spectators, and government bureaucracies charged with regulating and promoting cinema.

# The Oral History of Iranian Women

Mahnaz Afkhami

Recorded history has been the history of men, always and everywhere. As a rule, women have remained out of the narrative of the life of nations. The reasons for this exclusion are the same as those that historically have kept women outside social, economic, cultural and political interaction: overwhelming domestic responsibilities, illiteracy, economic dependence, social and geographic immobility and cultural prejudice, including a plethora of superstitions and negative values internalized by women themselves. Lacking both means and motives, women have seen and judged themselves within value systems established and enforced by men. Thus, they have rarely had the tools to record their life stories in letters, memoirs and biographies, or the self-confidence to deem them valuable enough to retell.

Under favorable political conditions, oral history, a relatively new discipline, may be used as an efficient method of inquiry to penetrate this wall of silence. Rigorously defined and conscientiously applied, it enables the historian to record and process not only the history of the elite, but also the *living history of ordinary people, including women, as they themselves live and experience it*. We have used this discipline at the Foundation for Iranian Studies to record the experiences of women in Iran before and during the Revolution, and the experiences of women in exile after the Revolution. We chose our subjects from among both the elite and ordinary middle class women.

We developed our methodology initially in cooperation with the Oral History Program of Columbia University, but soon came to appreciate the specificity of an oral history of Iranian women. We learned, for example, that even those exceptional women who have succeeded in the competitive sphere of men's world of government and business by