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ELUDING THE FEMINIST, OVERTHROWING THE MODERN?

Transformations in twentieth-century Iran

Zohreh T. Sullivan

The first chapter in this collection showed the centrality of 'modernity' to both anti-colonial and feminist movements; being modern often entailed accepting 'Western' styles and values, notably a secular or non-religious way of life. However, throughout the entire course of anti-colonial activism, alternate strategies such as pan-Arabism and the revival of Islam had developed. The reinvigoration of Islamic community envisioned the rule of Muslim clerics and the imposition of their teachings throughout society. In this way the Western identity – either capitalist or socialist – that had so shaped and, as many argued, oppressed colonized peoples could be thrown off for a more traditional, authentic one.

Islamic fundamentalism gained ground throughout North Africa and the Middle East, and nowhere more so than in Iran. In 1979 Islam-inspired forces overthrew the brutal and Western-allied government of the Pahlavi dynasty, which had come to power in the 1920s, and replaced it with a religious government. Under the rule of the Ayatollah Khomeini, the restoration of strict gender order and the subordination of women became a touchstone for de-Westernization and thus the basis for the restoration of true independence for Iranians. As Islamic fundamentalism spread in North Africa and the Middle East, feminism became seen as traitorous, and some women activists fled for their lives.

Simultaneously, however, as gender segregation and women's seclusion were restored, opportunities opened up for women. That is, if women were not supposed to have contact with unrelated men, then entire categories of services had to be staffed by women. Thus, women's presence in education, social welfare, and medicine, for example, became stronger. Nor did activism die out, as this chapter suggests. Instead, women found new ways to make their claims and even used old ones, sometimes with dire consequences. This chapter looks at novel forms of resistance and feminism where feminism is outlawed. It proposes that people must

see that as oppression changes course, it is always opening up spaces for resistance. Thus students of social movements like feminism should expect neither responses easily identified as 'feminist,' nor consistent slogans and programs over time.

'Everything is pregnant with its contrary.'

(Karl Marx)

The Shaykh Fazl Allah Nuri Expressway cuts through modern Tehran. Five minutes away from the newly named Azadi (Freedom) Square, it intersects with the Jalal al-Ahmad Highway that goes past the Ali Shariati Hospital, the College of Commerce and Administrative Sciences, and the College of Educational Sciences. Shaykh Fazl Allah Nuri was the charismatic conservative cleric who positioned himself against Western modernity and was, in 1909, publicly executed for opposing the first Constitutional Revolution of 1906. 'I speak of being afflicted with "westisis" the way I would speak of being afflicted with cholera,'¹ writes Jalal al-Ahmad in *Westoxification (Gharbzadegi)*, his famous critique of Pahlavi Iran's mindless mimicry of Western modernity. Any post-revolutionary Islamic government that chooses to name its expressways after Nuri and Al-Ahmad is probably, and self-evidently, being selective about which aspects of modernity to discard. Modernity, with its attendant goals of progress, autonomy, freedom, education, and justice, was quite simply reread as always already a part of the true Islam.

A model of secular modernity, however, had consolidated itself in nineteenth-century Iran through the Constitutional Movement that positioned itself against the practices of the decadent Qajar monarchy by looking to the West for models of nationhood and development. Modernity, however, came with unacknowledged ties to cultural colonization and petroleum politics. While on the macro-level the state bought the package deal, on the micro-level individuals resisted by channeling disturbance into various oppositional patterns of modernity, a countermodernity, as it were, one of whose impulses was shaped into revolutionary Islam.² The binary between traditionalism and modernity that sometimes shapes conventional discussions of Iran and the Iranian Revolution is therefore inadequate to a model I prefer, that of the coexistence and tension of each in a dialectical (but not mutually exclusive) relationship with its alterity.

I prefer to see modernity and the issue of women's freedom so integrally linked to it not as agendas but as new ways to package hidden internal agendas. Modernity, antimodernity, and feminism therefore need to be recast in terms of how groups respond to, react against, and use their ideologies. Modernity and feminism become vehicles producing a series of tensions between the ordering impulse of ideological systems and the clumsy challenges of real life. I will suggest not merely the relativity of the modern but the difficulty of reducing these modernities to their Western counterparts.³ The liberation of women, though not necessary to the larger agendas of modernity, becomes a troubled sign of its possibilities, limits, blind spots, and discontents.

Both modernity and feminism, in Iran and elsewhere, exist in perpetual antithesis with excluded particularities that remain beyond their control, and that return to disrupt their management. The unexpected difficulty of absorbing large programs into experience can be seen in the disparity between how cultural work implements modernity and how it is integrated at the level of personal experience. This chapter will therefore oscillate between public and private narratives: it will rely, in part, on a series of oral narratives I collected, starting in 1990, with Iranian émigrés and exiles that form a book called *Exiled Memories: Identity, Revolution, Iran*. Although the interviews I conducted invited my informants' memories of childhood, revolution, and exile, modernity was a currency that circulated through all their transactions. I will use their voices as a way to reflect on alternative modernities and on the problem of gender in Iran, and as an introduction to groups who narrate competing conceptions of culture and identity that recall projects of modernity during the first Constitutional Revolution of 1905, during the Pahlavi era (1925–1979), and after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Finally, by using stories of women as dialectical inversions of each other, I argue that although questions of gender and the articulation of gendered roles may come under the dominance of state apparatus, the state does not in the process secure the consent of all its women subjects. In other words, the Islamic State exercises hegemonic control over general politics, education, and culture, but, in the case of women, its hegemony is not tied (to use Ranajit Guha's elegant formulation) to dominance.⁴

Gendering the Iranian past: Shariati, Nuri, and Kasravi

In October 1971, the Shah of Iran and his queen staged the megalomaniacal 2,500-year celebration of Persian monarchy in Persepolis, a ceremony whose quail eggs stuffed with caviar and roast peacock and foie gras were catered by Maxim's of Paris, whose water and wine were flown in from France, whose entertainment was staged by Peter Brook, and whose benediction included a prayer in which the Shah called upon Cyrus, the great Achaemenian king of kings, to 'rest in peace, for we are awake.' At the same time in a small religious center called Hosseineyeh Ershad, Ali Shariati was awakening Iranian dissidents and students to the principles of his countermonarchical manifestos, and calling upon the figure of Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, as an emblem of revolutionary possibility.

Here we see two ways of recasting symbols from the past (Cyrus and Fatima), the Shah overhauling pre-Islamic Iran to dramatize current 'modernity' and Shariati recovering a woman, Fatima, whose conservative image he empowers with agency and revolutionary wrath against the patriarchal ruler. To the disenchanting masses angered at the petroleum imperialism hidden in the bright packagings of the Shah's 'Great

Civilization,' Shariati's fiery and erudite lectures and his reminder of daily life as a source of power and resistance offered alternative models of cultural identity. Imprisoned by the Shah in 1974 and later exiled in France, Shariati is generally recognized (though he died in 1977) as the 'ideologue' for the revolution. Overflowing crowds of dissidents and revolutionaries found new hope in his radical lectures in the early 1970s.

In Paris, Shariati had edited *Iran-e-Azad* (Free Iran), had translated works of Che Guevara and Frantz Fanon, had debated with Fanon about using Islamic unity as a weapon against neocolonialism, and had studied with several famous scholars at the Sorbonne. In his series of influential lectures titled *Return to the Self*, Shariati called for resistance to Western cultural imperialism through a return 'not to the self of a distant past, but a past that is present in the daily life of the people.'⁵ This is a self embedded in the social and material practice of everyday life whose power, as Foucault might put it, lies in 'micro' operations and in the reconstitution of the self.

But that newly realized Islamic self was necessarily gender inflected. Woman, Shariati argued, was the easiest path to de-territorialization. 'The West falls upon the soul of the Easterners like termites. . . . they empty out the contents . . . destroy all of the forces of resistance.'⁶ Shariati's much celebrated *Fatima Is Fatima* used the figure of the daughter of the prophet Muhammad not only as a model of revolutionary resistance to the monarchy in the 1970s but as a figure who could resolve the current problem of how women could enter modernity and remake themselves as neither Western nor traditional. Its vocabulary and arguments inform almost all subsequent manifestos by women after the revolution.⁷ By authenticating a secular concept of womanhood as an alternative to the Pahlavi 'Westoxicated' images of woman, it offered a new and revolutionary model of Islamic womanhood; but it is also a text that once again uses the body of the woman as the site on which to compose national and ethical values. Woman, for Shariati, is at once the greatest hope for and the greatest threat to revolutionary possibility.

Yet it is not Western women he faults but their commodification. In spite of their power to effect social change, women, he claims, allow their desires to be so manipulated that they become vulnerable pawns in capitalist consumption and leisure. Blaming the poverty of modern Iranian culture for providing no alternative other than dead ritual and tradition to women and youth, Shariati addresses the collusion between the oppressor and the oppressed: 'An oppressor cannot perform oppression in the air' (*FF*, p. 108). When, for instance, Chengiz Khan defeated Iran in the fourteenth century, Iran had opened itself to this defeat through internal decomposition, ignorance, and superstition.⁸ The same historical decadence, he warns, recurs in current youthful vulnerability to Western ideological exploitation and cultural colonization at whose temple (to lust and sexuality) the first object to be sacrificed is woman (*FF*, p. 90). In language that recalls such

social critics as Thorstein Veblen, George Bernard Shaw, and Karl Marx, Shariati reminds his audience of the link between the prostitute and the bourgeois lady, of the cost of unexamined sexuality and commodification. Referring to the marriage of Jackie Kennedy and Aristotle Onassis, he writes, 'The First Lady of America can also be bought for a price. The difference between her and those who stand on the street is one of rate' (FF, p. 97).

Like Frantz Fanon, Shariati rejects the traditional model of woman built around past Islamic cultural traditions; but unlike Fanon, he argues that the traditional image of Islamic woman is an inadequate representation of the revolutionary activism offered within Islam and exemplified by Fatima and her daughter Zainab. More generally and more importantly he affirms Fanon's warning that

In an underdeveloped country every effort [must be] made to mobilize men and women as quickly as possible; it must guard against the danger of perpetuating the feudal tradition which holds sacred the superiority of the masculine element over the feminine.

Women will have exactly the same place as men, not in the clauses of the constitution but in the life of every day: in the factory, at school, and in the parliament.⁹

The 'web' that imprisons and impoverishes modern woman, Shariati writes, is woven out of inherited traditions of conservatism, patriarchy, and ignorance (FF, pp. 109-110). The confinement of women within the home, the gendered splitting of the private and public, and the exclusion of woman from the public sphere are all inadequately premised on the virtues of motherhood and chastity. How, he then asks, can a person 'who is herself incomplete and useless, who is missing a part of her brain and who is excluded from literacy, books, education, discipline, thought, culture, civilization and social manners . . . be worthy of being the nourisher of tomorrow's generation?' (FF, p. 109).

In valorizing the figure of Fatima, not as daughter of Muhammad, wife of Ali, or mother of Hassan, Husain, and Zainab, but as 'herself' (hence the title of the book), Shariati reminds his audience of the denigration to which Islamic culture (not Islam) has subjected the image of women. He contrasts the civility of Qur'anic respect for girls against an Arab poet's advice that fathers of daughters select the grave (over house and husband) as their most suitable son-in-law.

In opposition to the ubiquitous image of the traditional royal family whose patriarch claimed to respect only women who, as 'natural' wives and mothers, were also 'beautiful, feminine, and moderately clever,'¹⁰ Shariati posited another way of seeing. He exposed the scandal of the traditional and unacknowledged traffic in women bartered in a form of

unexamined homosocial exchange. The 'fate of woman in our traditional, conservative society' is to grow up in her father's house 'without breathing any free air,' to go 'to her husband's home (her second lord and master) in accordance with an agreement . . . between a buyer and a seller' (FF, p. 110). Once she is transferred to her husband's house, 'the marriage licence or ownership papers show both her role and her price. She becomes a respectable servant. A married man means someone who has a servant who works in his house. . . . She is a household laborer and a nurse . . . without any wages; she has no rights' (FF, p. 111).

Though he is daring in his critique of the role of women in the traditional Iranian family, the contradictions in Shariati's stance toward women are also significant: on one hand, women are essentially vulnerable to the seductive powers of exploitation and consumerism; but on the other, they have power and agency to construct themselves as warriors, as is evidenced by a series of women scholars and scientists (FF, pp. 82-86). So too, Fatima, as the ideal mother, wife, and daughter, can also become the emblem of 'newly created revolutionary values' (FF, pp. 129).¹¹

Such values are needed, Shariati claimed in *One Followed by an Eternity of Zeros*, to defend the Muslim against neo-imperialism and cultural loss that come to Iran disguised as modernization. The history of Iran is narrated as a 'fall' into colonialism. For Shariati, national authenticity was a necessary antidote to the designs of the multinational markets on individual desire; and cultural authenticity could be found in his philosophically eclectic and religiously armored construction of cultural identity. 'Islam,' Shariati said,

is the first school of social thought that recognizes the masses as the basis, the fundamental and conscious factor in determining history and society - not the elect as Nietzsche thought, not the aristocracy and nobility as Plato claimed, not great personalities as Carlyle and Emerson believed, not those of pure blood as Alexis Carrel imagined, not the priests or intellectuals, but the masses.¹²

Here we see in Shariati's appeal to the masses and attack on the West an ironic link to Marxism, which is also (ironically) the latest bloom in Western Enlightenment thought. Through the early years of the revolution, Marxist categories and Shariati's language, argument, examples, and tropes became the scaffolding for Islamic feminism and humanism and were appropriated (though unacknowledged) by such groups as the Women's Society of Islamic Revolution, the Iranian women's delegation to the UN Decade for Women's Conference.¹³

Shariati locates the only weapon against global capital in individual agency and the 'self'. This is not an example of strategic essentialism in the service of a naive but necessary fiction of the self; this is a more popular, culturally constructed notion of self as a productive force in the service of

nationalism deployed against the de-territorializing imperatives of Western global capital. Eloquent in his defiance of the monarchy and the traditional clergy, trained in a contemporary European vocabulary and in Islamic philosophy, Shariati played, according to historian Mohamad Tavakoli, 'a crucial role in constructing an oppositional cultural and political identity based on a system of historical narration organized around Islam.'¹⁴

That oppositional construction was prefigured by a clergyman of whom Shariati would have disapproved – the late nineteenth-century figure recovered by the Islamic Revolution and celebrated in verse, drama, and modern expressways – Shaykh Fazl Allah Nuri. As leader of the clerical movement against the first Constitutional Movement, his politicization and organization of the clergy, some believe, prepared the way for the 1979 Revolution. Why, he asked, did the Constitutionalists wish to base the Iranian Constitution on equality and freedom? 'The foundation of Islam is obedience and not freedom; and the basis of its commandments is the differentiation of collectivities and the assemblage of the different elements, and not on equality.'¹⁵ Constitutionalism, Shaykh Fazl Allah claimed, was a European invention, 'a fatal disease, a terminal injury,' and he concluded that Western philosophy goes hand in hand with Western tyranny. Shaykh Fazl Allah was not the last to think so.¹⁶ In aiming to halt the movement of Iran into Westernized 'modernity' and plurality, Shaykh Fazl Allah asked for a return to *shari'a* (divine law) as a defense against Western constitutional laws (*qanun*) that would turn authority over to the people and Parliament.¹⁷ His stance against modernity and its corollary in women's freedom, articulated in a document titled 'For the Awareness of Muslim Brothers,' warned against the forces that 'spread consumption of alcoholic drinks, promote prostitution, open schools for women, redirect the money that should be spent on religious projects into building of factories, roads, railways and other foreign projects in Iran.'¹⁸

The historical moment that produced Shaykh Fazl Allah Nuri, modernity, women's education, and the woman's movement also produced its irreducible complexity on an individual level in the life of Nuri's granddaughter, Zia Ashraf Nasr, whom I interviewed in 1990. Her immediate family mirrored the schism in the country between the clergy who supported and those who opposed the constitution: whereas her grandfather on her father's side was Nuri, her grandfather on her mother's side was Sayyed Tabatabai, one of the leading theologians who backed the Constitutional Movement. In spite of family injunctions against the education of girls, Zia Ashraf persuaded her family to allow her to attend one of the first Muslim girls' schools, Madrassah-'i Namus, that had opened in 1907. A deeply religious woman who sees no contradiction between Islamic philosophy and the freedom of women in the public sphere, she renarrativized the progeny of the Prophet (it is standard knowledge that Muhammad had no male heirs; and Zeinul Abedin, the Prophet's

great-grandson, is best known as a perpetually ailing imam) in order to foreground the power of his daughter and granddaughter, Fatima and Zainab. Mrs Nasr faulted the 1979 Revolution as 'un-Islamic':

This 'Islamic' idea of women you quote to me from Khomeini . . . the disparity between men and women. This should be labeled not 'Islam' but 'Khomeini.' I believe, based on the life of the Prophet and the first leaders of Islam, that Muhammad himself did not discriminate against women. He considered his daughter Fatima superior to men. He made her the beginning. . . . Why? The Prophet had sons from other wives. He had daughters and sons. But he didn't give any of them as much power as he gave this girl. . . . After Fatima, her daughter was privileged – Hazrat Zainab who supervised the caravans, who took care of the family in the desert of Karbala, who brought the family in its imprisonment from Karbala to Medina. There were other men after Imam Hosein's martyrdom – Imam Zeinul Abedin, for instance. But it was a woman, Hazrat Zainab, who supervised the family, who took charge. Even in Yezid's court, it was she who lectured at him, and what a sermon she delivered. She was a woman, yet she was at the head of Islam. Then why should a woman, later on, stay home and the man go out? . . . Now the veil enslaves woman. Now women have been packaged and bundled so one has to guess from the shape. . . . Is it a human being or a black bundle?

Like other girls in the early years of the century, Zia Ashraf Nasr had a gendered education: she was taught to read but not write, in the tradition of limiting women's access to communication though not to learning. She learned to write only after her return to Tehran, after her family's exile in Iraq following the execution of her grandfather, and after the death of the grandmother with whom she lived. By then (1918) she was about fourteen years old and keenly aware of her sharp memory that enabled her to remember a page after glancing at it swiftly. Recalling her early education, she smiled as she told of making it through six grades in six months, and of the many women in her family who broke the family edict against girls attending school: 'Look at the number of strong women in our family who have doctorates in medicine, literature, and other fields. My aunt . . . was the first Iranian woman to go to the American school and learn English . . . to the American Missionary School.' Zia Ashraf's temperament and life were formed in the crossfire of tradition, change, and modernity, at a time when women began their activities through the formation of organizations, the opening of girls' schools and the publication of women's periodicals.

The movement for women's rights in Iran has a long and well-documented history. Zia Ashraf Nasr experienced its beginnings in her

friendship with Iran's leading feminist, Siddiqeh Dowlatabadi, in her involvement with women's societies, and in her struggle for women's enfranchisement. The same Constitutional Revolution that executed her grandfather also generated the start of women's secret societies and a surge in women's resistance to political and social subordination. When, in 1911, it was rumored that some of the Members of Parliament were giving in, again, to Russian demands, women's groups took action. Three hundred women with concealed guns behind their *chadors* (veils) entered the buildings, confronted the leaders of Parliament, tore aside their veils, and threatened to kill their husbands, their sons, and themselves if the independence of the Persian people were further eroded.¹⁹

At the turn of the century, political modernization became identified with nation-building; but the discourse of nationhood, as Afsaneh Najmabadi demonstrates, was consistently gendered. Because the significance of symbolic gendering was never confronted and problematized, it was susceptible to slipping backward into Qur'anic rhetoric of male dominance or forward into the kind of consolidation expressed in the Islamic Republic.²⁰ Such casual acceptance of gender inequity forged unexpected bonds between secular and religious intellectuals. Ahmad Kasravi, the historian, reformer and jurist, active in the 1930s and 1940s, argued for modernity and women's education, and against the veil. But he also argued against women's right to enter the public sphere in politics, the judiciary, or the civil service.²¹

But women could, Kasravi conceded, participate through their political support of national and necessarily male agendas. Kasravi's importance as a secular-modernist lay in his articulation of the need to centralize and integrate the many decentralized groups in the country: the elites, the masses, the clergy, the tribes, the clans, religious sects, and ethnic languages that constituted the 'unintegrated' layers of Iranian society.²² Gradually as secularism gained power,

the old tolerant attitude towards cultural heterogeneity was gradually supplanted by an intolerant crusade for national homogeneity: tribal nomadism became associated with rural gangsterism, regional autonomy with administrative anarchy, communal variety with political incompatibility, and linguistic diversity with oriental inefficiency.²³

Iranian scholars read Ahmad Kasravi, variously, as the most controversial of modern intellectuals, as a theorist of modernity, and as a 'dangerous iconoclast' appropriately murdered for trying to destroy traditional authority.²⁴ Because of his uncompromising opposition to 'irrationality', he might be called a modernist who rethought Iranian modernism, one who, though a clergyman, celebrated Western science and supported the

Constitutional Revolution in 1906, while he opposed women's liberation and suffrage, Western cultural imperialism, and the Shi'a clergy. Arguing for 'puritan rationalism', Kasravi attacked the clergy for superstition. He published over fifty books, a weekly journal, and a daily newspaper all elaborating on his theories of class, society, and 'civilization', laying out his strategies for national integration. A celebrator of urban living, he coined the new Persian word *shahrigari* (urbanization) to contrast it with *biyabangari* (nomadization).²⁵ He also attacked, as reactionary, the most precious art in Persian culture – poetry – because he believed that the habit of recitation and recourse to poetic quotation was a way of avoiding thought. To clarify his position on the fetishizing of poetry and mysticism, he started a book-burning festival at the winter solstice.²⁶

Kasravi's dream of unifying Iran was predicated on a paradox: he wished to take its distinctly divided factions and to integrate them into a modern democratic society with one language, one culture, and one central authority. In 1946 a man from an organization called the Devotees of Islam shot Kasravi dead. Kasravi had been brought to court under indictment on charges of slander against Islam. The fable of his failure perhaps illustrates a metaphor (from Kristeva), the banished or the abject returning violently from exclusion to enact its revenge against the center.²⁷

Modernizing from above

Such denial of marginal and diverse forces has recurred through the reigns of the Pahlavis and the ayatollahs. As part of his modernizing programs, the Shah set up, in the early 1970s, educational programs for women in villages. Pahlavi father and son, Reza Shah and Mohamad Reza Shah, combined the state policy of crushing opposition with enforced emancipation and modernization. Reza Shah's 1936 decree banning the veil is but a tiny example of how 'modernization from above' was presented as the only way for Iran to enter the modern world.²⁸ Reza Shah learned from a visit in 1934 to Atatürk's Turkey that the road to modernity necessitated emancipation of civil law from the *shari'a* and thereby the disengaging of secular politics from religion. Political emancipation and equal rights, however, had their dark underside: state repression, a regularized police society, and a consumer-mad 'westoxicated' culture.²⁹

The *chador*, forbidden by Reza Shah as part of his enforced program for emancipating women, and associated with the backward and downtrodden during the Pahlavi era, was later used as an emblem of revolutionary protest by women of all castes and classes who marched against the Pahlavi regime. Within the year following the revolution, they were to be surprised by governmental laws that required the *chador* for women who wished to venture outside their homes or enter offices and restaurants. Thus, the *chador* is used by opposing camps for opposite reasons: the veil as a symbol

of liberation from the dictatorial state and as an instrument for hegemonizing a revolution by those whose only aim was political power. The following story will suggest yet another take on the *chador*.

One of my interviewees, Pari (a pseudonym), spoke of her efforts, as assistant minister of agriculture, to head the literacy campaign for rural women: 'Neither the government nor I knew what we were doing,' she said. 'The literacy campaign had staffed centers for educating village girls to become "agents of development" who would then return to the villages to effect change.' Six centers were therefore built outside villages in buildings that looked like English boarding-schools, so different from their own environments that Pari found it 'culturally shocking.' The girls were required to learn how to use such Western facilities as tables and chairs, knives and forks, showers, and Western toilets, none of which they had seen before. Also, the girls, who had never slept in beds, were now expected to sleep in bunk beds. Pari tells of how, when they persisted in falling out of their bunk beds in the middle of the night, the administrators found a bizarre solution. They tied the woman on the top to her bed with her *chador*.

The image of the woman bound to her bed with the veil in the larger cause of progressive rights and freedoms, a paradox of modernity, captures the simultaneity of modernity and its underside, of the forces of reason and their bondage, of the necessary reconstruction of identity and the loss of community; it bears witness to modernity as its own gravedigger.³⁰ 'Everything is pregnant with its contrary.' In its social context, the image recalls the monumental hegemonic vision of Pahlavi Iran, and of the Enlightenment project of modernity that enforced selected citizen rights through repression and violence.

Another event revealed an even darker side of Pari's effort to educate village women. The story of the *chador* tells of the enforcement of knowledge whose dialectic is specific to modernity. This next story suggests a different dialectic endemic to resistance.

Here is her account of her visit as an 'agent of development' going to the village in her official capacity:

I went to the village and asked for S—. She didn't come out. The next day I returned and asked for her again, and she didn't come out. Then I found out that the girl had been beaten black and blue by her father, that she couldn't walk for weeks, and that she was ashamed to be seen because I had caused her such humiliation. . . . It was our organization that had made this man so angry. It was us as agents of development who couldn't understand village psychology. . . . The men could not tolerate the fact that someone from outside the village would come and ask to speak to a woman and not to a man. . . . I later found out that when I wasn't present, the women I worked with would, for the smallest thing, ask

permission from their fathers, brothers, and husbands. But then I would reappear and anger the men.

Pari was sent to the village to teach women's rights, which at its most basic level taught women their right *not* to be beaten or abused. But her very presence led to a reactionary violence – the abuse of the women. Pari assumed, as did the state, that social progress would neutralize the need for revolution. Her predicament was that of the modernizing agent taking on the burden of universal modernity, whose enlightened agenda necessarily produced darker consequences than she suspected. Or, as Geoffrey Harpham phrases it 'Enlightenment is always otherwise.'³¹

Pari not only witnessed but inadvertently promoted the collision between the state and its citizens, between modernity and its other, between what Partha Chatterjee might call capital and community, and, on quite another but a connected register, between the premodern, subjugated woman and modernity. Pari's story tells us something too about the problem of modernization that Chatterjee writes of in *The Nation and Its Fragments* – the problem of the suppression of an independent narrative of community, the erasure of respect for the individual that can occur when the importance of individual freedom and individual rights is proclaimed.³²

Pari tells the story of village women as part of a series of narratives that include herself and the women in her family. But the embedded stories are significant for their differences. Unlike her village counterpart, Pari's own search for autonomy from patriarchal oppression, her own subjection to coercive codes of female behavior and child abuse occurred in an urban setting that privileged her class, and that allowed her to find surrogate communities outside her city and country. But the village women relied on structures of kinship and community within the village. Outside the village a woman faced the multiple unknown threats of the city, whose effect was to alienate the villager from her former community, leaving nothing to fill the void.

Such alienation had also been the unexpected consequence of the White Revolution of 1962–63; the Shah's programs of multiple modernization, coinciding with rapid industrialization and Westernization, resulted in poverty and chaos that followed mass migration from country to city. An Azari woman, Mrs K., whose family owned a village near Tabriz, tells of the effects of the Shah's White Revolution and land reforms on villagers.³³ She recalls that they sold their land and went to the city, where they lived in slums and, if they found jobs, worked as janitors. She described their depression and culture shock: 'Now they [the villagers] come to my brother and complain that they don't know how to live in a city. On arriving in the city, one young man simply walked through a street expecting the cars to stop for him. Instead he was hit by a car and died.'³⁴ The Iranian displaced by the Shah's reforms could not survive the crash into modernity (any more

than could his European counterparts) without the protection of a surrogate organization – perhaps even of the industrial ‘Fordist’ organizations that had collapsed in the 1970s both in Europe and Iran.

The land reforms, the White Revolution, and associated government projects, however, were premised on Western models of development that opposed a ‘backward’ agriculture to a modern structure of unified (state) organizations. On the basis of the logic of downward flow from the economy’s ‘centre of gravity,’ from the oil industry to rural sectors, literacy and programmatic learning were to be the first of many steps toward freedom and rights;³⁵ and the position of villagers, farmers, and women would (it was reasonably assumed) automatically right itself along with the spread of reading, writing, and reason. In fact, the program so angered the men in the village that it exacerbated the injustice it was intended to dispel. Though the ‘agents of development’ came from above, descending from the skies in state helicopters equipped with institutional power, they failed to take into account the strength of revolutionary power brewing below.

Pari was vaguely aware that the young women in her village would disappear at certain points in the day, but she didn’t give this much thought because their usual excuse was prayers. One day in 1978 she went to hold a workshop for women in a village near Shiraz. This time the students who were her village aides disappeared. Frustrated, Pari returned to Tehran and saw soldiers and cannons all over the streets. She asked the taxi driver what was happening. He answered, ‘Lady, haven’t you been living in Iran?’ Didn’t she know there was trouble between the government and opposition rebels? She later realized that the women and student aides had disappeared at the same time of day, about 8 p.m., to gather around the radio and hear the BBC news. She should have known that 8 p.m. was not an appropriate time for Muslim prayers, but as a modernized, de-Islamicized Iranian, she didn’t. The villagers, who were later to become part of the revolutionary movement, tuned in to radios that suggested an alternative entry into modernity – a new imagining of a society that does what modernity, as they received it, failed to do, one that follows the ‘exhaustion’ of Pahlavi modernity but sees the possibility of an alternative narrative and activates new patterns of modernity. In the same vein, the message of that new society streamed in on tape cassettes recorded by Khomeini and surreptitiously distributed nationwide, and through underground radio stations and a system of new communication technologies that for the first time linked village life with global centers like London and Paris.

The historian Mohamad Tavakoli told me a slightly different story about ‘agents of development’ that provides an important example of the appropriation and transformation of state powers, of how individuals used the instruments of Pahlavi modernization in ways other than those the state

envisioned, how they took the packet and subverted its agenda. Mohamad’s brother, who was part of the Education Corps set up as an arm of state modernization in the early 1970s, found that the opportunity to work in rural Iran yielded unexpected results. Inadvertently, the regime had promoted a hitherto impossible dialogue between the educated urban Iranian and the rural villager. His understanding of the problems of village life politicized his consciousness and spurred the formation of a new revolutionary identity in him and many others. His subsequent involvement with leftist groups was the direct and unintended consequence of the state’s programs of development.

Iran’s program of literacy and modernization served not only the interests of Big Oil and American foreign policy³⁶ but also the making of a revolutionary counter-culture. The violent protection of US oil investments turned into a narrative that energized the Shah’s Iran and mobilized the forces of modernity into a story of progress, development, modernization, and freedom.³⁷ But what the grand narrative ignored was the presence of another story that challenged its conceptual framework. Partha Chatterjee’s narrative of community can perhaps be further complicated through a reading of resistance theory that refuses to allow the colonized (oppressed / subaltern) to be totalized as a stable category, and that investigates histories of insubordination and struggle against institutional and ideological domination.³⁸

The state’s many ideas of development,³⁹ all imposed from above, though theoretically plausible, were contradicted by the actual events fueled by the rage of those marginalized by modernization that built up to the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The revolutionaries were multiply determined subjects. The rage of displaced villagers and students drove them into a variety of leftist groups alongside the marginalized *ulema*, or clergy, and the intellectuals who opposed the Shah’s US-supported, consumer-driven modernization. The opposition spilt into political spectra that resist easy classification, though for the sake of simplification we can list the conservative Right (the Bazaar) and the conservative Left (Jalal Al-Ahmad in one of his phases), the Islamic Right (Hezb Jumhuri Islami, the Ayatollahs Shariat Madari and Khomeini) and the Islamic Left (Mojaheddin, Ayatollah Taleqani and Ali Shariati), and, finally, a three-way split producing the nationalist Right (the Shah), the nationalist Left (Fadayaan, the National Front), and the nationalist Islamic (Mehdi Bazargan and Ayatollah Taleqani).⁴⁰

But none of these factions was antimodern. The Revolution has been given many labels: against the standard reading of it as a reactionary, traditional, and antimodern revolution, Michel Foucault and Paul Vieille both describe it as a postmodern revolution, and for Anthony Giddens it was a sign of the crisis of modernity.⁴¹ It was not antimodern because Khomeini and his cohorts built on a coalition with secular modernists and

leftists, and their early pronouncements invoked, in addition to change and social justice, 'the rights of minorities, the rights of women, and the holding of democratic elections.'⁴² Its leading theorists had recognized that the 1950s and 1960s had produced a cultural schizophrenia, and that an 'other' modernity through Islam might be a way to confront 'cultural imperialism' and to address what Shariati called the 'modern calamities' of social and intellectual systems.

Revolution and women's bodies

In Iran's conflicted efforts to construct national, revolutionary, and Islamic modernities the figure of the 'woman' has repeatedly been constituted as the overdetermined sign of an essentialized totality, as a metaphor for a besieged nation, an embattled self, a delicate interiority, the uncontrollable other, the 'unpierced pearl' to be bought and protected, or the sacred interior. As Farzanch Milani observes, women dominate the cultural imaginary by becoming emblems of national identity: 'Forcefully unveiled, they personify the modernization of the nation. Compulsorily veiled, they embody the reinstitution of the Islamic order.'⁴³

A dramatic example of the violent repressions unpinning the gendered organization of Iranian cultural practice may be seen in the disruptive power of two women who transgressed the boundaries set by a patriarchal society. In their insistence on equality, independence, and women's emancipation, both women transgressed in ways that are specific to both feminism and modernity. When in the mid-nineteenth century Qurrat al-'Ayn, a woman writer, orator, poet, teacher, and religious rebel, discarded her veil and her submission to Islam and became a celebrated preacher for Babism, she so angered the male elite that she was arrested and executed on orders of the Shah. Before her death in 1852, the sight of her speaking unveiled before large crowds of men left more than a few men deranged. In the most notorious incident, one 'Abdol Khaleq Esfahani is said to have protected his honor by cutting his throat with his own hands.⁴⁴

Sixty years later in the city of Isfahan, another feminist, Siddiqeh Dowlatnabadi, daughter of a well-known Muslim religious leader, had her life threatened and was driven into exile. She was the contemporary woman most admired by Zia Ashraf Nasr, who recalled Dowlatnabadi's return from Europe as one of the most important events in her life. The year was probably 1927, and Zia Ashraf was attending the *Dar-ol-Moallemat*, a teacher-training institution:

I was very excited one day to hear that Khanum Dowlatnabadi, the progressive leader of women's liberation in Iran, had returned from abroad and was giving a lecture in town. Some of our teachers got ready to go, and I asked to go with them. We went early and waited

for her to arrive in this huge hall with balconies. She entered looking very dignified, very authoritative. She greeted a few people, went behind the desk, and began her lecture. There was silence as she began. But suddenly from the balcony a large pomegranate was thrown at her that landed on the lecture desk, exploded, and all the pomegranate juice splashed on her face and clothes. But Khanum Dowlatnabadi was so collected and well composed that she did not pause in her talk: she continued as if nothing had happened. From that day on, I was won over and became devoted to this woman.

This powerful woman who so impressed Mrs Nasr was the aunt to my main informant, Pari. Haji Mirza Hadi, Dowlatnabadi's father, had been a Mojtahid (religious jurist) in Isfahan. He married first Khatemeh Begum, who bore him six sons and a daughter, Siddiqeh Dowlatnabadi, before the mother fell sick and died. Dowlatnabadi arranged for her father to marry his secretary's nine-year-old daughter, after which she took over the care of her father's child wife's two children – one of whom was Pari's mother.

Dowlatnabadi raised the two girls and married a doctor, Dr Etezad in 1898. But, so the story goes, she discovered that she was infertile and got divorced. In 1917, she started the first school in Isfahan for women, *Umm Al-Madaris* (Mother of Schools). One of the first graduates of the American College for Women, *Iran Bethel*, her friend, Mehrtaj Rakhshan, became the headmistress of this school. In 1919 Dowlatnabadi started a society, *Sherkat Khavateen Isfahan* (Isfahan Women's Cooperative), whose purpose was to change practices she believed harmful to Iran, such as the marriage of girls before the age of fifteen and the import of foreign fabrics. At the same time she started the first major woman's magazine, *Zaban-i Zan* (Women's Tongue), in Isfahan in 1919. Through this magazine, she argued against the imposition of the veil, for economic and emotional independence of women, for the education of women in ethics, literature, and science, and against the political dependence of Iran on other countries. The aim of this journal, then, was both feminist and nationalist. The biweekly magazine shocked religious groups in Isfahan.

Siddiqeh Dowlatnabadi won further national notoriety by criticizing the prime minister (the *vusug-al-dawlah*), who had signed a treaty giving certain rights to the British. The British retaliated by promising to distribute food to poor Iranians who agreed to gather at the post office in support of the *vusug-aldawlah*. When an emissary from Dowlatnabadi arrived at the post office to read out Siddiqeh Dowlatnabadi's powerful petition for freedom from British interference and control, the crowd listened intently. After he finished reading, they left without accepting any of the food offered by the British.

The government countered by banning Dowlatabadi's magazine because, by discussing politics, she had transgressed its original purpose and limits. After her life was threatened and her house stoned, she went into hiding. Finally she moved from Isfahan to Tehran, where she started new societies (*anjuman*) for women and published a dictionary of contemporary women. In 1923, she left for Europe and traveled in France, Germany, and Switzerland. She studied at the Sorbonne for a few years and returned to Iran in 1927. She is known as one of the first women in twentieth-century Iran to address crowds publicly without a veil. She gave speeches everywhere, even in the heart of conservative Qum.

While in Europe, she attended the Tenth Congress of the International Alliance for Women's Suffrage in Paris (May 1926). There she met and started a friendship with Margaret Ashby, the president of the International Alliance of Women's Suffrage. Ashby, a New Yorker and mother of two, a housewife and a politician, was also the founder of *Taking Care of Home and Children*. The structure of this magazine influenced the journal Dowlatabadi subsequently edited in Iran, *Name-i-Banovan* (Women's Paper), which was produced under the supervision of the government.

Not only was Dowlatabadi's magazine repeatedly threatened and its publication banned for several months, but she received death threats for her outspoken feminist and political editorials. When in 1936 Reza Shah issued the decree banning the veil, Siddiqeh Dowlatabadi was safe. In 1946 she returned to Europe to attend the Tenth Congress of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Geneva. When she died in 1961 at the age of eighty, Dowlatabadi asked that no veiled woman be allowed to attend her death ceremonies or visit her grave. In 1993, her niece Pari went to visit her grave, whose stone, though defaced by Hezbollah thugs, still stands. She asked the keeper of the graveyard whose grave this was. He replied, 'I'm not sure. But I think it is the grave of a lewd woman who danced naked in front of cinema theaters.'

A second reading of the Siddiqeh Dowlatabadi story reveals some troubling fault lines. A courageous feminist and activist all her life, she consolidated her feminism along class lines. Her problem could be read as not uncommon to the early history of feminism. Joan Scott, for instance, draws attention to the history of feminism as 'the history of the project of reducing diversities (of class, race, sexuality, ethnicity, politics, religion, and socio-economic status) among females to a common identity of women (usually in opposition to patriarchy, a system of male domination).'⁴⁵ Yet Scott also discusses the problem of feminism's repressing differences that could not be eliminated. Such 'repression' of sexuality and class can be seen in a painful and telling incident recorded during my conversations with Pari, about her famous aunt.

Not only was the marriage between her seventy-year-old father and the nine-year-old daughter of his secretary arranged by Siddiqeh Dowlatabadi,

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the story continues with the following detail: when the girl was in labor before her first menstruation, howling with pain and hanging from the beams in her bedroom, Siddiqeh Dowlatabadi ordered the family to leave her alone. Another relative, unable to bear her cries, went to her aid. When the young wife was fifteen – after giving birth to two daughters, one of whom was Pari's mother – she was widowed. Once again, Siddiqeh Dowlatabadi arranged for her to marry an old man. As Gayle Rubin might say, woman here was the gift, but the exchange partners upon whom this exchange would confer its 'quasi-mystical power of social linkage,' though not necessarily men, operated through a psychic economy where daughter identified with father, and whose power and privilege were male.⁴⁶ The locus of the girl's oppression was between power systems (father and daughter) within a sexual system that trafficked in women, more specifically, women of a lower class. Descended from the 'lower-class interloper who had come into the family,' Pari was always aware of her difference from and inferiority to the other Dowlatabadis. And 'difference' perhaps became the category through which Dowlatabadi found more common ground with Margaret Ashby in Paris than with her father's child bride.

Feminist political activism waned during the Pahlavi era, partly because both the Left and the Right were gender blind, partly because various 'societies' were subsumed into the state-sponsored Women's Organization of Iran headed by the Shah's twin sister, Ashraf Pahlavi. Najmabadi describes the shift in attitudes toward women's rights as a movement from activism to tokenism: 'In the first period [the 1930s], women's status was seen as a symbol of modernity of the new nation and the new state. In the second period [the 1970s], it became the symbol of the modernity of the monarch and his progressive benevolence towards women.'⁴⁷

Whereas women had been activists before and during the Islamic Revolution, they found themselves increasingly disenfranchised by the hardened positions taken by the Revolution after its initial 'spring of freedom.' Newly hardened positions were articulated most publicly by Monireh Gurji, the woman representative responsible for drafting the new Constitution of the Islamic Republic: 'I feel ashamed to talk about "women's rights". Have any of our brothers in this assembly mentioned "men's rights"?'⁴⁸ The question elided was well articulated most recently by Mahnaz Afkhami

[H]ow will Muslim women, particularly those among them who can communicate with others, influence events, and make a difference, be empowered to advance the cause of women's human rights? How can the process be enhanced, facilitated, encouraged? What possibilities exist or can be generated for women activists?⁴⁹

by women in the history of Iran. Hailed as the 'pillars of Iranian society' by Ayatollah Khomeini, women were soon pilloried into submission, their symbol for revolutionary liberation (the *chador*) turned into a shroud of protective exclusion and bondage. Yet on International Woman's Day – 8 March 1979 – thirty thousand women marched on the streets to protest compulsory veiling and other forms of punishing and disciplining women. The women who marched for women's rights were a heterogeneous group who represented social and political organizations as different as the conservative Women's Society of Islamic Revolution and the radical Revolutionary Union of Militant Women, whose parent organization was the Maoist Communist Party of Workers and Peasants.⁵⁰

For the women I interviewed who had participated in this and the next march, the event included moments of unwelcome epiphany.⁵¹ Not only was the march followed by several days of hysterical responses from young Islamic fanatics who roamed the city in search of women they could assault, but it also revealed to them the indifference of leftist organizations to women's issues.

The Women's March of 12 March 1979, for instance, ruptured certainties for Afsaneh Najmabadi by starting the process of breaking up unexamined ideas of unified feminism, recognizing difference, and admitting the multiplicity of class and gender identities. The march had been organized to protest Khomeini's March 7th decree on *hijab* (regulation Islamic dress, not necessarily the *chador*) as a requirement. Najmabadi was about to take her turn (on behalf of a segment of the Socialist Worker's Party) as speaker on a platform. Suddenly something she heard made her so dizzy that she almost fell off the platform: she had heard a woman from another committee say, 'Look at those painted faces in the crowd. I will never go on a march with those women.' Afsaneh's first reaction was that 'of course she was right. A great many women who had come to that rally were exactly the women whom for years we had come to call "the painted dolls of the Pahlavi regime."' But years later as she reflected on her dizzy spell, she wrote:

Despite nine years of vehement argumentations against crossing class lines, something in my mind had broken down. All I cared about, there and at that moment, was for women of any class, or any ideological affiliation . . . to make a very loud presence felt. . . . For years I thought my dizziness had been caused by the deep anger I had felt. . . . On the body of what we called the Westoxicated painted dolls, we had *fixed* layer upon layer of meaning. . . . This dichotomous mapping of female bodies as representations of revolution and counter-revolution, of moral and immoral, was the common political and cultural language of Islamic and

secular forces at the time, with no room for any 'choreographical' destabilization.⁵²

Four months later, on 12 July 1979, when three prostitutes were executed, none of the leftist presses with which Afsaneh Najmabadi was associated thought the event important enough to report. She and other activists like Nayereh Tohidi report their horror at the extent to which the Left had internalized patriarchal priorities,⁵³ at their own inability to counter leftist arguments that head coverings and women's rights were minor issues in the context of the larger political arena of anti-imperial straggles.

Gradually, as evidenced by the writings of Khomeini and Motahari, all differences withered into a single truth: the only acceptable woman in the Islamic state was the Muslim woman who was the 'pillar of the family,' and who abided by all the laws laid down in the *shari'a*, who would accept the misogynist gender coding prescribed for her by the new government's version of Islam. By 1981 (two years after the Revolution), the idea of debating compulsory veiling or women's marches or women's rights seemed a part of the quixotic fantasy that had briefly accompanied a lost revolution.

The role of motherhood, however, was chosen as a charged symbolic site for the Islamic Republic. Motherhood was politicized and valorized, as well as sanctified through association with the clergy's vision of Fatima as ideal mother, wife, and daughter, even as the 'family' and 'family values' were revived as the birthplace for a new and proper Islamic society. Haleh Afshar compares Khomeini's veneration of mothers as 'pillars of the nation,' 'forts of virtue and chastity' who must raise 'brave and enlightened men and weak and united women,' with Hitler's similar claim that women were 'entrusted in the life of the nation with a great task, the care of man, soul, body and mind.'⁵⁴ Equality with men is deemed 'degrading' to women because it alienates them from their essential nature. While educated and middle-class women likely to pursue higher education and careers were indignant at definitions of their true 'nature,' the poorest women in the lowest classes were attracted and empowered by Khomeini's decree that husbands were responsible for the care and feeding of their wives. And it was the promise of this protection that kept them ardent supporters of the clergy.

The thrust of the conventional public narrative I have offered above is contradicted and inverted by yet another private account. A story told to me by Mohamad Tavakoli about his sister's rise and resistance to patriarchy, it is also a story about the incommensurability between ideology as it does its cultural work and ideology as it gets absorbed into personal life. Mohamad Tavakoli was born in Chaleh Meidun (below the bazaars in south Tehran) into a family of eight sons and one daughter. All eight brothers and their father saw the little sister as the repository of their honor and therefore,

from the age of seven on, the object of their concern, protection, and wrath if, for instance, her *chador* slipped. As was true of other girls in her conservative neighborhood, her movements in public were limited to trips to buy bread or go to school.

When the Revolution started in 1978, she disappeared from her home for three days with no explanation. She was then sixteen years old. When she returned, her angry father and brothers discovered that she had been engaged in making Molotov cocktails during one of the decisive battles between the army and the people. During the family fight that ensued, she wrestled with her father, knocked him to the ground, and kicked him. The father, who ironically had been the most religious member of the family, found that the Revolution had become his daughter's excuse for revolting against him. He left his home and went to his village of origin, promising never to return until his daughter left the house.

Her rejection of paternal power, however, did not preclude subsequent attachments to other centers of male power. In the early 1980s, Mohamad's sister flirted with the possibility of joining various leftist Islamic groups and temporarily even abandoned the *chador*. During the elections for the Assembly of Experts she came into contact with the Party of the Islamic Republic, liked their simplicity and clothing (the men, for instance, wore no ties), and became active in their cause. When she completed this trajectory by marrying a member of the Revolutionary Guard, she continued her education, became principal of a high school, and established an educational collective. Mohamad says that all the brothers are now afraid of her and warn him to be careful of what he writes in letters home. She has recently considered running for Parliament.

The strictures against women therefore contained and nourished their contrary. And in this inversion we see also an inversion of the narrative of bound women in Pari's story about her village work. The collapse of old certainties led to the invention of new spaces for the rethinking of women's issues and the male-engendered narratives of Islamic laws. Ten years after the revolution, women found other ways to avoid confrontation with the regime by critiquing *ijtihad* (legal decisions about the *shari'a*), by reinterpreting gendered readings of the Qur'an, and by demonstrating an active presence in 'every field of artistic creation, professional achievement, educational and industrial institutions, and even in sports.'⁵⁵

Najmabadi draws attention to the new power women have gained through their manipulation of the gendered construction of Islamic political discourse, as a result of which they are configuring new readings of Islam and feminism. Studies of female suicide, of population control, of laws of custody and divorce, of opposition to changes in laws on marriage and polygamy, for instance, appeared in the pages of *Zan-i-Ruz* (Today's Woman).⁵⁶

Seventeen years after the Revolution, evidence suggests that women are beginning not only to have an active presence in politics⁵⁷ but also to carve out new possibilities for themselves in social, legal, and political life through public debate in women's magazines, through social and civic activism, and through public office.⁵⁸ Small though the number appears, it is significant that nine out of 280 members of the Majlis (Parliament) are women. This number is 4 percent higher than the comparable figure in Turkey, which is assumed to be more 'modern' than Iran. The cabinet includes one woman who serves as adviser on women's issues. After the Beijing conference, the Ministry of Health opened a new position for a female deputy minister. Rafsanjani's daughter, Fayeze, won the second-highest number of votes in the Majlis during the most recent election.

The counternarrative to these happy statistics is that Rafsanjani's daughter, after being elected to the Majlis, was beaten after a press conference by a group of conservative thought-police who objected to her liberal positions on such issues as appropriate clothing for women who ride bicycles, and her opposition to certain aspects of the status quo: that women are excluded from the judiciary, that they are policed and arrested for improper *hijab*, and that the violation of Islamic gender relations is punishable by flogging. The Persian skill at versified sloganeering (demonstrated all through the marches preceding the Islamic Revolution) took a newly gendered turn during the conservative opposition to the election of Fayeze Rafsanjani. The slogans began by collapsing two women, Fayeze and Ayesheh ('A'isha) – the youngest wife of the Prophet, a model of reprehensible womanhood in Shi'ite Islam. One slogan therefore went as follows: '*Ayesheh ba shotor amad, / Fayeze ba motor amad*' (Ayesheh came on a camel, Fayeze came on a motorcycle). Another slogan played on the likeness between her first name and the similar-sounding word meaning "prostitute" – *fahesheh*:

Ayeshe-i-shotor sawar (Ayesheh who rides a camel)

Faheshe-i-motor sawar (Prostitute who rides a motorcycle)

Fayeze Rafsanjani and the debate about the propriety of women riding bicycles (see *New York Times*, 20 September 1996) is but a small manifestation of a much larger debate about women and power. So too the link between the camel and the bicycle in the second slogan needs to be contextualized in terms of a larger conflict over female activity and transgression that goes back to the seventh-century Battle of the Camel, also known as the first civil war in Islamic society.⁵⁹

The limited space women have carved for themselves has not been freely given. As Haideh Moghissi puts it, 'The Islamic regime has not opened the gates. Women are jumping over the fences.'⁶⁰ In particular, four journals

are responsible for rearticulating the position of women: *Payam-i-Hajar* (Message of Hagar), *Zari-i-Ruz* (Today's Woman), *Farzaneh* (Wise Woman), and *Zanan* (Women).

While distancing themselves from Western feminism as a limited and Eurocentric category, articles and editorials in three of the four magazines call for a re-examination of male readings of the *shari'a* and the Islamic canon. Their central concerns vary: *Payam-i-Hajar*, for instance, focuses on 'awakening the conscience of the Islamic Republic' to the plight of working women, rural women, state workers, and 'other suffering sisters.' *Zanan*, however, has taken on the radical task of 'decentering the clergy from the domain of interpretation,' questioning legality, justice, and canonical readings of the Qur'an, and advocating 'reading the Qur'an as a woman.'⁶¹ Social critics (Mina Yadigar Azadi and others) challenge readings of specific verses in the Qur'an by refusing to allow claims about ethics to be normative and insisting on the need for historic specificity. By arguing against hegemonic authorities and by admitting into their pages forbidden female voices from the decadent period of monarchy, and from the writings of such Western feminists as Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, and Susan Faludi, the new Islamic feminists are, as Najmabadi tells us, collapsing the oppositions between modernity and Islam, secular and Islamic feminism, and feminism and cultural authenticity. In these new alliances we might see a specifically non-Western alternative modernity that rereads and rethinks the failures of the past and present.

Finally, I return to my earlier point about the unexpected consequences of modernity – a package deal whose hidden agendas are surprisingly resisted by those who find ways to put new experiences in the old package. Those new experiences are the contraries with which modernity is always pregnant. Life makes for strange bedfellows. Just as Big Oil, the United States, and the Shah had no intention of producing an Islamic Revolution, so too the Islamic Revolution had no intention of producing its unintended effect: a potential that, though compromised, is realizing itself in a kind of woman's movement specific to and produced by its historical moment – and in a newly politicized public reflected in the approximately 90 percent of people who went to the polls in May 1997, an election that, against conventional predictions, brought in the liberal Ayatollah Khatami. Women are neither 'returning' to a past narrative, nor are they mimicking a Western model of feminism. Instead they struggle to articulate a women's movement in dialectical conflict with each.

NOTES

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- 1 Jalal Al-Ahmad, *Plagued by the West*, trans. Paul Sprachman (Delmar, NY: Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, 1981), p. 3. Al-Ahmad was one of many intellectuals and social critics who theorized the importance of political Islam in terms made familiar by Marxist socialism. Other representative figures in this group were Mehdi Bazargan and Abol Hassan Banisadr. His influential term *Gharbzadegi* has been translated alternatively as 'westernitis' or 'westoxification'.
- 2 See Parvin Paidar's *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) for a provocative linkage of two Iranian revolutions (1906 and 1979) with modernity, a movement that in Iran was 'broadly defined . . . as a socio-political process which promised the establishment of economic prosperity, social and technological progress, social justice, political freedom and national independence' (p. 24).
- 3 Keya Ganguly insists on the *agrammaticality* of different cultural modernities to discuss the 'messiness and incommensurable aspects of distinguishing, perhaps in the dark, the ruptures and syntheses produced in the encounter between a putatively universal grammar of subjectivity and its multiple, historically specific variations.' 'Carnal Knowledge: Visuality and the Modern in *Charulata*,' *Camera Obscura* 37 (1996): 157–86.
- 4 See Ranajit Guha, 'Dominance without Hegemony and its Historiography,' *Subaltern Studies* VI, ed. Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 210–309. Guha focuses on nineteenth-century colonial society in India, where he sees the state exerting domination without hegemony – the necessary consent of all classes.
- 5 Shariati, *Bazgasht bih Khvish*, p. 316, quoted in Mohamad Tavakoli, 'The Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1906 and the Islamic Revolution of 1978–1979' (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1988), p. 124. This is not essentialist authenticity, and not a fixed definition of the self based on a fantasmatic past. That was the model of self used by the clergy and accounts for Shariati's excommunication by the religious Right.
- 6 Ali Shariati, *Fatima Is Fatima*, trans. Laleh Bakhtiar (Tehran: The Shariati Foundation, n.d.), p. 105. Hereafter cited parenthetically as FF.
- 7 Some of the documents by women compiled in Azar Tabari and Nahid Yeganeh's *In the Shadow of Islam: The Women's Movement in Iran* (London: Zed Press, 1982) include lengthy examples lifted from Shariati's book almost as if the authors had internalized his argument and metaphors.
- 8 Shariati's argument is reminiscent of Fanon's chapter 'On National Culture,' in *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove, 1963), in which he examines the problems of constructing a new identity forged out of a dead past and a bourgeois travesty of an imagined European present.
- 9 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 202.
- 10 Oriana Fallaci, *Interviews with History* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), p. 272.
- 11 See William R. Darrow, 'Woman's Place and the Place of Women in the Iranian Revolution,' in *Women, Religion and Social Change*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), pp. 307–20, for a valuable reading of the ambivalent discourse of

- women's rights in the Islamic Constitution and its sources in earlier writings by Shariati and Moteahari.
- 12 Ali Shariati, *On the Sociology of Islam*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley, CA: Misan Press, 1979), p. 49.
 - 13 See, for example, Tabari and Yeganeh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, pp. 173, 176, 189, 190.
 - 14 See Mohamad Tavakoli, 'Modernist Refashioning of Iran' (unpublished Ms.)
 - 15 Quoted in Said Amir Arjomand, *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 357.
 - 16 Derek Walcott refers to 'Progress as history's dirty joke' and its excuse for extermination, genocide, war, and slavery; Levinas – using Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, and Sartre as evidence – has also attacked Western ontology as a philosophy based, he claims, on 'a horror of the other.' Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other,' in *Deconstruction in Context*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 346–47. Levinas proposes ethics in place of ontology, substituting respect for the other (justice) in place of desire (freedom).
 - 17 The irony here is that while Nuri claimed that he did not wish to build Iran out of the *ash* (stew) of the British, he was glad to sell out land and monopolies to the Russians. For a reading of this entangled relationship, see Michael M. J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 5–51. See also Vanessa Martin's *Islam and Modernism: The Iranian Revolution of 1906* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1989). Although Nuri's stance later became the basis for what is now referred to as traditionalist ideology, he does not fit into the category of the 'premodern' traditional because he takes modernity as a counter and articulates a position against it.
 - 18 Quoted in Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, p. 65.
 - 19 See Eliz Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran* (New York: Praeger, 1982), pp. 20–21. See also Haideh Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male-Defined Revolutionary Movement* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994); and Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*.
 - 20 See Afsaneh Najmabadi's forthcoming *Daughters of Quchan: Re-membering the Forgotten Gender of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press) and her unpublished Ms. 'Female Suns and Male Lions: The Gendered Tropes of Iranian Modernity.'
 - 21 See Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran*, pp. 82 ff. She quotes from Ahmad Kasravi, *Khaharan va Dokhtaran-e Ma* (Our sisters and daughters), 2nd edn (Bethesda, MD: Iranbooks, 1992), pp. 13–31.
 - 22 Ervand Abrahamian, 'Kasravi: The Integrative Nationalist of Iran,' *Middle East Studies*, October 1973, 271–95. This illuminating essay narrates the history of Iran as a story of linguistic, religious, and tribal factions and communal struggles. Abrahamian suggests what is at stake in political modernization by recalling differences in the use of the term 'national integration,' which for Clifford Geertz means the 'aggregation of communal groups into nations' and for Leonard Binder suggests the closing of gaps 'between elites and masses through the building of new national values and state institutions' (p. 272).
 - 23 *Ibid.*, p. 273.
 - 24 *Ibid.*
 - 25 *Ibid.*, p. 280. See also Fischer, *Iran*, for its discussions of theological disputes.
 - 26 For all these details, I am indebted mostly to Abrahamian, 'Kasravi,' and Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), pp. 98–105.
- Abrahamian sees the book burning and Kasravi's desire to cleanse Persian of mystical poetry and foreign words as a typically extreme strategy whose effect was to alienate communists and intellectuals who would otherwise have supported Kasravi. He therefore sees the failure to compromise as the cause of Kasravi's downfall. For an account of a typical debate between Khomeini and Kasravi in the 1940s, see Fischer, *Iran*, pp. 130–33.
 - 27 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Rodiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
 - 28 See Nikki Keddie, *Roots of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 93 ff.; and Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Books, 1986), pp. 57–72.
 - 29 See Geoffrey Galt Harpham, 'So . . . What Is Enlightenment? An Inquisition into Modernity' *Critical Inquiry*, (spring 1994): 551–56, for a sharp reading of the Inquisition as embodiment of the paradox, self-division, darkness, and 'dialectic' of the Enlightenment.
 - 30 This familiar image from Marx has been used to advantage most recently in David Lyon, *Postmodernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 21. Terry Eagleton uses the image to describe capitalism, which 'gives birth to its own gravedigger, nurturing the acolyte who will one day stab the high priest in the back,' in *Criticism and Ideology* (London: New Left Books, 1976), p. 133.
 - 31 Harpham, 'So . . . What Is Enlightenment?', p. 333.
 - 32 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 234.
 - 33 In 1963, explaining his program in the language of popular revolution, the Shah embarked on 'the Revolution of the Shah and the People' that included reforms such as voting rights for women, the formation of a literacy corps, and land reforms. See also Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Land Reform and Social Change in Iran* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), for a valuable study of the effects of the land reforms of 1962–72 on the economy of rural societies, and of the problems in translating into other cultures the European model for agrarian development.
 - 34 We must recognize that this is the narrative of a landowner and not of a peasant. The White Revolution was also seen as liberation by many peasants, some of whom organized street demonstrations during the 1960s in support of its aims.
 - 35 See Haleh Afshar, 'An Assessment of Agricultural Development Policies in Iran,' in *Iran: A Revolution in Turmoil* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), pp. 58–79. She points to misconceived national planning and to statistics that demonstrate, over a forty-five year span, a lack of linkage between central and rural economies: 'The oil industry was a highly developed, capital-intensive producer of unprocessed oil, mainly for consumption of the West. Oil formed an enclave of development with no backward and little forward linkage to the indigenous sector' (p. 59).
 - 36 After the CIA *coup* of 1953 Iran's political and economic enmeshment turned from Britain and the Soviet Union to the United States, whose paranoia about the Soviet threat from the 1950s to the 1970s translated into massive military and economic assistance. Before the 1953 *coup*, the country had been indirectly controlled by Britain and the Soviet Union. The Shah is reported to have complained that ambassadors from the two countries handed him a list of candidates each time there was an election to the Majlis: see Mehran Kamrava, *Revolution in Iran: The Roots of Turmoil* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 30.

- 37 See Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, p. 235.
- 38 See Benita Parry, 'Resistance Theory/Theorizing Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism,' in *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*, ed. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 172-96; Lila Abu-Lughod, 'The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women,' *American Ethnologist* 17 (1990): 41-55.
- 39 See Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 226 ff. Discussing the uneven development of different sectors of social systems, Giddens writes of two models of unfolding development in Marx: one a progressive model moving toward empowering workers, neighborhoods, unions, and the proletariat; and the other, a 'second theory of revolution,' that 'anticipates a conception of uneven development,' that 'involves the idea that the conditions initiating revolutionary transformation are to be found in the conjunction of the retarded and the advanced: the sort of explosive situation Marx saw to exist in Germany in the late 1840s, and in Russia some thirty years later' (pp. 226-27).
- See also Marshall Berman's persuasive and relevant argument about the 'tragedy of development' in *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (New York: Penguin, 1982): 'In so-called underdeveloped countries, systematic plans for rapid development have generally meant systematic repression of the masses,' a repression that he says takes two forms. 'The first form has involved squeezing every last drop of labor power out of the masses - Faust's "human sacrifices bled, / tortured screams would pierce the night" - in order to build up the forces of production, and at the same time drastically restricting mass consumption so as to create a surplus for reinvestment in the economy. The second form entails seemingly gratuitous acts of destruction - Faust's destruction of Philemon and Baucis and their bells and trees - not to create any material utility but to make the symbolic point that the new society must burn all its bridges so there can be no turning back' (pp. 75-76).
- 40 Although I am indebted to conversations with Mohamad Tavakoli for my understanding of differences, he warns me to resist such facile simplifications because each of the figures I name belongs just as easily in other categories.
- 41 See Ali Mirsepassi-Ashtiani, 'The Crisis of Secular Politics and the Rise of Political Islam in Iran,' *Social Text* (spring 1994): 51-84, for an important reading of the revolution as a 'historical turning point in the crisis of modern secular politics.' Foucault's comment appeared, according to Ashtiani, in an interview in a Persian paper, *Akhtar* 4 (spring 1987): 43. Paul Vieille's comments were made in Champaign-Urbana, both in conversations and public talks.
- 42 See Cheryl Benard and Zalmay Khalilzad, *The Government of God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 39. When Karim Sanjabi, the leader of the National Front, visited Khomeini in France, he emerged from their meeting with a shared understanding of Islam and democracy as foundations. This convinced secularists that the theologians would step aside once the Revolution had been won. Later, however, Khomeini refused to include the word 'democracy'. It was, he said, 'a Western import and Islam sufficed.' See Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, p. 252.
- 43 Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992), p. 4.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

- 45 Introduction to *Feminism and History*, ed. Joan Wallach Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 4.
- 46 See Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex,' in Scott, *Feminism and History*, pp. 105-51.
- 47 Afsaneh Najmabadi, 'Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran,' in *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), p. 63.
- 48 Nahid Yeganeh, 'Women's Struggles in the Islamic Republic of Iran,' in Tabari and Yeganeh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, p. 55. Gurji was the chosen woman representative in the Assembly of Experts. She continued in this speech to say that Islam does not separate women's from men's rights. 'We have only the rights of human beings.'
- 49 Introduction to *Faith and Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World*, ed. Mahnaz Afkhami (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), p. 5.
- 50 My source is the section entitled 'Women's Organizations in Iran,' in Tabari and Yeganeh, *In the Shadow of Islam*. This useful book includes documents on the question of women spanning the period from Khomeini to the Tudeh Party. It also lists positions taken by thirteen major and ten smaller women's organizations on the Revolution.
- 51 See Afsaneh Najmabadi, 'Without a Place to Rest the Sole of My Foot,' *Emergences* (fall 1992): 84-102, for an account of her participation in the march, her questioning of the mapping of female bodies as representations of revolution and counter-revolution, and her disillusionment with leftist organizations for their refusal to take public positions on the terror against women when three prostitutes were executed on 12 July 1979.
- 52 *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- 54 See Haleh Afshar, 'Khomeini's Teachings and Their Implications for Iranian Women,' in Tabari and Yeganeh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, pp. 75-90. She quotes from C. Kirkpatrick's *Women in Nazi Germany* (London: Jarrolds, 1939), p. 100.
- 55 Afsaneh Najmabadi, 'Feminisms in an Islamic Republic,' in *Gender, Islam, and Social Change*, ed. Yvonne Haddad and John Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 59-84.
- 56 See Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*, pp. 265-363, on the 'Discourse of Islamization,' for a valuable survey of the Islamic Republic's policies on women.
- 57 For this information, I am grateful to Nayereh Tohidi, who has recently visited Iran and written on the changing social positions of women (see n. 58).
- 58 See Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran*. See also Valentine Moghadam, ed., *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in an International Perspective* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994); and Nayereh Tohidi, 'Modernity, Islamization, and Women in Iran,' in *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*, ed. Valentine Moghadam (London: Zed Books, 1994).
- 59 See D. A. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of 'A'isha bint Abi Bakr* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 132 ff., for an insightful reading of conflicting interpretations of 'A'isha's role in the Battle of the Cammel in Sunni and Shi'a sources. This event is read as the cause of the split in the Prophet's household after his death. Most of his wives opposed 'A'isha's involvement in politics on the grounds (according to Shi'a sources) that women belonged in their tents rather than on battlefields. 'Retrospectively

cast in the historical record as the defeated political activist, 'A'isha is scripted to defend an untenable legacy as a woman already defined by the errors of female transgression' (p. 137).

60 Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran*, p. 183.

61 For the details on magazines, I am entirely indebted to Najmabadi's 'Feminisms in an Islamic Republic.'

HUMAN RIGHTS ARE WOMEN'S RIGHT

Amnesty International and the family

Saba Bahar

Women's movements have had formal international ties since 1902 when the International Woman Suffrage Alliance was organized. In the late twentieth century, globalization of the economy, technology, information, and politics made connections among women more widespread. In particular, international meetings became important to women's movements from the mid-1970s. These meetings were the occasion for publishing statistics on women in individual nations and evaluating women's situation globally. They provided publicity for the incredible poverty of most women, their victimization physically and politically, and the need to remedy these harsh conditions. Global organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch came to see that their work had focused too strictly on male political prisoners, the treatment of combatants, and other issues relating only to men. Feminism was reaching beyond national governments and constituencies to a global audience.

A major achievement of the last two decades of the twentieth century was the formulation of projects on human rights as they pertained to women. Human rights are defined in a variety of ways, from the right to food and shelter to a life free from violence and abuse. Women's failure to enjoy equal human rights emerged from these international conferences – for example, in Nairobi, Houston, and Beijing – as a common bond for women in countries of the North and South alike. Since World War II the number of people killed globally in wars of liberation, civil wars, ethnic war, and interstate war has passed the fifty million mark. It has been estimated that these wars and the accompanying rape have disproportionately impacted women. Domestic violence and rape in the course of everyday life constituted another common thread and one that seemed a progressively greater threat. This chapter charts the emergence of human rights as a feminist theme in the 1980s and 1990s and its intersection with other activist agendas. Human rights activism, its advocates maintain, has the potential for reinvigorating political life at the local level because it encompasses basic needs. In this respect it replaces or