Populism and Feminism in Iran

Haideh Moghissi

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Women's Struggle in a Male-Defined Revolutionary Movement

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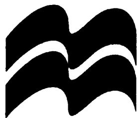

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To my mother, for her wisdom and endurance, and for her skill in remaining joyful and humorous amidst tears and sorrows, a skill generously shared among Iranian women of many generations.

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Preface to the 1996 Reprint

To write a new preface for a study completed several years earlier imposes the need, in the light of changing circumstances, to reassess one's understanding and analysis of events and forces involved in the period under investigation. Unfortunately, in the period since I wrote this book nothing has happened to compel a fundamental revision of the main thesis of the work. The obstacles of a democratic opening in Iran remain, and, if anything, have become entrenched further in the face of a prolonged social and economic crisis. Neither political developments in the Islamic Republic nor the ideological evolution of the traditional Iranian left at home or in exile indicate an adequate movement in the direction of recognizing and respecting women's rights to full personhood.

Iran's clerical state is still struggling to find a way without opening the gates of Sharia to the modern world, of accommodating women's demands to a more equitable treatment in economic and social spheres and women's quest for personal freedoms and basic human rights. This is a challenge that it cannot meet. To do so, the theocratic state would need to initiate substantial legal and social change, without itself changing. The traditional left, in its turn, despite heartening efforts of individual women and men in Iran and the diaspora to rethink their own personal politics, still must confront decisively its historical, ideological and personal male-centredness.

The major hopeful sign and most remarkable stimulus of change continues to come directly from women at home and in exile. Women in Iran have succeeded in pushing back the offensive of the Islamists inch by inch, reappropriating spheres of public life that were lost immediately after the Revolution. Their success in forcing the government to remove, at least on paper, the ban on certain fields of higher education is a case in point. Women have succeeded in placing their plight at the centre of politics in Iran and as a

major issue of conflict in political discourse and ideological mobilization. In the streets of Iran's major cities, growing clashes between the Morality Police and bystanders over the arrest of violators of the Islamic dress code demonstrate that women's resistance, together with the overall political and economic crises of the Islamic state, have caused a disenchantment of ordinary Iranians with the Islamists who, incapable of delivering on their economic and political promises, continue their policy of purifying the female soul and body from secular ideas and practices. Women and the politics of gender continue to be the Achilles' heel of the clerical state. This reconfirms, for me, the place of the women's rights struggle in post-revolutionary politics. It also suggests that change is on the way. One hopes this change will positively affect the struggle of women in other Muslim societies in which 'Islamic states' on Iran's model are in the making.

Preface

I am a descendant of the house of trees.
Breathing stale air depresses me.
A bird which had died advised me to
commit flight to memory.

Forugh Farrokhzad

This book is personally and intellectually rooted in my experience of living through the unforgettable period of Iranian history when rising fundamentalism, involving the most undemocratic, brutal and misogynist practices, was sweeping away the democratic achievements of the 1979 revolution. Particularly painful for me was the response from a large section of the Iranian left that ranged from supportive criticism at best through a silence that justified those practices.

The idea of writing about this experience, however, did not come to my mind until several months after yet another distressing experience. That was my involuntary residence in the West, with no prospect of return. Probably the idea of writing about this experience was initially a defence mechanism to offset my new predicament. The project was kept alive and my perceptions about the experience I had left behind became more clarified as I had to confront astounding misconceptions about the revolution in Iran, the place of the left and women's place in the revolution, and as I discussed it with friends who encouraged me to write about it. For the materialization of my initial thoughts about this book, I am indebted to many people who in different ways have contributed to the completion of this work.

First, I must express my gratitude to all the women and men who courageously shared with me their experience and knowledge of the Iranian socialist and women's movements and those friends who sent me valuable documents from Iran and who must remain anonymous. A number of friends read and commented on parts or the whole manuscript. A major part of it was conceived as my doctoral dissertation. My deep appreciation goes to Roberta Hamilton for her critical suggestions

and her intellectual support in various stages of this project. Her friendship and support sustained me throughout this work and I have learned a lot from her. Special thanks to Phil Goldman for his personal and intellectual encouragement. I owe much to Haleh Afshar for her warmth, unfailing support, and her comments on an earlier version of the manuscript, which helped me to improve the book. I drew help from other friends. I thank Kathleen Herman, my first friend and teacher in Canada, for her unfailing support and sound advice; Susan Babbitt for many stimulating discussions and constant support; and Lynn Freeman for copy-editing this text. I also gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, whose funding made the project possible.

My deepest appreciation extends also to my family. Ali's unquestioning love and patience allowed me to reconcile mothering with political activism in the difficult years of the Iranian Revolution. He never refused to follow me to endless meetings, sit-ins and demonstrations. In his own way, he has shared many of the experiences underlying this work. Amir's good humour and unstated love has been and is still a source of hope and endurance. I am indebted to Saeed Rahnema for his enormous intellectual and political support, many good critiques, and unfailing love. Of course, the shortcomings of this work are all mine.

Introduction

It is no secret that women have been the main losers of the 1979 Revolution in Iran. They have been increasingly deprived of personal and social freedoms under the clerical government that replaced the Shah. What is sadly not known by those who have not followed political events in Iran is that the post-revolutionary period saw an extraordinary upsurge of gender-awareness and the proliferation of independent women's professional and political organizations. Women presented the first, and to a certain extent, the most effective challenge to the Islamic regime by courageously questioning the clerical authority to define the conditions of their lives. Their resistance, however, could not fend off the formidable offensive of the new regime.

The experience of Iranian women in the post-revolutionary movement has, of course, not been unique. Time and time again we have seen the reproduction of traditional gender roles in revolutionary movements and post-revolutionary states. Under the pretext of preserving the authentic cultural heritage against foreign influence, the most reactionary practices have been preserved, antiquated sexist traditions reactivated, and dissenting voices silenced. Women's political mobilization in many national liberation movements has served to obscure and cloud the patriarchal and undemocratic character of those movements. This work presents a dramatic case of the continuing process of claiming national identity through traditional dogmatism and religious orthodoxy at the expense of the female citizenry.

My main concern in this book has been to analyse women's experiences in a revolutionary movement whose direction and outcome we did not control. I have attempted to unravel the forces involved in the defeat of the women's movement and to explain how and why women's struggle did not develop into a strong feminist movement against the fundamentalist assault on women's legal rights and social freedoms. My analysis demonstrates that the suppression of the women's movement, as a significant political force, can only be attributed in part to the formidable coercive power of the Islamic regime. The

political climate of the time was also against feminist ideas and the development of autonomous feminist organizations. My first argument is that the dominance of populist tendencies and ideologies among the opposition and their preoccupation with foreign aggression made the struggle for democracy and individual liberties peripheral. This deprived the women's movement of the active support of opposition forces that might have halted the advance of the fundamentalists. The suppression of the women's movement has made it easier for the ruling clerics to carry out their Islamization policies since 1980. My second argument is related to the hegemonic influence of Shiite/Iranian concepts and perceptions of female sexuality and sexist beliefs and values. These beliefs and values, inculcated through socialization, and reproduced and sustained in gender hierarchies in political life, determined the nature and scope of the roles women assume in Iran. The Islamists had no monopoly on male-centred culture and moralistic visions of female sexuality and sex-roles. Rather these were shared by, and had a determining influence in the ideological formation, political culture and practical activities of secular nationalist and socialist organizations. This political culture helps to explain why, at different historical junctures, women have been highly praised for their unflagging contributions to the goals of national liberation and have been resented and ignored when they raised issues of women's autonomy and individual rights. It also explains why Iranian socialists, historically most consistent advocates of women's democratic rights, did not support women's struggles for autonomy in personal and political life in the post-revolutionary period. I have tried to unveil the political, cultural and religious grounds for the left's anti-feminist perceptions, discourses and actions.

At the core of my explanation for the political events in the aftermath of the revolution is the convergence of the left's populism with Islamic populism and the tight links between their respective attitudes towards women's right to choice and women's struggle for self-determination and individual liberties. Both Islamist and socialist forces engaged in frequent criticism of feminists and feminist ideas. In these areas, the left contributed to the saliency and acceptance of Islamic populist themes. So male-centred were their views of social change and

their definitions of democracy that they left no space for women's democratic rights and voices. In their moralistic views towards women's dress, manner, and particularly sexual conduct, the differences between the socialist and Islamic populists were only a matter of degree. In fact, in the area of what Western feminists have called sexual politics, the commonalities between the socialists and the Islamist forces overlapped more than either would ever admit.

The populist tendencies that had engulfed the left's activities, the left's narrow definition of women's rights, its theoretical socialist legacy and its male-defined cultural values influenced the women's movement and precipitated its takeover by left organizations and parties. The patriarchal-moralizing-populist-socialist influences rationalized, accentuated and approved the sexual division of labour in both the personal and political lives of all left activists. Sexist beliefs in the family subordinated women's voices and interests to those of men, and subordinated the struggle for women's rights to the struggle for national liberation. The left's opportunistic silence, or at most mild criticism of the regime's offensive, immensely strengthened the regime's ability to use force and other means of intimidation against the progressive opposition and to develop the mechanisms needed to silence women's dissenting voices. Had it not been for the ideological composition of the post-revolutionary events, the regime could not have so easily undermined women's resistance, eliminated women's political organizations, and re-established Islamic Sharia.

Because of its refusal to see through Ayatollah Khomeini's 'anti-imperialist' stance and its infatuation with Islamic populism, the left ended up participating not only in the suppression of the women's movement but also in hastening its own elimination. Underlying this argument is a belief, quite reasonable I think, that a viable opposition from strong feminist, nationalist and left movements could have articulated the collective interests of women and their oppression in the Iranian context, and protected individual liberties and democratic rights against the assaults of the new regime. By drawing together secular liberal-minded men and gender-conscious women, alliance among opposition forces could have become a political outlet for and preserved the early dynamism of the women's insurrection in defence of women's rights, individual

liberties, and social and political democracy. This is a very large 'could' but, as a participant in those events, I must make this point.

POPULISM AND FEMINISM

Throughout this book, I have used the terms populism and feminism in reference to the ideas and movements that dominated post-revolutionary politics in Iran. I use populism less self-consciously and in a more self-explanatory fashion than feminism. There are of course many ambiguities and overlaps in definitions and meanings for the term populism. The term has been used to identify a certain type of social change and historical transition, a particular socio-historical movement, and specific class-based or non-class mobilizing ideologies. Populist movements have differed in their class-bases and goals, and have assumed different forms in various socio-historical contexts. There have been major differences between non-mass-based Russian populism and mass-based North American populism. The romantic ideas of the Narodnik intellectuals about the Russian peasantry centred on how to avoid capitalism and develop Russian communes (*Obshcina*) as a springboard to leap directly to socialism.[1] Their North American counterparts, such as the Greenback movement of the late 1860s and the People's Party of 1892, while not anti-capitalist, were against bankers, monopolies and all form of 'bigness' inimical to the interests of the small man.[2]

Third World populist movements have sometimes also drawn their support from rural masses (Tanzania) or the urban poor and working classes (Argentina), but they generally have appealed to 'the people' across class lines. Hence, populism in the Third World has been more often an expression against relations of national subordination and domination, or what Laclau calls 'non-class' anti-imperialist contradictions. Despite the elusiveness and ambiguity of the term populism, it can nevertheless be used to identify any ideology or movement that has the following principal features. These were summarized by Worsley: (1) as socio-economic classes are not the crucial social entities that they are in developed countries...the class struggle is, therefore, an irrelevant conception; (2) The major antagonisms are

those between society as a whole (the nation) and the outside world, particularly the ex-colonial powers; (3) An emphasis upon cooperative and communitarian forms of modernization; (4) The single party system and use of methods of intimidation against opposition, and (5) unlike North American and Russian populism, a desire for industrialization.[3] This description is wide enough to include my understanding of populism as a concept.

I have used the term feminism more self-consciously. I have felt a need to draw exact boundaries on the feminist map I am using in order to make an ideological demarcation between my understanding of feminism and what is often referred to as mainstream or Western feminism. That is a middle-class, white, Western ideology that challenges male prerogatives and power. To make this distinction, however, is not an easy task and I now wonder if it doesn't distract us from a more important one. This is not because I see no difference between my understanding of feminism and many other ways of understanding and being a feminist. Feminism is, after all, a constantly evolving and changing political and theoretical project. The different and distinct political views, groups and individuals who call themselves feminist or are so called by others, increasingly find totalizing and universal definitions of feminism or feminist concepts unresponsive to their sexual, racial, class, age, religious and national specificities. Our personal and political identities may include any, some or all of these specificities, and are therefore not reducible to gender or any one of these elements exclusively. So even in the West, an all-embracing and all-inclusive definition of feminism has become increasingly rejected. Disagreement and conflict within feminism have evolved so much further than the divisions among, liberal, radical and socialist feminism. Consequently, the question of whether the *cause* of women's oppression is patriarchy and male domination, or property relations and class exploitation, no longer seems particularly relevant. One often feels unable even to stay current with so many different, interesting and, sometimes, confusing ways feminists have developed to explain gender inequality and male-power. For example, it is hard to assess the remarkable shift from the 1970s denial of the significance of biological differences, as the cause of women's subordination, to a new tendency of womanhood celebration and its emphasis on women's superior virtues, or the crucial conversion from a totalizing and false generalization of

'global sisterhood', which overlooked the actual differences and complexities among women, to an increasingly individualistic, self-indulging and politically passive ethno-feminism in the West. Even some central political goals of feminism, such as sexual equity, are now being reviewed as region-specific and context-related. The influence of post-modernist advocacy of pluralism in morals, in politics and in cognition, and its refusal to grant any credibility to universalist humanism and the concept of progress, associated with the secularization of social and political life, personal autonomy, individual rights, legal and political equality and democracy on this mode of thinking is unmistakable. The serious risk involved in post-modernist relativism has not been lost on feminist critics, who feel it might allow 'an analysis of all the more ugly racist, nationalist, sexist tropes of our time as reactive reassertions of difference'.[4] These concerns are shared by others who continue to emphasize the global character of feminist political programmes and the need for it to 'converge with those of all other egalitarian or liberationist movements'[5] and to 'revalue around the alliance coalitions and commonalities', if it is to survive as a radical politics.[6]

My self-consciousness about the use of the term feminism, however, has a more disconcerting reason, which has to do with my perpetual uncertainty when it comes to specifying the similarities and differences between Middle Eastern/Iranian and Western feminisms. I cannot pretend that I have complete confidence in the response that I, like many other self-identified feminists from Iran and the Middle East, give to the recurring question: 'Is feminism relevant to non-western and specifically Iranian contexts?' After all if feminism is a transformative ideology concerned with explaining women's subordination, from women's point of view, and changing conditions for women as women, how can non-white women, whose subordination and oppression has many more dimensions than gender, find a place within it? Haven't I, living in the West, observed first hand how empty of content and commitment the nice, reassuring concept of feminist sisterhood can often be? Are we not at best considered step-sisters by white feminists? Is not the most unifying point of alliance for feminists still racial, cultural and class sameness? How then can I argue that feminism can address the common oppression of women when in its birthplace it faces radical critiques from non-white gender-conscious women for not being

receptive to issues that are important to them; for being a 'middle-class women's thing';[7] and for not acknowledging that 'beyond sisterhood, is still racism'.[8] In fact, many forms of oppression women feel can be the occasions for division, not alliances, simply because not all women share those oppressions. Hence, they are excluded from the solidarity that those oppressions can create. More importantly, some women even benefit from other women's oppression. Audre Lorde made this point explicitly by calling upon white feminists to remember that the 'women who clean your houses and tend your children while you attend conferences on feminist theory are, for the most part, poor women and women of colour'. She challenged white feminists to respond to the question: '[W]hat is the theory behind racist feminism?'[9] bell hooks writes about 'woman's capacity to dominate'.[10] It would be over-ambitious and unrealistic, therefore, for me as an Iranian and Middle Eastern woman to adopt uncritically a theoretical scheme to identify the *cause* or the most fundamental factors involved in *women's* oppression in my culture.

But I am equally disturbed by a growing intellectual tendency in the study of and by women in the Third World, and the Middle East, which seems to refute feminist theories and analytical concepts altogether as bourgeois-Western experiences, as Orientalist in character,[11] and even as a 'docile servant' of the system of white male dominance. The suggestion is that 'the ideas of western feminism essentially functioned to provide moral justification for the attack on native societies'.[12] Feminism is criticized for sharing the 'historical blindness' of the European Enlightenment and for assuming for itself the prerogative of 'the exemplary "civilizing mission" of its own colonial past',[13] Even well-intentioned and well-justified critiques of the ethnocentrism and political bias of Western academic feminism, including its application of an 'external standard' to study women in the Middle East, explicitly or implicitly denounce all innovative works by feminist scholars from the region for their use of feminist discourses. The arguments are that such feminists, despite their denouncements of Eurocentric conceptions of Islam, 'yield to the prevailing paradigm', 'use feminist discourses', 'adjust their enquiry to fill the blanks in the geographical distribution made available to them by U.S. feminist liberalism'.[14] Does this mean that it is not

acceptable to criticize the misogynist, sexist and derogatory religious and secular practices and standards that have been preserved, celebrated and reproduced as part of an untouchable national or cultural heritage generation after generation? If you use feminist ideas and concepts to explain women's experiences in the Middle East, will you inevitably be relegated to the status of a shy or unconscious Orientalist – as I was recently called by a Muslim woman at the Learned Societies Conference in Ottawa – or perhaps a 'modernizationist'.

Edward Said's critique of the representation of Middle Eastern and Islamic cultures, histories and societies by others 'who know more about them than they know about themselves' took as its point of departure 'the right of the formerly un- or misrepresented human groups to speak for and represent themselves'.[15] But fear of Orientalism is haunting studies of the Middle East, and particularly the study of women's experience in various Middle Eastern and Islamic societies. It is used to discourage critical thinking and self-criticism, something I suspect Said did not have in mind when he wrote *Orientalism.*

The pressure on Middle Eastern Iranian women to disown and denounce Western feminism, because concepts and ideas generated by feminists in the West are ethnic-specific and irrelevant to non-Western contexts, comes also from feminist scholars in the West, with varying degrees of sophistication and from various ideological and intellectual positions. Sometimes even previously accepted minimal elements of women's rights in a non-Western context are called into question. For example, Patricia Higgins suggested that the plight of women in Iran concerns only middle-and upper-class women,[16] implying that the horrendous consequences of the revolution were not significant for most Iranian women. Others have questioned the maturity of Muslim countries, and their women, to enjoy such rights as sexual equality. Juliette Minces has argued that they are not ready 'to undergo an emancipation which throws into question a secular equilibrium which has the full backing of religion'.[17]

Cultural relativism and fear of cultural imperialism feed into ethno-feminism. If the ideal until recently has been to avoid evaluating the activities and discourses of various cultures and communities by universal, Western-oriented standards, the tendency now is to view women's quest for legal, political and economic equality as culturally specific. The new opinion that the

conditions for sex equality, such as personal freedom, freedom of choice, freedom of refusal and self autonomy are something peculiarly Western, has blurred the thin line between understanding and respecting difference and the right of a people to choice. It permits indifference to or the justification of the practices that oppress and dehumanize women in non-Western cultures as simply 'alternative forms of existence', when similar practices would be condemned as outrageous, unacceptable and oppressive in Western culture. One dramatic example is the silence of feminists in the West in face of systematic suppression of women's basic human rights in Iran by the fundamentalists. Azar Tabari was quite right in challenging Western feminists to respond 'why should geographical and cultural borders make what is conceived as oppression in one context an acceptable cultural norm in another?'[18]

The problem exists in the conceptual frameworks which prevent many Western intellectuals including feminists from seeing and appreciating the diversified burgeoning women's movements in Middle Eastern countries and their feminist content. The hegemonic influence of the Western image of Middle Eastern women as veiled, obedient and subservient, if nonetheless alluring and wistful, overshadows the mounting evidence of their intellectual, cultural and political struggle for social and political reforms in the region. This distorted understanding of women's life experiences, concerns and expectations is reproduced and repeated in a new stereotyped revolutionism. The stated and unstated idea is that, because socio-economic problems are more pronounced in the region and because traditional gender roles and male power are more rigidly maintained and reproduced, issues of concern to Western women, such as sexuality, freedom from sexual oppression and sexual exploitation as articulated in feminist theories, are irrelevant to Middle Eastern women. It is assumed that these women are (or are expected or pressured to be) only concerned with general national and political goals. Hence, Western feminism and feminist ideas are irrelevant for the Middle East. Kathleen Barry, in the Foreword to Evelyn Accad's analysis of war and sexuality in Lebanon strongly criticized this view and linked it to the 'hands off approach' of Western liberal particularism. By announcing to Western nations that they have no business interfering in the affairs of the Third World,

such an approach also carries the message that women of the Third World who demand rights and expose male domination are disloyal to their country and violate their culture. The effect is to isolate women in their cultures and identify Western women (and especially feminists) as their enemy.[19]

This is especially ironic and potentially tragic – because the rise of fundamentalism has created fertile conditions for women's mobilization in the Islamic Middle East. Indeed, a growing number of women are protesting against outrageous religious and cultural practices and demonstrating a new awareness about the use and abuse of women in men's political games. Many have benefited from Western feminist analyses of sexism and gender power to understand and explain their place in their societies. Many more are challenging male-power and the culture that promotes and sustains such power without identifying themselves as feminists. What they are struggling for is what Western feminists have identified as gender equity. Once women start to recognize and question sex-hierarchy and male-power and to develop an awareness that what they feel and experience comes not from their personal failure or bad luck, but is part of the shared experience of women resulting from an entrenched sex-subordination and sex-power relations, they are gender-conscious in a feminist sense. This point was reinforced by Minoo, one of the women I interviewed. She identified her ideas and way of life as feminist in character, before she was even introduced to feminist ideas. She identified her views and way of life as feminist because she valued 'self-determination, autonomy and right to choice' for women and 'had a voice in the family, in the workplace and in every sphere of life'.

I am not arguing that feminism comes to women naturally or that all women, by virtue of being from the oppressed sex, are feminists. My point rather is that being a feminist begins with not much more than refusing the social and cultural values that subordinate women's life options and decisions to the male-centred dictates of religious and non-religious institutions and structures. It means having a voice and a distinct autonomous personal and political identity. Women in great numbers in various Middle Eastern societies are shaking off their 'unreal loyalties,' to borrow Virginia Woolf's term. Their revolt is shaking up their societies, and the lives of men as well as women. It is no exaggeration to suggest that women are at the forefront of the

struggle for democratization in Middle Eastern cultures and societies. Their movements clearly manifest the idea that to attain full human potential, the spheres of work, love and sexual relations must be democratized. This cannot be conceived as a culturally specific goal for women's emancipation. As Khavar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed have noted, in the case of Pakistani women, for the first time women activists see their struggle as against a patriarchal system. They write: 'Not until they were jolted into action by the Islamization process started by Zia-ul-Haq, in 1979' did women question the system. Previously they had been guided by 'a false sense of security and the equally false belief that achieving their rights was only a matter of "natural" evolutionary process'.[20] As Mumtaz and Shaheed have argued '[n]umerical weakness cannot be used to dismiss the women's movement as either insignificant or irrelevant... Women's rights have never been granted without the demand having been voiced by women themselves'.[21]

In Algeria, protests over the conservative character of the new family law bill in 1984 led to the arrest of feminist protestors for the first time since Algerian independence.[22] The Algerian feminist movement was one of three protest movements (Berberist, Feminist and Islamist) contributing to the delegitimization of Boumedienne and Chadli in Algeria and to struggle for democratization in that society. But Algerian feminists, like their other Middle Eastern sisters, have had to fight on two fronts – against both the government and the Islamist opposition. The response of a feminist leader to an Islamist from the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) epitomized this dynamic. In response to the Shaikh's conception of women's role and status in Islam as primarily domestic, she stated 'when women took part and died in the war of liberation, they did not ask for the permission of any guardian – father, brother, uncle or son'.[23]

In the Palestinian resistance movement, women have begun to express their distinct political identity by deconstructing the national culture which, by focusing on women as mothers and making women's mothering role central to Palestinian popular culture, 'has ignored, suppressed or subordinated women'.[24] The attempts of the Islamists to impose the *Hejab* (headscarf) on women, as a form of cultural struggle, a return to authentic Islamic tradition, a symbol of national heritage, or as a sign of women's political commitment to the Intifada, is also

challenged by women. An increasing number of women refuse to succumb to this ideologization of gender oppression. As Rema Hammami has observed, these women very well understand the clear meaning of the identification of the *Hejab* with the Intifada. It is not about modesty, respect or nationalism. It is about the power of religious groups to impose their views against secularism and nationalism at its most vulnerable point in the Middle East, that is, women's liberation.[25]

However, the complexity of social relations and hierarchies of oppression in the Middle East and Iran poses a formidable theoretical and practical challenge to feminists from the region. For instance, how strong is the explanatory role of Islam for the persistent survival of sexism, entrenched gender values and hierarchy, and women's subordination in Middle Eastern societies? If it is the intrinsic animosity of Islam to equality in relations between the sexes and women's role in society, how can the changing conditions of women in specific historical periods and in specific Middle Eastern countries be explained? Obvious examples are the positive experiences of women during historical periods of nation-building, secularization and economic modernization in Tunisia, Turkey and pre-revolutionary Iran, where state policies were geared to bridging the gap between women and men's legal rights and privileges.

Yet, if Islamic beliefs and practices are not important barriers against effective development in women's status, why are women's individual rights and social positions worse in Muslim countries than anywhere else?[26] In fact, women's political mobilization has often mystified and obscured the reality of women's oppression and social segregation in Middle Eastern societies. National movements in the region have not radicalized issues of gender relations and democratized relations between the sexes. These movements have not necessarily increased consciousness and resistance against class and gender oppression. Indeed, it is quite the opposite. Some studies of women's political struggle in periods of political conflict have demonstrated the peculiar paradox between political movements for social change and their conservative character against women's quest for change. National struggle almost everywhere demands the subordination of women's specific interests. This 'mobilization without emancipation', as Maxine Molyneux has called it,[27] or 'emancipation without liberation',

as Deniz Kandiyoti calls the case of Turkey,[28] is not a peculiar Third World phenomenon. The tension between the national and political struggle and women's political self-expression is observable whenever a society is mobilized 'to meet a common political goal' or to 'resist an external threat', be it in the context of the miners' strike and peace movement in Britain and Northern Ireland or anti-imperialist struggles in Iran or Lebanon. This universal pattern which sustains the 'powerlessness of women within the structure of public political life', as Rosemary Ridd and Helen Callaway have argued, means that, particularly in periods of national political conflict when women find opportunities to express themselves politically, 'men step up their efforts to control women and try to reinforce the boundary that separates the domestic from the public sphere.[29] The appropriation of women's reproductive capacity and a glorification of motherhood has also been characteristic. Yet, only in the Middle East can we find a case where, after a war of independence or revolution, equality between the sexes was not formally and legally recognized, at least on paper. And there are few cases other than Iran where women were worse off after the revolution. This suggests strongly that there must be a connection between Islam and other cultural, economic, and political forces that feed the 'authoritarian impulse' in the Middle East and mitigate against women's democratic rights and quest for change. In the words of a feminist Arab scholar, '[I]f, from the Mashreq to the Maghreb, women are the losers whenever they demand equality before the law and confront the untouchable sacred texts, is it possible to ignore that law and its power?'[30]

A key factor in understanding this pattern, I will argue, is the central importance of female sexuality and sexual control in Islamic culture. It helps explain why the homogenizing forces of Islamic culture are expressed with utmost clarity and strength in the assertion of male control and authority over women's lives and in the uniformity of policies in the areas of women's rights and status. Middle Eastern culture is no more obsessed with sex than other societies. But the nature of the obsession matters. Sex is the most vehemently protected taboo in Middle Eastern cultures. An understanding of the role of female sexuality in Islamic Middle Eastern culture helps explain the specific

direction that various national and political movements have taken in the region. It explains why, for example, in Iran after the Shah's downfall, among the first 'revolutionary' actions taken by the new regime was the reveiling of women, nullifying of the Family Protection Act that had abolished man's unilateral right to divorce, and banning women from the judicial profession. It explains why, in Afghanistan, fundamentalist guerrilla factions engaged in a brutal civil war, immediately after the demise of the communist regime of Najibollah, were in complete harmony on only one issue: restricting women's movements and ordering all female citizens to cover up. It explains why in Egypt, a country whose female citizens were the first in the Middle East to organize themselves in an explicitly feminist organization, the Egyptian Feminist Union, in 1923 and who cast off their veil in 1924, more and more women are taking refuge in the sanctuary of *Hejab* as a means of asserting their 'national heritage' against the infidel West and its cultural values. For this reason, a systematic and serious discussion of sexual oppression, sexual hypocrisy, sexual morality, and relations between the sexes from a secular and progressive perspective has enormous value to any political project geared towards social and political change in the region. Recognizing this fact, feminist scholars from the Middle East are breaking a silence no one has dared to break. They are speaking about the unspeakable – about sexuality, in the hope of helping their societies re-examine the impact of this most 'private' aspect of life on 'public' affairs.

A discussion of sexuality, sexual hypocrisy and sexual oppression is at the centre of Evelyn Accad's splendid study of nationalism in Lebanon. Exposing the similarity between the way Lebanese macho society develops its military weapons and human sexuality to conquer, control and possess, Accad advocates a sexual revolution for the Middle East: 'A revolution that starts at the personal level with a transformation of attitudes towards one's mate, family, sexuality and society and, specifically, a transformation of the traditional relations of domination and subordination.'[31] Similarly, Fatima Mernissi identifies the main problem for women in Morocco to be sex. She argues that it is 'the domain that is still taboo – we can't even talk about it – and the domain where women suffer the most', con-

tinuously manipulated and exploited. A woman can't walk alone, anywhere, 'without being accosted'.[32]

The discussion of female sexuality, sexual gratification and sexual oppression is a new area of investigation for scholarship on Iran. However, it is time to unveil this vigorously concealed secret of every man's and woman's life that nonetheless informs cultural norms, moral values and personal and public life in Iran. Only individuals who have not lived with the realities facing many Iranian women can deny the overriding role of sexual oppression, and particularly the derogatory imagery of female sexuality in Iran, in explaining women's oppression. In a moving account of life in prisons of the Islamic Republic, we read how rumours of 'unnatural relationships' between women prisoners deprives them of the minimum comfort of friendship and love. Sleeping side by side at night, women sometimes would hold hands to support and comfort their wounded souls and injured bodies, particularly following an interrogation session.[33] When found by the prison guards, these women would be humiliated, brutally beaten up, flogged and separated. The case of two high-school girls, one with severe depression, is extremely heartbreaking.

When President Rafsanjani, in a sermon at the Friday prayers in Tehran during the winter of 1990, spoke about the 'undeniable sexual urges of the youth, the neglect of which will cause personal and social problems', and urged young men and widows to enter into brief temporary marriages for gratification, his speech caused a commotion in Iran.[34] The government-sponsored women's magazine, *Zan-e Rooz*, rightly in my view, criticized the President for supporting the institution of *Mut'a* (temporary marriage) which for many people is nothing more than a means of having access to sexual pleasure without having responsibility,[35] and which in the end only furthers the exploitation of women. However, the President's speech was a response, albeit a male-defined and male-centred response, to a pressing and no longer deniable social and moral problem of sexual oppression and hypocrisy in Iran, and its tightening hold on women and men in the country, particularly since the fundamentalists' rise to power.

There is no question that differences in our histories, sociopolitical structures and relations, levels of industrial and economic development, and specific cultural norms and values

create the conditions for women to experience gender oppression differently. They explain existing variations between women's movements in the Middle East and, say, North America. These differences determine the priorities, immediate goals, strategies and the discourses of our struggles. These same factors create a setting that links Middle Eastern feminists more directly to issues relating to social justice, liberty and peace, although these issues might not be clearly gender-marked. Women's oppression in the Middle East is more clearly seen to be related to other forms of oppression. Therefore, many gender-conscious women in the Middle East devote a good part of their energy and revolutionary commitment to changing the central political and economic systems. They generally avoid a singular focus on sex and gender power as the basis for women's subordination. Hence, it is reasonable to suppose that feminist theories and perspectives that ignore the differences and contradictions existing among women and that define sex as the only relevant factor in the analysis of gender relations and women's empowerment *vis-à-vis* men have little currency in the Middle East. Gender oppression is so intertwined with racial, national and class oppression, and the sense of empowerment is so tightly linked to the lack of economic and political power, that the idea of women's empowerment *vis-à-vis* men alone offers little by way of showing the path to our emancipation.

Many of us see patriarchy as more than what, for example, Mary O'Brien has theorized as the resistance of men 'to the experienced alienation from nature... in the process of reproduction'. It is not simply a 'historical move to compensate for that exclusion'. Nor can patriarchy be seen as an almost conscious conspiracy against women by men who 'fore-gather [in the public realm] to make laws and ideologies which shape and justify patriarchy'.[36] To accept O'Brien's analysis, that the material basis of women's subordination and men's power is biology, leaves no hope for changing power relations or perceiving men as potential allies in women's sexual and class struggle. Furthermore, at least in the context of Middle Eastern politics and culture, men are also subjugated and repressed by the authoritarian and patriarchal relations crystallized in the imbalance of power and unaccountable control of tribal, kinship and religious structures. As Khawar Mumtaz and

Farida Shaheed have pointed out, '[P]atriarchy, as a system that militates against equality, has been absorbed into the structures of tribalism, feudalism and, more recently, capitalism. Theoretically distinct, it is practically inseparable from these latter: opposition to one automatically implies opposition to the other'.[37] The unaccountable power of men like Khomeini and Saddam Hussain are cases in point.

That said, many of us are increasingly awakening to the fact that we are oppressed not only as members of a racial or ethnic group, class and nation, but also as women by men who are also oppressed as a result of their specific identities or position in the hierarchy of power. Therefore, while we recognize a lack of autonomy and choice within the wider context of not belonging to powerful nations, races or classes, we are directed by the crucial importance of taking back control of at least our own bodies and our own lives that at present are dominated by male power and male authority. Women are increasingly challenging the established order of gender hierarchy and power in our societies. A serious political and intellectual campaign is under way against the ideological construct that ranks struggle on different fronts in a hierarchical order and defines sexual oppression and exploitation as peripheral to national and racial oppression. We have come a long way in recognizing that the struggle for gender equality and choice and the need to respond to sexual oppression and violence against women and children is of immediate urgency. But we need to put into context and translate into our own cultures feminist ideas and demands. The task we face is how to reconcile the universality of gender oppression with the particular ideographic conditions and contingencies of women's lives. Related to this is how to articulate the diverse factors causing women to experience gender inequality differently in different settings and the enormous differences in their immediate needs and concerns, according to their vision for change.

We still may not have a cross-cultural definition of feminism or a feminist framework wide enough to identify women's oppression in diverse socio-historical contexts. This, however, does not alter the fact that the basis of women's oppression everywhere is patriarchal structures and relations. Despite diverse forms, they have the same content. Feminist paradigms and frameworks are as useful for understanding and theorizing

gender relations in non-Western societies as they are in the West. This is true, provided it is a selective use of feminist ideas that are applicable to specific socio-historical location and concerns. All women and some men who see the need to work for changing sexist social relations, institutions and ideologies that subordinate and oppress women, and who are committed to a more fulfilling and self-validating way of life for women, are working within a feminist framework, whether or not they choose to identify themselves as such. More than two decades of feminist theorizing and analysis have at least raised new questions that validate our personal experiences, and have assisted us to name the unnamed, and to articulate our feelings and interests. Many of us are more conscious that the forces which subordinate women's interests and voices to those of men do not originate only from economic and political structures and relations, but are produced, reproduced and upheld through entrenched sexist and misogynist cultural norms and practices that shape relations between the sexes in every sphere of social life. We may be able to identify and unveil the inner feelings, needs and emotions that, as Jessica Benjamin has argued, lead us to submit to power and to participate in relations of domination. Such awareness, coming to us through feminist psychoanalysis, helps us to acknowledge our individual responsibility in transmitting the culture of submission to our children,[38] and identifying the forces of repression and forces of progress within and outside ourselves. We have become sensitized to the fact that sexuality, sexual double standards, and derogatory visions of female sexuality, which produce and sustain gender hierarchies and men's power over women's bodies, influence every aspect of social and political life.

Many of us are still very unsure about the most effective and appropriate framework to reconcile our commitment to gender equity and the struggle for personal and political autonomy with our commitment to national movements for democracy and social change. We have to develop more feasible and workable strategies to be an active insider and a critical outsider at the same time. This means being involved in the national movement, while critically evaluating and influencing its politics. It means accepting and continually evaluating the tension between our identities as political activists and as women. Indeed it means being feminist political activists.

If women are to continue to move towards changing the entire structures of domination and power, it must be through liberating themselves. We need to reflect on ourselves, and to question the sacred cultural values that we have unquestioningly internalized and practised. We have to break with the forces that operate to keep us in our place as the only 'gendered subject'. Women will benefit most from such a break. We should be capable of struggling on many fronts and drawing attention to the various layers of our oppression. This sometimes means including men as allies at one level of the struggle as well as struggling against male power and male privileges in another. We still need to learn how to make more visible the structures and barriers that deny women basic human rights, indeed how human rights have been defined with men as the assumed human subject, and how to set our own agenda and priorities, independent of the state and political parties, without compromising our political commitment to specific issues that may not necessarily be visibly gender-marked. We must find a way to resolve the tensions between our demands for individual rights and freedoms, and demands for other fundamental human rights. This has been the strategy of the pioneers of women's rights in Iran and many other Middle Eastern societies. As feminists or womanists, to use Alice Walker's term, they had the wisdom, the commitment and the skill to fight on different fronts for social change. This is a legacy that gender-conscious Iranian women have to rely on and benefit from, a legacy that was undermined and ignored by socialist feminists in post-revolutionary Iran.

In this book I examine the action and interaction of various factors which obstructed development of a democratic women-focused political culture, and a self-validating and autonomous women's movement. This is a woman's side of the story which draws on the experiences shared and talked about with other women. This specific investigation also raises more general questions: (1) why do women support political movements and regimes that severely restrict their rights; (2) to what extent do nationalist and socialist movements in Third World/Middle Eastern countries incorporate women's specific interests and concerns; (3) how, if at all, do gender relations change within these movements; and (4) what are the conditions under which women organize in defence of their own rights and interests?

Writing about what I now consider to be fatal political errors of the left, and specifically the Fedayeen, in post-revolutionary Iran raises poignant personal dilemmas. First, it is always easier to assess the rights and wrongs of a political stand, separated from the urgency and immediacy of its time. Fourteen years after the revolution, we have more information and new evidence to tell us what mistakes could and should have been avoided. Many former political activists have had time (often more than they hoped for) to revaluate the theories and ideologies that informed their activities as well as their own attitudes, values and perceptions in political and personal life.

Second, there are always perplexing doubts about how much of the truth needs to be revealed and who will be its beneficiaries: the forces of progress or the forces of oppression. Third, and more personally, I am painfully aware that I have criticized the political and personal actions of women and men who sacrificed their interests, desires, needs, and in many cases, their lives to change the structures and relations of exploitation and domination in their society. The principle that has guided me throughout this work is that a commitment to change requires questioning all seemingly sacred beliefs and values as well as the actions of those whom we respect and hold dear. I take some comfort from the fact that I too share the blame for some of the political positions that I now assess as harmful to the cause of women in post-revolutionary Iran.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

To understand the political dynamics of the post-revolutionary period it is necessary to understand the socio-historical, economic, and political dynamics of pre-revolutionary Iran. Economic and social development are preconditions for an awareness of women's oppression and the struggle for change. Based on this premise, I have examined the ideological and material bases for the absence of an autonomous feminist movement in post-revolutionary Iran. The book is organized in three parts. My analysis begins with an historical overview in Chapter 1, which explores the organized struggle of women in Iran against exploitation and oppression. This analysis demonstrates that women's struggles to increase their

access to society's resources improve the quality of their lives, and establish legal equality were not new developments in Iran. These struggles had elicited strong resistance and hostile reactions throughout Iranian society. The experience of the women's movement after the 1979 revolution was typical of women's role in various mass movements in twentieth-century Iran, where their political mobilization was encouraged only when they served the general goals of national struggle. These goals had always been male-defined and their fruits enjoyed by particular classes of men.

Chapter 2 points out that the modernization process in Iran did not create the structural changes necessary as a precondition for the development of gender consciousness. Increased opportunities for education and paid work for women did exist. So did growing disparities between the social classes and strata of the female population, and between rural and urban women. The late start and relative short life of development strategies, the persistence of pre-capitalist, pre-industrial socio-economic structures were not conducive to changing gender roles and transforming relations of domination and subordination between the sexes.

Turning from economic to political structures, I have argued that repression and the lack of civil liberties and democratic institutions, together with the extensive use of physical coercion, prevented secular nationalist and socialist forces from developing the effective ideological and organizational means for democratic struggle. The Shah's modernizing regime, despite its seemingly pro-woman legal reforms, impeded the emergence of an independent feminist movement. Women's quest for equal rights was co-opted by the state and only supported when issues of concern coincided with the state's interests. Consequently, the mobilization of women by the state changed the nature of women's political involvement, distorted the women's movement, and fragmented women's rights activists.

The position of women in public life and in socialist and anti-imperialist movements was consistent with their position within the Iranian family. The beliefs, values and moralities that governed women's sexual expression and male–female relationships at home also animated political life. The obsession with female sexuality and sexual power, and with the means to control that power, continued to shape women's lives

through rigidly-defined sex-roles, and to buttress double standards in all forms of behaviour.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I have developed this argument. The pervasiveness of the sex-based and sexist culture which gave men power and control over women affected the whole culture. My discussion of the images of women and female sexuality in Iranian popular culture is aimed at illuminating the similarity between men's power and control over women's bodies and women's desires in the family and the control of women's demands and voices in political parties. This unveils an astonishing commonality in the paternalistic and moralizing attitudes of the Islamists, secular nationalists and the left. Democratization of Iranian society, including most importantly democratization of family structures and relations and relations between the sexes, depends on recognizing and transforming these all-pervasive attitudes and practices. The hegemony of these values in the society explains not only the moralistic and sexist views and behaviours of Shiite populists but also those of the otherwise modern and secular liberal nationalists. They hung on to their privileges and domineering attitudes at home, and failed to make the connections between the lack of political democracy and the oppressive relations within the Iranian family.

The all-embracing patriarchal culture with its far-reaching and entrenched sexist norms directly influenced women's political activities and their place in the revolutionary movement. In Chapter 5, I explore the theoretical and ideological reasons for the active opposition of the organized socialist forces to an autonomous women's movement and generally to women who articulated the various interests and grievances of Iranian women across all social classes. I have attempted to demonstrate that many left intellectuals, who embraced Marxist ideologies and had fought for modern social and political democratic values, almost unanimously rejected women's quest for autonomy and equality. They dismissed all aspects of feminism as influences of Western ideology and irrelevant to the Iranian situation.

I pursue this argument in Chapter 6, by looking specifically at the Organization of Iranian People's Fedayeen (OIPF), the largest and most influential left organization of the time. The politics of the OIPF on gender issues in post-revolutionary Iran

was consistent with its pre-revolutionary politics and practices as a guerrilla movement with Marxist-Leninist inclinations. My purpose has been to expose the interaction of male-focused guerrilla culture, a 'sex-blind' socialist legacy, and patriarchal and sexist cultural norms that facilitated the dominance of populist-sexist politics within the organization and legitimized and justified the subordination of women and women's concerns in the post-revolutionary politics of the OIPF against women's autonomous movement. This policy was instrumental in expediting the suppression of the pro-democracy movement and defeating the women's movement against the fundamentalists.

From this broad historical, socio-economic and ideological perspective, I look in Chapters 7 and 8 at the women's movement in post-revolutionary Iran, as represented by the National Union of Women (NUW), an affiliate of the Organization of Iranian People's Fedayeen. The formation of the NUW and its theoretical and practical activities, as well as the intra-organizational ideological and political struggles that determined its position *vis-à-vis* the Islamic regime, provide a dramatic example of the unresolvable tension between feminist struggle and the national socialist struggle in a Third World country. The case of the NUW demonstrates the impotence of a women's movement organized by women, but led by a political male-dominant organization. It demonstrates how women's revolutionary spirit and ingenuity were dissipated because women lacked organizational and ideological autonomy. It seems clear, as I will argue, that organizational and political autonomy are preconditions for any viable feminist movement that seeks to transform the hierarchies of gender that inform all social relations and practices in their societies.

Part I:
Women and Social Change

1 The Emerging Women's Movement

Women did not emerge as a separate political force until their involvement in the national struggle for constitutional government during 1905–11. Restrictions which deprived women of education, paid work outside the home and social activities had not been conducive to political consciousness and activity. The general belief, promoted by the clerics, was that women's education was against Islam. Women's literacy was such a social stigma that literate women had to hide their education.[1] As for economic activities outside the home, the only profession recognized (and regulated) by the government was prostitution. Poor abandoned women and widows joined this profession and paid taxes.[2]

The experience of seclusion and domesticity was different for women according to classes. Sexual segregation was more strictly enforced in upper and middle-class households. The socialization of girls from infancy aimed solely at preparing them for their future roles as the obedient and selfless wives and mothers so highly praised in Iranian culture. Women's seclusion and sexual segregation had to be respected even by the Shah, the supreme patriarch. For instance, on one of his trips to Europe, Naser-ul-Din Shah (1848–96) took his favourite wife, Anis-ud-Dowleh, with him. This decision so angered the clerics and caused such social uproar, that the Shah had to send Anis-ud-Dowleh back to Tehran from Caucasia.[3]

EARLY ACTIVISM

Until the nineteenth century women from poor families expressed their discontent in periodic riots against rising prices and tax increases. Such women had greater opportunity to leave home and take part in social and political protests. Their involvement in these activities generally had such enormous social impact that it was taken as a sign of a general uprising.[4] The women themselves, however, were not

considered responsible or given credit for their actions as independent adults, but looked upon as dependents of their male kin. In fact, before the formation of the centralized modern state, women were regarded as the reservoir of the society's honour *(namoos)*, not to be touched, insulted or violated by the police. In the 1880s, for example, when more than 1000 women, protesting against the scarcity of bread in Tehran, blocked the road and prevented Naser-ul-Din Shah's passage, the Shah ordered the arrest of the women's husbands.[5] While this gave women a certain immunity from harm and a freedom not shared with Iranian men, the tolerance shown by the authorities and the police to women was derived from women's non-person status in Iranian society.

In the nineteenth century, there emerged some exceptional women who challenged the patriarchal order that denied them basic human rights. Bibi Khanum, for example, vigorously opposed the oppressive and male-dominant culture of late nineteenth century Iran. In 1896, in 'Moayeb-ul Rejal' (The Statesmen's Folly), Bibi Khanum responded to a recent pamphlet on women's good manners and punishment. She criticized the author and men like him for their arrogance, hypocrisy and ignorance, and complained that women, denied rights to education and the acquisition of new knowledge, were forced to spend their lives doing housework and tending children. Instead of correcting these wrongs, Iranian statesmen advised women to take short steps and speak in weak, soft voices, as if suffering from an ailment.[6] Not only had these men done nothing for women but they had ruined the country. 'We women after all have been confined to the kitchen and been kept in harems'. She charged: 'All the problems and chaos this country faces are men's doings.'[7]

Bibi Khanum's challenge to male supremacy and her criticism of Iranian society made her the first Iranian woman who dared to question publicly the patriarchal religious and cultural beliefs and practices woven through Iran's social fabric. Other women rebelled against their degraded place in the family and in social life by abandoning Shiism for the Babi faith, despite the great costs of such heresy for them and their families. One such woman was Qurrat-ul-Ain (1815–51), a prominent literary figure and renowned political orator, who appeared unveiled in public to give speeches, causing great dis-

comfort and scandal for her relatives. Qurrat-ul Ain called for the prohibition of polygamy and equal rights for women. With the bloody suppression of the Babis in 1850s, she was executed alongside other Babi leaders.

Through their participation in the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–11, women began to forge a more explicit political identity. The prospect of the establishment of a constitutional government and the rule of law generated high hopes for social change that would also provide women with a decent, more humane and equitable life. The revolutionary conditions released women's long-suppressed energy and mental potential. Women seemed emotionally empowered by their newly found political identity. Consequently, although women's participation was evoked by the male constitutionalists, the context and forms of women's political involvement escaped the limits envisioned by the leadership of the revolution. As women emerged as political actors, they transgressed the traditional and socially appropriate forms of female political involvement and took part in peaceful demonstrations and sit-ins as well as violent actions.

Some women disguised themselves in men's clothing to join the resistance forces in the civil war that followed the ratification of the constitution. Among those who lost their lives, during a battle between the army and the revolutionary forces in Tabriz were women dressed like men.[8] Nonetheless the Revolution was unique in that it often created a reverse of traditional sex roles. For example, on one occasion women built strongholds on the roof of Abd-ul-Azim Shrine near Tehran, ready to attack the guards who had surrounded the place where the leading clergymen had taken sanctuary, whereas Amir (General) Bahador, the Court Minister and commanding officer of Tehran's military forces, fearful of these stone-throwing women, escaped the threatening situation by pretending to faint.[9]

However, the ironic lesson of the Constitutional Revolution, later repeated in the 1979 Revolution, was that women's political activism did not guarantee subsequent improvement in their social and legal rights. If anything, the first Iranian Constitution further entrenched female subordination and gender inferiority in the law. The franchise section of the Constitution, for example, placed women in the same category as criminals, the insane, minors and beggars, who were deprived of the

right to vote.[10] Women's involvement in politics was thus encouraged by Islamic traditionalists and secular nationalists only when it was in the service of the general goal of national liberation. Women's attempts to raise specific concerns that challenged the patriarchal structure of the Iranian society were either frowned upon or openly discouraged and condemned. In 1906 some women marched in the streets of Tehran, took off their veils and demanded recognition of their rights as full citizens. This incident aroused such strong 'public opinion' against them that the prominent constitutionalists denounced this 'ugly scene' as a plot arranged by the reactionaries who had hired these 'prostitutes' to discredit the revolution in the people's eyes.[11]

There were a few progressive men at the time both within and outside the Majlis (parliament) who supported the issue of women's rights. Poets and literary figures, such as Bahar, Mirzadeh Eshqi and Iraj Mirza, advocated female education and unveiling as preconditions of women's emancipation. For these men, freeing women from the chains of oppressive traditions, such as the veil, was an important aspect of secularization and modernization of Iranian society. The majority of men, however, opposed women's emancipation. When the issue of women's political societies was raised in the parliament, for example, the conservative deputies denounced such organizations as atheistic against the pleas of secular constitutionalists, such as Taqi Zadeh, who argued that women's societies were not against the constitution which recognized both men and women as 'citizens of Iran'. The 'moderates' argued that, provided women got together 'to discuss such issues as cooking or sewing or not to wear foreign clothing', no harm would be done. On their suggestion, the Majlis ruled that women's societies could be formed as long as they were not 'mischievous' and did not lead to immorality.[12]

ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE

The Constitutional Revolution stimulated the development of gender consciousness among women activists. In the process of national struggle, many women transformed their self-image and consciousness of their place in Iranian society. Women's

activism for liberating the country shifted to struggle for liberating themselves. Unlike the women who engaged in the spontaneous movements of earlier times, these women, like the men constitutionalists, belonged to the upper and upper-middle classes. Given the overall socio-economic and political retardation of Iran in the early twentieth century and the wide gap between the rural and urban areas, mass movements in this period were organized with specific political goals and led by upper-class men and traditional intellectuals in major urban centres.

The earlier women's protests took the form of bread riots or in the late nineteenth century the dramatic case of the Tobacco Uprising. The participants, hard-pressed by economic constraints, sought immediate results from their protest. But the new female affluent urban protestors made specific demands based on their experience as women in the Constitutional Revolution. The National Ladies Society, founded in this period, included a few women from the royal family, namely Eftekhar ol-Saltaneh, Taj ol-Saltaneh, and Maleke-ye Iran.[13] This was not unique to Iran. In almost all Middle Eastern countries, women's rights activists were from the privileged classes. So were the early suffragists in the West.

In the decade following the Constitutional Revolution there was an extraordinary surge in women's rights activities, as women's organizations proliferated. For the first time women's activism included issues of gender inequality which centred around the goal of improving the quality of women's lives through legal and social reforms. The intellectual and political activities of these early Iranian feminists were influenced by the desire, shared by the Iranian intelligentsia at large, for modernization of Iran's economic, political and social structures. Technological and scientific advances in the West had convinced Iranian intellectuals that personal freedom and socio-economic progress were possible only when the forces of reason replaced the forces of revelation, and the informed decision of the people replaced the arbitrary power of the Shah. The basic condition for these developments was the secularization of the norms, values and institutions of social and political life. Even though the Iranian intelligentsia adopted Western ideas of the enlightenment, they adamantly opposed Western political domination.

The female intelligentsia, who organized the women's societies, linked the liberation of Iranian women with the development of a strong, modern, secular political structure and an industrialized economy. Taj-ol-Saltaneh, for example, not only questioned the socio-political structures, but also identified Iranian traditions and customs as root causes of both the country's retardation and women's deprivation. The lives of urban women, she argued, were 'completely futile' because they were not free to work 'in the shops, offices and factories' like European women, and therefore lacked economic independence.[14] Other women spoke of the capacities of humankind to change prevailing conditions and emphasized the power of human will to make possible what seemed impossible.

The central forms of the women's rights struggle were education and agitation among middle-class women. Starting with handwritten underground leaflets *(Shab-nameh)* produced by women's secret societies, Iranian women waged an extensive campaign to draw attention to the plight of the country's female population. The first women's periodicals, *Danesh* (Knowledge) and *Shekoofeh* (Blossom), appeared in 1910. They included articles on a wide range of issues: women's education and technical schools for girls, principles of hygiene, critiques of superstition among women, child-care and housework instructions, encouragement for the consumption of domestic goods, and struggle for national independence and progress.[15]

Many women's rights activists also established schools for girls. In the social and political climate of the 1910s, these activities entailed enormous danger for women activists. Sediqeh Dowlatabadi, who published the monthly journal *Zaban-e Zanan* (Women's Voice), for example, was beaten and detained for three months for establishing a girls' school in Isfahan. Afaq Parsa, another pioneer of women's rights, and publisher of the women's magazine *Jahan-e Zanan* (Women's World), in 1921, was exiled to Tehran and then to Arak, from the holy city of Mashhad, and declared an enemy of Islam.[16]

These women challenged the patriarchal structure of Iranian society and the established social order of the time. Their struggle for gender equality was as subversive as their fight for the establishment of a secular parliamentary democracy. Only within this context can we understand the hatred of Islamic fundamentalists towards Iranian feminists, past and present. In

August 1980, one year after the 1979 Revolution, a fanatic mob destroyed Dowlatabadi's tomb and those of her brother and father who, despite being men of religion, had supported her activities.[17] Afaq Parsa's daughter, Dr Farrokhrow Parsa, a pro-women's rights activist herself and the first woman to serve in a ministerial position in Iran before the 1979 Revolution, was the first woman executed by the Islamic regime.[18] Such was the unbearable grudge that the fundamentalist Islamists held against the pioneers of women's rights in Iran.

Despite the dangerous conditions under which early women activists lived, the women's movement became more visible, particularly after the First World War. During this time most of the women's societies were more nationalist than feminist. Iran's independence from foreign domination and interference was the emphatic point in their publications, yet none seems to have lost sight of women's specific concerns. Early Iranian feminists insisted upon the inseparable links between democracy at home and democracy for Iran, and the interconnection of national liberation and women's liberation. These women had the political awareness and strategic tact to raise women's concerns in the midst of the national struggle without sacrificing one for the other. Most were, however, critical of the reactionary clerics and the lack of government support for improving women's rights, although women's organizations and periodicals attempted to avoid violating the religious feelings of the general populace.

Two major developments of the period impacted in contradictory ways on the women's movement: the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the formation of a modern state in Iran under Reza Khan in the early 1920s. The Russian Revolution gave a tremendous impetus to nationalist aspirations and the democratic movement in Iran including the women's movement. A series of decrees aimed at the emancipation of women in the Muslim Asian Republics of the Soviet Union was particularly inspiring to women activists in Iran. That these developments occurred under a socialist government contributed to the spread of social democratic and socialist ideas among early feminists.

In the radicalized political climate of the time, and in the absence of a strong central government, demands for change became pervasive. These conditions provided some space for

women to push for reforms such as unveiling, access to education and improvements in their family status. Women founded several new societies, some with radical demands and explicit feminist tendencies. Among them were three organizations, out of which the formation of two was associated with the establishment of the Communist Party of Iran in June 1920. These were the Patriotic Women's League, Women's Awakening, and the Messenger of Women's Prosperity.

The Patriotic Women's League (Nesvan-e Vatankhah-e Iran), founded in 1919 with Mohtaram Iskandari as its first elected president,[19] had several goals: to emphasize respect for the laws and rituals of Islam (a possible defence mechanism to appease the clerics); to promote the education and moral upbringing of girls; to spread literacy among adult women; to set up hospitals for poor women and care for orphaned girls; to encourage national industries; and to organize cooperative societies.[20] The League's journal, *Patriotic Women*, operated as a vehicle to recruit new members and advance women's cause. The League's pronouncements against the veil and its advocacy of women's education as well as its daring methods to draw public attention to women's plight made it a target for hostility and attack by the clergymen and civil authorities. For example, Mohtaram Iskandari and other women were arrested when they publicly burned copies of a pamphlet against women's rights. It had been written and distributed by a clergyman.[21]

Women's Awakening (Bidariy-e Zanan) was formed by a group of Marxist women splitting from the Patriotic Women's League. Kambakhsh, a well-known leader of the communist and labour movement in Iran and a member of the Central Committee of the Tudeh Party, reported that the [Communist] Party indirectly led this group. His claim that for this reason the organization took a 'correct line', suggests that Party members and sympathizers did not hold a majority in the League and therefore resorted to schism to pursue the Party's goals. According to Kambakhsh, the party was actively involved in women's and other groups which he categorized as 'cultural associations'. While the Party gradually gained control of the leadership in such associations and 'used them effectively', Kambakhsh contends, its major work centred on political groups.[22] This distinction between cultural and political

groups clearly demonstrates that women's intellectual and organizational activities – no matter how effective – were considered neither 'political' nor capable of leading the struggle for women's rights unless they were under the patriarchal wings of the Communist Party. This legacy remained with socialist feminist groups all through modern Iranian history.

The Messenger of Women's Prosperity (Paik-e Saadat Nesvan) was established by a group of Marxist women in Rasht one year after the First Congress of the Communist Party of Iran in Enzali in 1920. By organizing adult literacy and sewing classes, setting up girls' schools and libraries, and publishing a journal, the organization tried to articulate the interests of women from various classes.[23] The group's journal, *Paik-e Saadat*, owned by Roushanak Nowdoost, is believed to have been the first communist journal ever published in Iran. It had readers in many parts of the country.

Between 1910 and 1930 more than 20 women's periodicals were published, each criticising the inferior position of women in the family and society and making specific demands for change. In a country where the publication of newspapers did not have a long history, the sheer number of pro-women's rights publications speaks to the existence of a relatively strong women's movement. The 1920s, therefore, signified the emergence of a prospering feminist movement. This represented a huge step forward in a society where only two decades earlier women were banned from having any contact outside the family and, in hostile debates in the Majlis, their mere attempt to organize their own groups was declared heretic and anti-Islamic. Women's activism definitely benefited from the political climate of the time, as the country taking advantage of the weakness of the central government, moved slowly towards establishing institutions of political participation and liberal democracy. A growing section of the population, empowered by their struggle for a constitutional government and encouraged by the revolutionary changes in the Soviet Union, shifted from a state of passivity to political activity, seriously challenging the hegemony of the traditional ruling classes. The continued existence of a free press and the freedom to organize political parties was most crucial for the establishment of a stable parliamentary democracy and a cohesive social movement in support of the democratization of Iranian social

structures and relations. But these same conditions that initiated revolutionary ideas and promoted the nationalist and socialist movements represented a serious challenge to the Iranian ruling class and the hegemonic interests of British imperialism. The 1921 coup d'état led by Sayyed Zia, a pro-British politician, and Reza Khan, a colonel in the Cossack division, and the coup's military arm, was an attempt to prevent the country's disintegration and to counterbalance Bolshevik advances and influence, thus curbing the rising democratic movement. Reza Khan, after a brief period of political temporization, established himself first as a strong-minded Prime Minister and eventually, by ousting the Qajar dynasty, as the ruthless modernizer and dictator, Reza Shah.

Reza Shah's reign marked the beginning of a period of socio-economic reforms, the development of a strong centralized modern state, and, particularly, the secularization of culture, which continued through the reign of his son, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, the last Shah. During the reign of the two Pahlavi kings, the much vaunted modernization of Iran had significant consequences for Iranian women and for their burgeoning political movement. On the one hand, state reforms opened the door to women's access to education and paid work. On the other, by assuming the role of the grand patriarch, the state aborted women's autonomous movement, stifled further development of gender consciousness, bureaucratized women's quest for equity and autonomy, and gave women's demands a distinct class-character.

An analysis of the possibilities and limitations of the social, economic and legal changes during the Pahlavi era helps explain how and in what ways the structural changes of the period affected women. It also shows how successfully the dominant patriarchal, religious and cultural practices which determined women's place in Iranian society were challenged. At the same time this analysis helps explain the role women played during the 1979 Iranian revolution, and why so many women supported the clerics who had for decades actively opposed social reforms which might have improved women's lives and status.

2 Women and Social Reforms

Feminist consciousness and women's struggle against gender discrimination in any society seem to demand a certain level of socio-economic and political development. Much of women's sufferings in third world societies relates to a low development of material production and the persistence of pre-capitalist social and economic structures that restrict women's access to the society's resources. Therefore, economic and social development are the main preconditions for women's emancipation. Yet this does not mean that economic and social change will automatically lead to a change in women's status. Deeply entrenched social norms and values inform patriarchal religious and cultural structures and practices that change more slowly and painfully. The political structure and the degree of women's political and institutional participation in any society are also crucial factors in women's emancipation. So are government policies and the commitment to empowering women not only through extended educational and employment opportunities and formal legal rights, but also through active support for women's challenge to secular and religious patriarchal ideologies and customs.

The process of capitalist development and modernization in Iran, despite the country's great potential and resources and extensive efforts in social engineering, failed to bring fundamental changes in the status of the majority of women. The transformative impact of legal and social reforms on the position of women in the family, in the workplace and in society in general remained limited. Iran's economic modernization had a late start and a short life, starting in the late 1920s under Reza Shah, and continuing during the reign of Muhammad Reza Shah, particularly after the CIA-backed coup d'état of 1953. The period was too short to bring about irreversible social changes and transform the status of women and the conditions of their life. Moreover, the dictatorial political structure and uneven and poorly implemented development policies raise serious doubt whether the situation of women,

dominated by persistent religious and cultural norms hostile to them, could have fundamentally changed over the years.

The socio-economic and political structures built by the Pahlavi Shahs had contradictory results for women and the women's movement. Reza Shah's anti-clerical crusade, which reduced the legal, social and political influence of clergymen, his educational reforms and the creation of a modern bureaucracy, large modern factories, and other social and economic institutions were positive moves. Public education increased women's access to schooling, a major long-time goal of women's rights activists. Yet the political repression and the autocratic and paternalistic means of implementing reforms during his regime did much harm to women's cause. An analysis of two major social reforms in women's favour – the judicial reforms and outlawing the veil – reveals the superficiality and paternalistic character of Reza Shah's pro-women reforms.

REZA SHAH'S REFORMS

The introduction of modern civil and penal codes in 1928 and the replacement of religious judges by judges and lawyers with a secular education drastically reduced the influence of the Islamic Sharia (Islamic jurisprudence) and clerical presence in the courts. Yet, their influence relating to marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance, which discriminated against women's equality in the family, remained practically intact. The provisions of the first Iranian civil code ratified in 1928 were taken mostly from the Sharia. The only departure from past practice was that the law now required marriage and divorce to be registered, set the minimum marriage age for women at 15, and allowed them to include in their marriage contracts the right to divorce. None of these undermined the force of Islamic Sharia, or challenged men's prerogatives over women. Neither did they question the cultural beliefs and practices that shaped the consciousness of the Muslim believer on the treatment of women. Looking back at Reza Shah's reforms, it is clear that no legislative, ideological or educational attempts were made to change women's subordination as embodied in the patriarchal structure of the Iranian family. Moreover, the fact that the Shah himself was polygamous – he

had three wives – indicates the limits of his personal commitment to pro-women's rights reforms. It also suggests that the preservation of the Sharia laws in family matters was more than a gesture to appease the clerics.

Reza Shah's efforts in eradicating religious practices, as exemplified in outlawing the veil, is even more questionable. For years, unveiling had been a central issue for women's groups. Women used various means to show their discontent with the black veil (*Chador*). In Shiraz, for example, women had changed the colour of the *Chador* from black to dark brown, an innovation which ended when they were attacked by a mob in the streets.[1] In the late 1920s, a number of leading women activists stopped wearing the veil in public. These upper-class and upper middle-class women, who had benefited from the educational reforms of the state, were still being harassed in the streets and as late as the early 1930s the Patriotic Women's League continued its anti-veil campaign with a petition to the Shah.[2]

Reza Shah's anti-veil offensive came in 1936. The veil was abolished, and police were instructed to use force to remove women's veils in the streets. Iran was in fact the first Muslim country to impose Western dress on women. In Turkey, for example, Ataturk implemented his secular reforms, including unveiling, essentially through encouragement, and Turkish women were requested, but not compelled, by the government to abandon the veil.[3] Reza Shah's main concern was to produce a Westernized and modern image for Iran. As veiled women disfigured that image they had to be removed from the streets.

The forceful unveiling of women shocked traditionalists and outraged the clerics who saw it as a most violent act against Islam. It provoked a serious confrontation, which ended only with the bloody suppression of a clerically organized anti-government gathering in the mosque of Gowharshad in Mashhad and bloody suppression of the religious opposition.[4] Women also resented this forced unveiling. Many from more traditional families refused to leave their homes altogether and became suspicious of both modern ideas and reforms as well as of those women who favoured unveiling. The strength of the pro-veil backlash in the post Reza Shah period and more recent reveiling movement in post-revolutionary Iran, clearly show the failure of the Shah's anti-veil reforms to institutionalize.

Reza Shah's policy towards the women's movement was derived from his dislike for any force that wished to exist outside the state's control or did not emphatically endorse him. In the early years of Reza Shah's rule, from 1925 through the early 1930s, most women's organizations and journals supported his reforms. With creeping state control over civil society and increasing police repression, the activities of women's groups, along with other political and trade union organizations, however, were restrained and finally banned. Along with the arrest of a number of socialist men, namely Dr Arrani and his comrades, known as the Group of Fifty Three, a number of socialist women were also put in prison. The situation of these women kept in prison without trial was one of the issues raised by Arrani in his defence.[5]

By the mid 1930s all women organizations were quashed. Socialist women's organizations were suppressed and their leaders, Roushanak Nowdoost, Jamileh Sedighi and Shoukat Roosta, were arrested.[6] The Shah did not even tolerate the liberal women who endorsed his reforms, while demanding further changes. While implementing these repressive measures, the government continued its pro-women's rights propaganda for external consumption. Hosting the Second Congress of Eastern Women in 1932, which brought Middle Eastern and South East Asian women to Tehran, was part of this campaign. While the Patriotic Women's League hosted and participated in the Congress, the government appointed a man to 'guide' the women.[7] The Congress endorsed the resolutions of the first congress which included demands for equal rights for women in the family, the abolition of polygamy, compulsory elementary education, women's franchise, and equal pay for equal work. In his concluding remarks, however, the representative of Iranian government stated that the root cause of women's problem was consumerism and women's extravagance, which nurtured all kinds of social evils.[8]

The well-organized Patriotic Women's League in Tehran survived only until 1932. Two years after the dismantling of the last independent women's organization, a number of educated women were ordered to form a Women's Centre (Kanoon-e Banavan) with the following goals: to improve women's moral and mental education, to provide housekeeping and child-rearing instructions on a scientific basis, and to promote phys-

ical training.[9] The charity-oriented and pro-establishment Women's Centre replaced the independent and militant feminist organizations. This pro-women's rights group was composed almost entirely of upper-class, educated and privileged women who had no contact with other social and political movements. They neither posed a challenge to male domination nor questioned gender inequality. Their sole functions as members of the Women's Centre were to endorse the state's mild reforms and praise the Shah as the 'father of the nation'. A letter written by Sediqeh Dowlatabadi, the Head of the Women's Centre in 1941, reveals that the Centre did not have the power even to organize a commemoration for the prominent female poet Parvin Etesami, without the permission of the Ministry of Education. This is a telling example of how women are coerced into conformity once they choose to act within the frameworks determined or defined by men, be it the state or political parties.[10]

As Sanasarian notes, this was the first time a women's group established a close relationship with the central government and systematically pursued charity projects. Charitable activities, she argues, were in line with Reza Shah's ideas of appropriate activities for women. Through charitable works, he sought both to involve women in governmentally controlled projects and to use their readily available labour with little economic cost.[11] This manipulation of women by the state through coercion and cooptation, however, had an even more powerful detrimental effect for feminism and feminist ideas. By depoliticizing women's rights activists and isolating women's struggle for gender equality from the struggle for social justice, democracy and self-determination, the state circumscribed and discredited the women's movement.

With the removal of Reza Shah from power by the Allied Forces in 1941, the anti-religious atmosphere evaporated. The return of some religious exiles boosted the orchestrated efforts of the clerics for the restoration of the veil and the closing of girls' schools. Reza Shah's despotic rule and the atrocities of his police were isolated in one obvious symbol: unveiled women. Women who had been coerced into unveiling were now forced by social pressure and the menace of the clerically organized mob to reveil. Many older women in the cities resumed the veil. Renewed political freedom and the lifting of

severe censorship imposed by Reza Shah, however, provided secular newspapers and progressive parties with a chance to agitate for preserving secular gains. Young women and some of their older sisters refused to go back to the veil.

The surfacing of social and political conflicts and former grievances renewed the revolutionary mood of the early 1920s. It opened the prison doors and freed labour organizers and communist leaders who had survived the harsh conditions of Reza Shah's prisons. The period saw the reorganization and regrouping of political parties and democratic organizations and provided the opportunity for the establishment of special branches, committees and organizations for women, quite a new phenomenon in Iranian political culture. With secular middle-class and working-class bases, these parties felt obliged to address women's issues, or at least to show concern for women's status. The liberal Iran Party formed a women's organization, while the conservative Democrat Party included a clause on women's rights in its programme. The government-sponsored Women's Centre was disbanded and replaced by several women's associations, including the Women's Party, founded by Safiyeh Firouz, and the Women's League,[12] with various groups of aristocratic women in leadership positions. Several women's magazines also started publication. The weakness of the central government allowed women's organizations in this period to be more outspoken, but almost none was independent of party politics.

THE REFORMS OF MUHAMMAD REZA SHAH

The reign of Muhammad Reza Shah, between 1941 and 1953, was characterized by social and political instability and turmoil, as the country went through many political upheavals. The most significant was the nationalist and anti-British movement of 1949–53 for the nationalization of the oil industry, which culminated in the CIA-backed coup d'état of 1953. In the ensuing struggle, the popular government of Mossadegh was toppled and the Shah's position consolidated *vis-à-vis* the popular and socialist movements. A new era of terror targeting all political parties and oppositional groups prevailed.

The Shah's attempt to preserve existing social and economic structures did not resolve the severe social and political contra-

dictions of Iranian society. When the economic crisis of the late 1950s threatened the country's political stability, the Shah's American advisers, alarmed by the situation, advocated social and economic reforms. It was an attempt to restructure Iran's economy along capitalist lines. The 1963 reforms, the White Revolution, included women's enfranchisement and other reforms favouring women. The state carried out these reforms without relinquishing its long-standing authoritarianism and patrimonial rule. Hence, coercion and intimidation remained the primary instruments of political control. Consequently, while Iran underwent considerable economic growth and socioeconomic development from 1963 to 1978, in terms of political institutions and participation it lagged behind many other countries experiencing similar economic development. The wide gap between the economic and political systems and the outright suppression of democratic rights remained an integral part of the Shah's White Revolution. Women were 'granted' suffrage. But how much could this mean in a political setting where people were denied basic human rights and freedom, totally excluded from decision-making processes, and the SAVAK (the Shah's notorious secret police) scrutinized and selected deputies of the Majlis and controlled the activities of even high ranking officials? Not much, even though the extension of the franchise had been at the centre of the struggle for women's rights since the drafting of the first Iranian constitution in 1905.

An examination of the specific changes in women's economic, legal, social and political status in this period suggests that women's mobilization in the revolutionary movement of the late 1970s cannot be explained solely as a reaction to the modernizing reforms of the Shah and the threats they posed to traditional ways of life. On the contrary, it was because the material rewards of modernization affected only few women and then only in superficial ways. A brief look at three important factors that determined women's life options and democratic rights – family, education, and paid work – illuminates the possibilities and limitations for women under Muhammad Reza Shah's rule.

The government attempted to legislate improvements in women's rights in the family. Ultimately, however, the law depended on fundamental transformation of the hierarchical social relations that defined the Iranian family. The centrality of secular and Islamic values in Iranian culture, which

portrayed sexual purity, obedience, and self-denial as ideal feminine virtues, ensured continued male domination and female subordination. Legislation could do little to change these relations, unless new patterns of social relationships and behaviour were supported by public education and improved material means for women's independence. Patterns of marital relationships are predicated on the most fundamental values and beliefs within any culture. Changing them against intense opposition is very difficult. As Chapman Smock has argued: 'The greater the male control over the family, the easier it is for men to thwart the enactment of reforms by discouraging women from taking advantage of their new rights.'[13] For this reason, she supports the French approach to changing women's conditions. In France the legal status of women was modified first outside the family by providing women with access to economic and educational opportunities. The elimination of subordination of the wife to the husband in the family came later, when French women, by virtue of their economic and educational experience, could better enforce their legal equality with their husband.

The debate over whether legislation should first address relations within or outside the family can scarcely have a definitive conclusion. The point is that the Iranian government not only remained faithful to the principles of Islam by limiting social reform measures, but also failed to foster and promote conditions for effective change, including women's economic independence from men. This refusal to act helped to maintain the regime's oppressive character for women. Reforming the sections of the civil code dealing with marriage and divorce took several years of agitation and pressure by women's groups. Reforms on divorce, child custody and polygamy were finally introduced, only after much debate over various proposals and drafts prepared by the Association of Women Lawyers and despite the government's hesitation to provoke reaction from the clerics. Even then Dr Mehrangiz Manoutchehrian's proposed draft on behalf of the Association of Women Lawyers of Iran was not passed by Majlis. This draft had proposed the annulment of many articles of the civil and criminal codes which discriminated against women, while attempting to mollify the clerics by maintaining male authority on issues such as a woman's obligation to live where the hus-

band decided. The prohibition of polygamy and temporary marriage, equal rights in divorce, custody and the guardianship of children, equality of rights in inheritance and to the property accumulated during the marriage contract, the right to work outside the home, women's guaranteed sustenance after divorce, were highlights of the draft.[14]

The Family Protection Act (FPA), passed by the Majlis in 1967, did not annul the articles of the civil code or advance a radical break with Sharia,[15] although it did modify the civil code in favour of women. Divorce – previously a unilateral right of men – became subject to the court's approval, with both husband and wife having the same right to institute divorce proceedings. The court would also now decide upon the custody of children, where previously boys over two and girls over seven belonged to the father. In 1975 women were also granted the right to legal guardianship of their children on the death of the father.[16] Polygamy, while not outlawed, was restricted and required sanction from the man's first wife and the court. The Family Protection Act was silent about *mut'a* or temporary marriage for pleasure.[17]

The scope of the reforms remained very limited. For example, a divorced wife was still not entitled to alimony, and women's inheritance rights continued to be half those of men. A husband could prevent his wife from engaging in any sort of employment which he thought was 'incompatible with the family's best interests and his or his wife's respectability' (Article 16). A woman's right to travel abroad was subject to the written permission of her husband. Moreover, the criminal code, which gave a man the right to murder his adulterous wife or 'promiscuous' sister, daughter or mother to save 'his honour', remained intact. This law obviously condoned brutality and violence against women, while restricting their movement and sexual freedom and perpetuating the tradition wherein a man's honour and respect are irreversibly linked and validated through a woman's sexual purity.

Many new middle and upper-class women took advantage of these legal changes to leave unbearable marital situations and, particularly, to gain custody of their children. For the majority of women, without education or gainful employment, however, the right to institute divorce proceedings was meaningless. Furthermore, in a society where women's social position and

respect were intrinsically connected with the men of their life, divorced or single women could hardly survive outside the family let alone achieve security and social acceptance.

Despite its limited scope, and notwithstanding the fact that it did not make a radical break with the Sharia, the law faced strong opposition from the clergy. Ayatollah Khomeini, for example, condemned the government for following the orders of foreigners rather than upholding the explicit words of God and the sacred Islamic texts. He warned the deputies of the Majlis not to ratify this anti-Islamic legislation which deprived men of the right to unilateral divorce. He also denounced government legislation which allowed women to serve as judges.[18] (Not surprisingly, the suspension of the reformed Family Law was one of the first 'revolutionary' acts of the Islamic regime in 1979.) Other reforms also faced clerical opposition. Such was the case with abortion, even though the government sought to mitigate opposition by announcing its legalization only through internal memos of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice and Women's Organization.[19]

Progress in women's education is attributable largely to the reforms of Reza Shah in the 1920s. Under his rule, social attitudes towards women's education changed, despite the strong and often violent opposition of the clerics who considered the non-religious education of women to be against Islam. Under Muhammad Reza Shah, the acceleration of economic development and the increase in the country's oil revenues, particularly after the 1960s, supported great advances in education for the entire population. Yet despite the general increase in the level of literacy among women, the efficacy of formal education as a force for redefining women's social role remained limited. Women continued to constitute a much larger portion of the country's illiterate population. While the percentage of the literate population increased from 15.4 per cent in 1957 to 47.1 per cent in 1977,[20] the literacy rate among women increased only from 8 per cent to 35 per cent during the same period. In 1977 women constituted 65 per cent of the country's illiterate population. Regional disparities also meant that the benefits of educational reform were not equally shared among urban and rural populations. In 1971, the majority of the country's population (58.7 per cent) lived in rural areas. In the same year, UNESCO declared 91.7 per cent of rural

women illiterate, as compared to 51.9 per cent of urban women.[21] Finally, women's educational gains were made almost exclusively at the elementary level. The limited availability and restricted access to higher level education and technical training for most women obstructed radical changes in their economic activities. Consequently, they continued to be economically dependent upon their husbands and fathers.

Several factors prevented equal and uniform access of women to education. Economic hardships prevented the majority of low income families from sending their children, particularly daughters, to school. Even young boys had to work for wages to contribute to the family's upkeep. A girl's labour around the house was often too valuable for poor households to permit her to attend school. Marriage at an early age also hindered most women's schooling. Although the minimum marriage age for women was fifteen, earlier marriage was common practice in rural and poor urban households. The law also permitted the father to acquire a licence to marry off his under-age girls and this was the most acceptable way for poor households to reduce the burden of their female children. In early 1970, a fertility survey in rural areas found that 19.7 per cent of women interviewed had married before reaching the legal age. In some areas the figure was as high as 33.3 per cent.[22]

The education system did little to change traditional sex roles or women's self-image. The school curriculum and textbooks supported the traditional socialization of women by preparing female students for mothering and nurturing roles. Significant gender differences also existed at the post-secondary level. In 1977–78, while 30.9 per cent of all university students were women, they comprised only 3.9 per cent of students in the natural sciences and 0.1 per cent of those in agricultural science. A full 63 per cent were enrolled in teachers' training schools. Stratification by sex, more than any other factor, determined most women's training and life choices. But many upper and upper-middle class women did obtain high school diplomas and university degrees which proved instrumental in gaining employment in government and the private sector. Despite its limitations, women's increased access to education was a major gain during the process of economic modernization.

After 1950 the rapid industrialization of Iran, the growth of the service sector, and the expansion of the state bureaucracy

brought a growing number of women into the paid labour force. Yet this process did not provide economic independence for the overwhelming majority of women workers. Capitalist relations of production and industrialization, profoundly shaped by pre-existing sex roles, determined the conditions and the scope of women's integration into Iran's paid labour force.

Women's labour force participation grew slowly. In 1956 women comprised 9.3 per cent of the 5 970 666 paid workers. This percentage rose to 13.7 per cent by 1966 and remained at 13.7 per cent during the next decade, despite a substantial increase in the number of working women. The persistently low percentage of women's labour force participation stems partly from the fact that, as in other third world countries, official statistics tend to undervalue and under-report women's non-market economic contributions.[23] However, these figures also point to women's limited participation in the expansion of capitalist and wage labour relations and the low level of female paid work.

With increased investment in the industrial sector, along with an influx of foreign capital in the 1960s, the number of female workers in both small traditional and large-scale modern industries grew steadily.[24] Yet, as in other parts of the world, women held lower-paid, temporary jobs ostensibly requiring less skill. The number of female industrial workers in both traditional and modern industries grew from over 227 000 (34 per cent of the total manufacturing labour force) in 1956 to over 508 000 (40 per cent) in 1966 and to over 619 000 (37 per cent) in 1976. However, the growth-rate for women workers was limited to 6 per cent between 1956 and 1966 and dropped to 3 per cent between 1966 and 1976.

The majority of women worked in small rural and urban workshops with less than 10 employees. In rural workshops, 91 per cent of the workers were unpaid family workers, and women constituted 85 per cent (or 850 000) of the total workers. [25] The concentration of women in small industries and workshops meant that they were deprived of the provisions of the Labour Law, which regulated such conditions of employment as job security, maternity leave and equal pay for equal work in large industries. These women were denied other potential benefits required by the Labour Law including child care, worker's insurance and employer-sponsored health care facilities.

In the larger industries, women were mostly concentrated in traditional and labour-intensive activities. In 1971, for example, the largest proportion of these female workers was in textile manufacturing (32.2 per cent) and food processing (17.7 per cent). Both were labour intensive and heavily reliant on cheap labour. Despite the rapid growth of modern industries, only a very small percentage of women were absorbed into these industries. The traditional small industries together with the older and larger labour-intensive industries continued to be the domain of female wage-earners. In industries, under the jurisdiction of the Industrial Development and Renovation Organization (IDRO), Iran's largest industrial conglomerate with more than 110 large public sector industries, women comprised 15.9 per cent of workers in the old, large, labour-intensive industries but only 0.94 per cent in its modern industries.[26]

As a direct result of the government's policy to increase female employment, the proportion of women in the civil services grew from 6.8 per cent in 1956 through 8.6 per cent in 1966 to 28 per cent in 1976. With the increased access of urban middle-class women to higher and technical education, their employment opportunities as well as their occupations diversified significantly. Nevertheless, the majority of women with higher education were engaged in teaching, clerical or nursing jobs. The proportion of professional women remained very low compared to their male counterparts and in comparison to the total number of women working in the service sector.

In other services, the number of women workers increased constantly. Here, their distribution followed the more general pattern of keeping women on the periphery of the economy and assigning them to less skilled, lower-paid and less prestigious occupations, that is 'feminine' jobs. Consequently, they typically earned too little income to secure financial independence outside the family. Moreover, the economic activities of many urban working women were part of the informal sector of the economy: domestic servants, self-employed vendors, street pedlars and women who cleaned private homes and offices on a day-to-day basis. These workers had no legal protection – that is, no rights to the minimum wage, fixed working hours or paid holidays.

Unequal access to society's wealth, resources and employment opportunities was not the only factor preventing women's independence and freedom of movement. Equally

important were the paternalistic and religious-based social values and practices. Many studies of rural and tribal women have pointed out that not only women's earned income, but also their property rights, as regulated by Islamic law and the civil code, were controlled by men. Such women were excluded almost entirely from the use of money which was considered a masculine privilege.[27] The situation of urban wage-earning women differed slightly in terms of the use of money and control over their income. Nonetheless, except for women whose paid work outside home was absolutely necessary, the work of middle-class women was not taken seriously or thought socially necessary. Although a woman's income was generally controlled by the man and poured into his pocket, he would never admit that the woman was actually contributing to the household expenses. Women who worked for pay tended to look at their work through the eyes of men and consequently felt guilty for neglecting their 'duties' at home. In more traditional and religious families, the 'working girl' was generally considered a 'loose' woman who stood to lose her chance to marry. The power of men was, in fact protected by the law which did not give women the right to work outside the home without their husbands' permission. Permission was usually conditional upon women's submission to the prevailing moral codes, that is decency in clothing and behaviour. As recently as 1986 Ayatollah Khomeini, in response to one *Istifta* (the question asked from Ulama – clergymen – the response to which forms one source of Shiite legislation) asking whether women can become doctors, dentists and nurses without their husbands' approval, responded that 'they may, yet they cannot leave the house without their husband's permission'.[28]

On the whole, the social and economic reforms of the post-1960s were positive, even though only a very small number of urban wage-earning women from the higher echelons of the new middle-class and upper-class families could enjoy financial and personal independence and could manoeuvre within the limits imposed by the patriarchal, male-centred culture. Moreover, the heavy-handedness in which social and economic reforms were enforced made the reforms ultimately superficial, undemocratic and antagonistic. The social and legal reforms were designed and implemented by a highly centralized autocratic state, with no regard for the participation of

people in the matters that affected them most. No form of political activity or opposition to the regime was tolerated. Consequently, neither Reza Shah, nor his son, Muhammad Reza, enjoyed the full support even of their beneficiaries. Moreover, the general repression which denied civil liberties, democratic activities, and political and institutional participation also obstructed the development of a political culture and the organizational means for struggle against gender inequality. No genuine democratic organizations, including women's organizations, could be formed. Denied their own independent organizations, women were also unable to use other democratic organizations, such as labour unions, to assist in the struggle against gender discrimination.

Muhammad Reza Shah's autocratic rule adversely affected women's mobilization. Like his father, he resorted to cooptation and coercion to control and manipulate women's groups. No activities outside government supervision were allowed; only pro-establishment groups were legitimized and supported. In 1959 the High Council of Iranian Women's Associations, incorporating seventeen women's groups, was established. Ashraf Pahlavi, the Shah's sister, was named its honorary president. In 1966 the Council was renamed the Women's Organization of Iran (Sazeman-e Zanan-e Iran) (WOI).[29] Until the 1979 Revolution this was the only women's organization campaigning for legal reforms for improving women's status.

The Shah's political goal in the creation of the WOI was to incorporate women into formal politics in order to give the image of modernity to his regime and further legitimize it within Iran and in the West. Yet, despite the massive propaganda machinery at its service, the WOI failed to attract the female intelligentsia. Instead its presence encouraged either passivity or opposition. By 1977, the membership of the WOI was around 70 000. Many were teachers, nurses, and government employees, whose professional associations belonged to WOI, making their individual membership automatic.[30] The Association of Women Lawyers, the Zonta Club, Parent-Teachers Association, International Women's Club, Society of Jewish Women, Society of Zoroastrian Women, among others, were affiliated with the WOI.[31] A big share of the organization's budget was spent on luxurious projects, including trips abroad and international

conferences. Only through the Family Welfare Centres, which were established in a few urban areas, did the WOI make contact with women from lower-income families.

The WOI's politics caused much resentment and increased social and political stratification among women. Under dictatorial rule, women's political actions was divided into two antagonistic spheres – the one, open and pro-establishment; the other, clandestine and anti-establishment. The demands of the government-controlled WOI coincided with the regime's policies. A charity mentality and passive acceptance of male superiority and traditional sex-roles characterized their activities. They neither posed a serious challenge to male domination and gender inequality, nor questioned other forms of domination and inequality. Thus, despite the fact that some of the reforms, such as women's education and civil reforms advocated by WOI, could benefit women in general, the organization generated distrust and suspicion among non-upper-class and progressive women.

Between 1963 and 1978, the extensive use of the state's ideological apparatus complemented its widespread intimidation and repression. Through government-sponsored organizations and parties, the Shah's regime tried to expand its ideological presence in civil society, broaden its mass support, and legitimize the Shah's rule. The establishment of the Women's Organization of Iran in 1966; the formation of the Intellectual Association of Iran (Jame-ye Andishmandan-e Iran), where most well-to-do, Western educated individuals gathered to analyse and praise the Shah's modernizing reforms; and the creation of a one-party system, Resurgence (Rastakhiz) in 1975, all aimed at the ideological incorporation of a larger number of people, on the one hand, and the intimidation of dissidents, on the other.

The absence of a genuine feminist movement, which could articulate the interests of a majority of women and produce a discourse that would address the oppression of women in Iran, had enormous implications. As post-1979 events revealed, state patronage did not well serve either women's organizations or interests. The mobilization of women by the state changed the nature of women's political organizations and involvement in ways that distorted and discredited feminism. Consequently women's distinct problems and oppression could be dismissed

as bourgeois and divisive by the younger generation of the women intelligentsia. In this context, the favourable structural changes occurring during the Shah's regime were underestimated. The fact that, despite continued disparity between rural/urban and male/female life options and resources, the economic growth and social and legal reforms of the 1960s and 1970s had improved women's position remained unappreciated. This prompted some to join the opposition movement, which was not responsive to women's specific interests and concerns. Perhaps, this experience provided the ideological grounds for a revolutionary movement that subsumed and muted issues of women's oppression in the anti-despotic and anti-imperialist struggles of the late 1970s.

The despotic rule of the Pahlavi era that banned political parties and prevented the establishment of popular democratic institutions served the conservative Islamists well. Because of the Shah's intolerance of nationalist, socialist and feminist movements, no viable secular political force and no progressive counter-culture was developed to confront and successfully challenge the force of Islamic discourse. The Shah's regime, in fact, facilitated the emergence of Islamic populism as the only viable alternative to itself. With no independent democratic organizations, trade union or non-governmental parties, an extensive network of religious associations had a virtual monopoly on the recruitment of Iranian dissidents. By 1974, there were 322 Hossainiyeh type centres for commemoration of religious events and over 12 300 religious associations in Tehran alone.[32] During the political crisis of the late 1970s, these Islamic associations turned into a formidable instrument for mass mobilization, a significant part of which targeted women.

Part II: Women and Other Political Forces

3 Islamists and Women's Rights

Women who joined the revolutionary movement during the late 1970s fell basically into three categories, as the appeal of revolutionary promises varied according to women's social origins, class interests and ideological orientation. For marginalized urban working women, the revolution provided prospects for change in the material conditions and quality of their lives. These women neither had a sense of themselves as a group, nor were they particularly drawn to Islamic ideology. Following their men, they supported the revolution and its clerical leaders for specific and pragmatic goals, such as lower prices for water and electricity; fewer obstacles for the construction of slums in shanty towns around Tehran; the remission of bank loans; and a more equitable distribution of oil revenues among the population.

The second group, urban middle-class women from traditional households, had somewhat different life experiences and concerns. Clearly defined sex-roles in their families and the authority of traditional values over these women made them resistant to the rapidly changing social relations deriving from the modernizing policies of the Shah's regime. The majority of these women from shopkeeper and bazaari families had little or no education, and few had worked outside the home. They accepted the values and beliefs of their men for whom Islamic discourse had a special appeal. This discourse spoke not of empowering women but legitimizing and sanctioning the sexual division of labour and sex-role differences as a natural and necessary condition for social harmony. These women formed the army of black *Chadors* who filled the streets of Tehran and other major cities during the revolution in support of the clerics.

The third group consisted mostly of young educated women from the new and traditional middle-classes, who were motivated by either secular nationalist or socialist tendencies, or religious beliefs which drew them to radical Islamic politics. Their reasons for supporting the revolution were, in most cases, no

different from their male counterparts'. Their revolutionism stemmed less from economic concerns than from ideological and political grievances. They sought the overthrow of the Shah's regime and an end to foreign economic and political domination. In the absence of another alternative, they accepted the leadership of Khomeini. They were neither gender-conscious nor committed to a feminist agenda. Hence, they failed to appreciate that women's specific interests and demands would not be served by a movement that sought to reconstruct traditional gender roles and the *status quo ante.*

The lives of these women had been shaped by the modernization and economic development of the period, and as mentioned earlier, they were the main beneficiaries of the social reforms favouring women. Their education and new way of life had exposed them to revolutionary ideas and oppositional politics. However, the absence of autonomous feminist organizations and discourses to expose the dominant patriarchal assumptions and teachings of Islamic ideology or the 'gender-blindness' of socialist revolutionary messages meant that these women were not alert to male biases in the socialist or Islamic ideologies they embraced or to their inadequacies in addressing questions related to sexuality, gender relations and women's rights. The two political ideologies which inspired and mobilized these women led them in directions which were not conducive to women's collective interests. Neither socialist ideas nor radical Islamic ideology promoted or supported the development of a feminist consciousness or women's autonomous organizations. Despite obvious differences between socialist and religious tendencies, both were indistinguishably similar with regard to gendered values and sexual politics. Neither socialist nor radical Islamic group had the theoretical or practical motivation to address the oppression of women in Iran. Both were specifically and clearly against women's individualism, autonomy and independent voice. Women activists from both new and traditional middle classes were confined to acting within an ideological framework set by male ideologues whose political and moral ethics comfortably converged in the areas of female sexuality and desired sex-roles. This in turn defined their revolutionary strategy *vis-à-vis* pro-democracy and women's rights movements. Their astonishing and grotesque ideological and political coalition had its roots in Iranian masculine cultural

beliefs and practices and the populist revolutionary ideas of Islamists and secular forces. Hence, no viable political force existed to question and discredit the politics of Islamic populism, particularly as it applied to women.

Furthermore, the defeat of the socialist and nationalist movements of the 1950s in Iran gave Islamic populism a new political and ideological weight and made its discourse increasingly appealing to a large section of the population. Like their male counterparts, the majority of revolutionary women entered the only avenue open for activism, Islamic associations and mosques. Some of these associations, namely Hossainiyeh Ershad, promoted a modern version of Islam as the only viable response to the socio-economic crises of the 1970s. Political repression that stifled any political debate outside religious or formal state institutions and discouraged development of feminist consciousness prevented young women activists from seeing the conservative patriarchal character of the revolutionary movement under the leadership of Khomeini, and to dismiss its sexist projects. They simply did not see that women were the main targets of the fundamentalists' agenda for re-establishing Muslim identity and the main symbol of cultural continuity against the infidel West.

The appeal of the populist Islamic discourses become even more meaningful in light of the contrasting strategies of the socialist and Islamic populists in that period. The socialists postponed discussion of women's rights and status until the anti-imperialist and socialist revolutions had succeeded. In contrast, the populist Islamic intellectuals used the issues of women's status to agitate against the socio-cultural developments of the Shah and drew male and female activists to an Islamic alternative. Ideologues like Motahari and Shariati were in fact instrumental in sharpening the disenchantment of the young female intelligentsia particularly from traditional households against the Shah's regime.

IMAGES OF WOMEN: POPULIST SHIITE DISCOURSE

Islamic populism or a turning towards an 'Islamic solution' had the same breeding ground in Iran as in other parts of the Middle East. The rejuvenation of Islam as the 'ideology of

authenticity', to use Bassam Tibi's analytical term, was a response to the failure of the Westernized ideologies of nationalism and socialism as well as Western-influenced third world ideologies. It represented the assertion of an identity in crisis, an expression of a defensive culture, a 'cultural retrospection' and an expression of the material misery of the Islamic people.[1] The appeal to authenticity by revitalizing the indigenous culture and idealizing past traditions against Western values and cultural models, and the triumph of messages of Islamic populism over nationalist and socialist ideas can only be understood in the context of socio-economic and political underdevelopment. Islamic, particularly Shiite populism, shared features with other ideologies and movements, including fascism. A significant number of ideological and psychological elements of fascism, characterized by Wilhelm Reich in his analysis of the mass psychology of fascism, was present in Shiite populism, particularly after it assumed the status of the state ideology. Among them are unquestioning loyalty of the masses and their faith in authority; religious treatment of the leader, or, to use Reich's words, the 'psychic and somatic state of excitation, and orgastic excitation experienced by submissive masses when they open themselves to the beloved leader's speech.'[2] Other similarities included the appeal to uneducated, ordinary people, nostalgia for the past and glorification of bygone traditions, and hostility towards politicians, the secular legal system, liberal democracy, intellectualism, and permissiveness. Dogmatism, religiosity, emphasis on a direct relationship between the charismatic leader and 'the people', inclination towards popular participation, a mass-based single-party system, racism, disregard for the rights of minorities, and intolerance of political opposition have also been present in both ideologies. Reliance on the lower middle classes, and particularly the unemployed and unemployable lumpenproletariat, along with anti-communist and anti-socialist frenzy and moralistic masochism, form yet another set of shared characteristics between the two ideologies.

Radical Islamic discourse shares distinguishable similarities with fascism also in its obsession with sin and deep longing for redemption, as described by Reich. In this regard, the daily publication in Iranian papers of letters or 'Martyrs' Wills', which were written by young Iranian men killed in the Iran–

Iraq war during the early 1980s, are very illuminating. In almost all these letters the predominantly teenage writers passionately asked their parents' forgiveness for their 'unpardonable sins'. They embraced death, they wrote, because only death would purify their sinful souls and bodies. These moving letters make one wonder what the sins of these innocent and hardly adult men could have been.

Explicit hostility towards women's emancipation, propagation of the large, authoritarian, patriarchal family and stress on the intimate relations between family, nation, and religion are other similar aspects of the two ideologies. Both Islamic populism and fascism confine women's role to mothering and present an image of woman as mother, reproducer and nurturer of the family and nucleus of the nation.[3] It was this view of women's natural shortcomings that mobilized the Ulama against women's suffrage in 1962. The idea of gender equality was for Ayatollah Khomeini a blasphemy and a Western plot. He believed that by encouraging women's involvement in social and political activities the Western enemy was trying to bring women out of the home and block their 'sacred natural function of rearing pious children'.[4] The corrupting influence of the West was a repetitive theme in Ayatollah Khomeini's popular statements. Indeed the Ayatollah achieved political eminence in 1962–63 through opposing the Shah's move to enfranchise women and implement land reform. On his initiative, the nine top clergymen issued a communiqué denouncing women's enfranchisement as 'trampling on the Quran and exigent Islamic decrees and encouraging prostitution'.[5]

The Shah's regime did little to challenge sexist and misogynist beliefs and cultural norms. Religious programmes and the weekly sermons of the Shiite clerics broadcast on radio made religious morals and instruction accessible in the remotest part of Iran even during the Shah's time. Thus the Shiite clerics ensured that such instruction did not become simply the orthodox views of bygone generations. This can explain why Iranian popular culture is saturated with statements such as those made by Imam Ali, the first and the most admired of the Shiite Imams. He instructed Muslim men not to value women more than they deserve, for their brain is weak and delicate, like their bodies, and not to allow women to influence their decisions in the social and public domain.

It is important, however, not to collapse Shiite texts and views from different historical and sociopolitical circumstances into a simple reading. Ayatollah Motahari and Ali Shariati are two Shiite ideologues in the modern period whose views had specific sociopolitical implications. Both these men represented the ideological force behind the revitalization of Islam as a political movement and a counter-ideology in the late 1970s. Their intellectual influence, particularly Shariati's, far exceeded that of Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini's references to women in his *Touzih-al Masa,il* (Clarification of Questions) were religious instructions for the believers.[6] He simply reiterated traditional interpretations for the already 'converted', thus limiting his effect. In contrast, Motahari and Shariati addressed themselves to the broader population in a language and style that made Islamic dictates more acceptable. An analysis of the so-called modern Shiite conceptions of women reveals the underlying religious/ideological roots of the pre- and post-Revolution secular discourses and the interconnection between the suppression of women's sexuality and political expression.

The dominant theme in Shiite political discourse in the 1970s was a disdain for changing the status, dress and conduct of women. This attitude cohered with the dominant populist tendencies which targeted Western economic and cultural influences as the root cause of all national problems. 'Emancipated' women in both religious and non-religious discourses constituted the most obvious sign of Western influence and imported values (*Farhang-e Varedati*). Many men experienced a sense of insecurity and resentment at this ever-present sign of Western influence which challenged their privileged position in that most important site of male authority, the Iranian family. As clergymen, Khomeini and Motahari well understood the psychology of Iranian men (and women) and articulated their intuitive anxieties.

Their arguments in favour of traditional relations in which everyone knew his or her obligations and distinct gender role inspired the traditional classes and guided their political discontent. Gustav Thaiss has pointed to the use of woman as metaphor in religious sermons in Iran in the late 1970s. In these sermons, the Muslim community was portrayed either as a pure, virginal female violated by the impure West, or as an

adulterous female 'having an affair' with Western society and, thereby, cuckolding her husband.[7] Only effeminate men would not react to such indiscretion. Such sermons, Thaiss argued, played on the Iranian male's apprehensiveness about sexual relations, ambivalence about contact with women, and threatened sense of masculinity and virility.

This attempt to influence the masses by correlating notions of homeland with family and national pride with family honour is not an exclusively Iranian/Shiite practice. Wilhelm Reich argues that in fascism's subjective emotional core, the ideas of homeland and nation conjure up those of mother and family. Family 'is the nation in miniature...thus, nationalistic sentiments are the direct continuation of the family tie and are likewise rooted in the fixated tie to the mother'.[8] He explains how fascist leaders made use of these notions to play on the unfulfilled sexual and non-sexual desires of the German lower-and-middle-classes to win their support.

Muslim intellectuals such as Motahari and modernists such as Shariati rejected the socio-economic domination of Iran by the West by rejecting 'modern women'. Their writings represent an attempt to reassert Islamic values in a changing social atmosphere which inevitably involved the desegregation of women and their growing presence in public places. They made their views accessible to the masses and used them as a political weapon against the Shah. Thus women became a central focus in the revitalized Islamic discourse.

Ayatollah Motahari's writings on women were a reaction to the attempts by reformist intellectuals – 'imitators of the western way of life' – to secularize and reform the civil code articles on women's rights. At a time when the socialist and secular liberal intellectuals refused to enter into dialogue with the organic intellectuals of the Shah's regime, or use its media, Motahari used the state-run media and every other means possible to advance his goals. In *Zan-e Rooz* (Today's Woman) he published articles condemning the much publicized family law reforms of the 1960s and responding to critics of the Islamic Sharia. Motahari made extensive references to Western sources ranging from philosophers, scientists, psychologists, to film-makers, such as Alfred Hitchcock, to substantiate his biological claims. Only the form of his argument departs from the position of other traditional clerics.

Motahari argued that the physical, psychological and sexual differences between men and women inevitably translate into different obligations and rights including different systems of sanction and punishment.[9] He based his arguments on clichés common to Western societies as well: men are stronger, more rational, more aggressive and more in control of their emotions. Women are weaker, more easily excited, more emotional and less emotionally stable, although they are more in control of their sexual desires. Men are slaves of their sexual instincts; they want to appropriate and dominate women's bodies. Women are slaves of their love and want to dominate men's hearts. Men's passion is primitive and aggressive; women's passion is passive; man by nature is the embodiment of desire and demand, and woman is the embodiment of the beloved and the desired.[10]

While Motahari considered women to be sexually passive and more in control of their sexual desires than men, in his book *Hejab* (veil) he shows much concern over female sexuality and women's power to tempt men. He argues that the need to fulfil sexual desire requires the suppression of excessive and deliberately provoked desires. Keeping sexual desires within limits, that is within the marriage bond, and disciplining sexual instincts, are essential for maintaining social order. For this reason, Motahari argues that adopting Bertrand Russell's position against the censorship of pornographic material or Freud's advice on removing sexual prohibitions would only encourage sexual promiscuity and the freeing of destructive sexual instincts. His discussion of human sexuality concludes with an argument in favour of women's veiling. Unveiled women and the mixing of the sexes allow women to provoke men who will use women for extra-marital pleasures.[11]

Motahari explains that *Hejab* is an indispensable Islamic institution existing for the good of the society. Without barriers between the sexes, sexual desire and excitement is increased. *Hejab* is such a barrier that brings peace of mind to the believer. Sexual segregation through *Hejab* prevents extra-marital sex and encourages youth to marry to fulfil their sexual needs. Therefore, *Hejab* strengthens the institution of family. The appearance of unveiled women in educational institutions, offices and factories provokes men and diverts their attention from productive activities. *Hejab*, therefore, also

serves social stability. Finally, *Hejab* increases women's 'value' and respect. According to Motahari, *Hejab* is quite in accord with woman's self-adorning and coquettish nature. By making herself invisible, a woman becomes more heart-ravishing and desirable.[12]

Aware that prevailing social and economic conditions encouraged desegregation and the partial release of women from the home, Motahari was disturbed by the presence of unveiled women and the changing ways of life in Islamic Iran. His contempt for urban women followed the pattern set by Khomeini and other traditional clerics: 'Except in villages and among the pious families, no woman can be found whose energy is spent on useful social, economic or cultural activities.'[13] Through unveiling, he argued, 'half the population has been transformed into idle creatures preoccupied with clothes, cosmetics and attracting men. This, he argued, was having a disastrous effect on the young: 'These women are turning the youth, who should be the symbol of strength, will power and productivity, into weak, pleasure-seeking and lustful oglers.'[14]

Motahari claimed that he was not against women's social and economic activities, 'provided women observed *Hejab*, did not act coquettishly and in sexually provocative manners.' Yet he was not convinced that even *Hejab* could bring women's sexual and seductive power under control, for he suggested that 'female and male students in universities should be separated in the classrooms by a curtain.' Motahari was neither a political activist nor a radical critic of the Shah's modernization policies. It is particularly significant, therefore, that it was in the area of women's rights that he chose to voice his discontent over rapidly changing conditions. In the Shah's Iran, opposing changes to the status of women – as the symbol of the penetration of Iranian society with Western socio-cultural values – did not invoke the same harsh response from the Shah's police as a critique of despotism or politico-economic dependence. Gender equality was presented by Motahari and others as a Western plot and women who advocated secular reforms were renounced as agents of the West. This stood as a code for the broader critique of the regime. Motahari thus appealed to history and tradition, and implied that imperialist interests were behind changes in Iranian family law:

> Once we were the gate-keepers of developed science, philosophy and reason in the whole world. Now 'others' are imposing their views of similarity of male–female rights on us, under the sacred name of 'equality of rights'.[15]

'Equal rights', he argued, was a deceptive label placed on a 'Western import' by those who mimicked Western culture. What they really aspired to was 'similarity of rights' in family law, a goal both unnatural and illegitimate. According to Motahari, Islam renders equal rights to man and woman by recognizing their biological differences and accordingly treating them 'equally'. Given the differences between man's and woman's nature and their physical and mental capacities and needs, Motahari argued, 'the only path to happiness and peace of mind for both sexes is to remove the similarity of rights'. The principle of 'fairness', as well as the natural and temperamental differences between the sexes, requires dissimilarity of rights.[16]

Ali Shariati was the chief intellectual and political force for the new Muslim militants in universities. A non-mullah religious leader, educated in Paris, with a reformist-Muslim upbringing and nationalist political inclination, Shariati's political activities cost him two prison terms. His lectures and speeches, later transcribed into books, addressed genuine concerns of the Iranian intelligentsia from traditional households. His political use of old Islamic concepts and symbols played an important part in the mass mobilization of the 1970s and the reactivation of Islam as a political force. Shariati's criticism of mullahs and their conservative interpretations of the Quran inspired the new generation of Muslim militants, notably Mojahedeen-e Khalgh. This organization, which came into existence as an Islamic guerrilla force in the 1970s and waged several years of intense armed struggle against the Shah's regime, was instrumental in the Shah's downfall. It drew much of its inspiration and ideological force from Ali Shariati and his anti-clerical version of Shiism.[17]

The appeal of Shariati's views came partly from his extensive use of the Western and non-Western social perspectives of Fanon, Sartre, Massignon, and others and his use of some Marxist concepts such as class struggle. This was undoubtedly a factor that provided him with the authority and popularity of

an Islamic thinker who, compared to the mullahs, was well-versed in modern philosophy, history and social theory. He raised old doctrinal issues of Islam in a new light and made them an instrument for political action. Yet part of Shariati's appeal to youth stemmed from the ambiguity and inconsistency in some of his arguments and concepts. Open to diverse interpretations, they meant different things depending on political interests and leanings. Shariati's conceptions of women provide a good example.

His conception of women, which represented both an apologia for Islamic law and tradition and a different interpretation to that provided by the clergy, was formulated clearly in *Fatemeh Fatemeh Ast* (Fatima is Fatima).[18] Like his other books, it was developed from Shariati's lectures in Hossainiyeh Ershad in 1970 and 1971. Here Shariati addressed the dilemmas of young middle-class and lower middle-class women and female university students caught in the socio-cultural crises emanating from rapid social changes in Iran. He skilfully avoided discussing Islamic principles on women's rights and obligations, probably to escape the contradictory and fallacious reasoning which inevitably accompanied the arguments of modern Islamic thinkers. Yet, nowhere did he question or challenge the Islamic laws which dictated women's lives. Instead, he attacked the 'customs' with religious masks, the out-dated traditions and the 'power of father' without explaining the ideological roots of those oppressive traditions.

Through a female role model, presented to Muslim women in the character of Fatima, the Prophet's daughter and wife of the first Imam Ali, he addressed the dilemmas of contemporary Muslim women – the dilemmas of 'who they are' and 'who they want to be'. In Iranian and other Islamic societies, he wrote, 'there are three visages of women. One is the visage of the traditional woman. Another is the visage of the new woman, European-like who has just begun to grow and introduce herself.'[19] Shariati condemns both female models, before presenting his third and ideal type. Since he did not believe that either traditional or modern women think for themselves, he criticizes men for promoting both female models. The world, Shariati argues, is changing, as societies are not as closed and 'permanent' as they were 100 or 300 years ago. 'Social realities are such that if we do not open doors to them,

they will spring out from the windows... These rapid changes have transformed men and women. A young woman today does not resemble her mother. They have different visions and lives, even two cultures.' As he put it, 'the change from the traditional type of "mother" to the new type of daughter is inevitable.'[20] The religious leaders should recognize that everything changes.

Out-dated customs with false religious undertones in strict religious homes exclude women from literacy, books, education, discipline, thought, culture, civilization and social manners. A woman in a traditional household, he argued, was separated from humanity, and chained.

> What her mother, father, uncle and other members of her family, offer her in the name of religion, ethics, character, chastity and strength is a collection of : NO, don't go, don't do, don't see, don't sing, don't say, don't know, don't write, don't want, don't understand.[21]

The traditional woman for Shariati is not worthy of being the nourisher of tomorrow's generation. Yet Shariati is equally critical of the superficiality of the life of the 'bourgeois' woman, the 'lady of the house', the 'good for nothing', the consumer of Western goods. He condemns the modern woman, the woman who has assumed the mould of the Western enemy. She is free, but free of all values.

> Freed but not with books or knowledge or the formation of a culture and clear-sighted vision... common sense and the level of feeling and the level of vision of the world but rather with a pair of scissors to the *Chador*! This is how they think that women will all at once become enlightened![22]

Against the traditional woman who is asleep, tamed and quiet, and the modern 'doll', the agent of the enemy, he proposed his ideal woman, Fatima, a Muslim female model. She is the symbol of a daughter, a wife, a mother, and a political fighter: '[S]he answers how to be a woman, inside and out, in the home of her father, in the home of her husband, in her society, in her thoughts and behaviour and in her life.'[23]

Shariati's model woman aspires to nothing for herself. She raises her voice only as a daughter, a wife, and a mother, never for herself, for her needs or her wants. She is the embodiment

of devotion and love. She is a beautiful woman, with 'weak body, deep feelings and a sensitive heart'. Shariati's ideal type woman recalls the attributes of female beauty in Islam. As discussed by Fatna Sabbah: 'obedience, silence, and immobility, that is, inertia and passivity are three qualities of the believer *vis-à-vis* God.'[24] What Shariati requires of woman, a true Muslim, a follower of Fatima, is a living martyr, a sexless creature, free from all wants, the guardian of primordial traditions who silently suffers for others' troubles. She sacrifices herself to support, protect and nurture her men. She fights their fights. Shariati's ideal woman is not even sexual, for Shariati, who sees sex as opposed to love, regrets that 'beauty, spirit, feelings and love have now been changed into sex'. Women's sexuality is an additional problem because it is used as an instrument of entertainment, by the exploiters and oppressors to divert the attention of the (male) masses.

Woman's sexuality is a curse because it can be exploited by capitalism. It has been used by the imperialists. '[T]o change a traditional, spiritual, ethical or religious society for the sake of an empty, absurd, consuming society ... [woman] is changed into an instrument for sexuality in order to change the type of humanity.' Through women, the cultural structures of the 'East' are destroyed and wealth plundered. Women's sexuality opens the door of the East to the West. Thus, for Shariati, the only woman worthy of praise is the woman of the tribe or the farm. She helps her husband, shares in production and, at the same time, nurses her child, cooks, and cleans the house. Often she produces handicrafts within the home. The true Islamic woman 'is a wife, a nurse, a mother, a worker, and an artist... She gives her love with the purity of [a] turtledove'.[25]

Shariati's disapproval for women's independent needs and sexual desires is quite clear in his conception of women's position in the West. On the one hand, he praised the European woman for her autonomous human personality, her intellectual development and her individual and social independence which has altered her relationships with others. She works both inside and outside the home. She is experienced, capable of seeing reality, seeking self and finding her interests. But it is the European woman's human freedom, not her sexual freedom, that is worthy of praise. For 'sexual freedoms are deceiving'.

Shariati's crusade for an 'Islamic Renaissance' against 'Safavid Shiism',[26] which he believed had stupefied people and chained women, had little in common with the conservative interpretations of the Quran presented by Khomeini or Motahari. Yet his ideal conception of women, despite its modern form and revolutionary appearance, was traditional, populist, patriarchal and male-centred. In the end, he rejected Western culture and ideologies and in particular their messages for women. From this perspective Shariati was a traditionalist who sought to cleanse the nation of alien values and cultural influences by purifying a woman's body and soul, and evoking the Prophet's family as model. Shariati's discourse played on the genuine concerns of religiously-inclined young members of the intelligentsia who were in search of a new ideological ground. Shariati's 'new Muslim woman' and a 'new Islam' opened the deadlock for these women, who felt pressured by Western cultural representations, on the one hand, and oppressed by the traditional religious values of their households, on the other. Shariati's criticism of the traditional clergy and their 'ancient thoughts' which he blamed for the deplorable situation of women in Iran had much appeal and still inspires many women among the emerging female elite in post-revolutionary Iran. The pages of the government sponsored women's magazine *Zan-e Rooz* attest to the influence of Shariati's ideas on Muslim women who support the Islamic government but are critical of the conservative interpretations of the Quran which foster the Islamic government's gender-biased policies.

Regardless of Shariati's patriarchal and traditional conception of women, he saw the democratic rights of women as central to the democratization of Islam and tried to define the methods for achieving this goal. The failure of the secular intellectuals with liberal, nationalist or socialist orientations to provide an alternative discourse in response to Shariati made his discourse the sole response to the cultural and identity crises of the intelligentsia. This failure did not arise from political negligence nor a tactical error. Rather, it came about because the secular intellectuals shared some of the dominant Shiite presumptions. In other words, the appeal of the Islamic populist discourses on women's rights had deep-seated ideological roots in the images of women, female sexuality, socially

and religiously sanctioned sex-roles and gender hierarchy in Iranian popular culture. This fact explains the mobilization of women and their support for a revolution, whose segregationist and male-centred goals were blatant from its inception. And it also explains the failure of the post-revolutionary women's organizations and other democratic groups to unambiguously and persistently defend women's right to individual autonomy and personal freedom as well as their legal status.

4 Secular Intellectuals and the ‘Emancipation of Women’

The central focus of the political struggles of liberal and left nationalists in Iran in the present century has been to end foreign domination. Attempts to gain the support of influential clergy for mobilization of the masses against foreign powers and the arbitrary rule of the monarchy had always been part of their political tactics. The influence of the clergy in Iranian politics and social life made their support a decisive factor for any of the contending forces.[1] Consequently, an undeclared alliance of the secular nationalists and the left with religious forces around particular political goals has always been part of Iranian politics. This has had enormous repercussions for women's lives and the women's rights campaign.

The alliance of the secular nationalists with the clerics, each seeking different political goals, however, has been open and popularly supported. The balance of forces in each of these movements determined which one emerged hegemonic in leading the masses towards its specific political goals. In both the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–11 and the oil nationalization movement of the early 1950s, for example, the nationalists' struggle targeted the arbitrary power of the monarchy which, by giving foreigners a free hand in the country's economy and polity, had blocked the development of an Iranian national bourgeoisie. The clerics supported these movements, mainly because they opposed the expansion of the centralized power of the state and its bureaucracy, the secularization of the judiciary and education, the ever-expanding army and the monarch's alignment with Western powers and their threatening cultural influences. As discussed earlier, one major concern of the clerics was women's changing status and life conditions, which they saw as the direct result of Western cultural influence.

The Ulama's declining power and their discontent over cultural and moral issues inspired them to ally themselves with the nationalists against the government. In other words, the

clerics' participation in anti-despotic and pro-democracy mass movements was self-serving and in support of *status quo ante.* The dual character of the Ulama's politics *vis-à-vis* the nationalists has been emphasised by some scholars of Iranian history and culture. Nikkie Keddie, for example, suggests that the Ulama's participation in the Constitutional Revolution was to further enhance their power. When 'this turned out not to be the case, the Ulama returned to their policy of fighting secularization and government encroachment on their prerogatives.'[2]

The left intellectuals and the religious forces never formally entered a political alliance. Except for the Constitutional Revolution, when Iranian social democrats and the pro-constitution clerics fought on the same front and the short period during the Gilan movement of the 1920s, the relationship between the left intellectuals and religious forces had always been strained. This mutual antipathy has meant caution on the part of the former, and hostility on the part of the latter. Nevertheless, aware of the clerics' power over the masses, the left tried to form a united front against foreign powers. The clerics' level of tolerance for the Marxists, however, depended on the degree of their power at any particular historical juncture.

What is important for the present analysis is the impact of these political alliances on the position of women. The crux of the matter is that, despite ideological and political differences between the tripartite forces, that is, the nationalists, the left and the Islamists, conflict over women's status has emerged as an issue of central importance in none of the present century's mass movements in Iran. The liberal nationalists and the clerics have typically had fewer differences on issues concerning women. This was particularly true in the post-Reza Shah's period. The nationalists' position either preserved a religious face to attract the bazaar merchants and other traditionalist sections of the population, as was the case of Prime Minister Mossadegh, or had a stated religious side. This was the position of Bazargan, who become the first Prime Minister after the 1979 Revolution. In the early 1960s conflict between the government and the Ulama over women's enfranchisement, for example, Bazargan's Freedom Movement (*Nehzat-e Azadi*), supported Khomeini's position and denounced women's suffrage which, it claimed would expose women to political conflicts and endanger their natural duties in the sacred family sphere.[3]

The left intellectuals, however, had more serious differences with both the nationalists and particularly with the Islamists on issues such as women's enfranchisement, women's access to education and paid work. Compared to other ideological and political conflicts, however, the differences on women's issues remained minor for two reasons. First, the left, fearful of a backlash, confined its defence of women's rights to issues that would not alienate the clerics or violate traditional and religious values observed by the general populace. In other words, women's rights were always sacrificed for 'more important' political goals in the interests of (an imaginary) unity of anti-imperialist forces, as was the case in the post-revolutionary period. Hence, the left timidly supported women's rights to avoid controversy on such crucial issues of women's family status as equal rights to divorce, child custody, questions of polygamy, temporary marriage, control over reproduction, and other issues involving individual liberation of women and their personal freedoms.

The second, and more important, reason why differences in the sexual politics of the left intellectuals and other forces remained minimal must be sought in the sexist and sex-discriminatory cultural norms and values which shaped the consciousness of men and women in Iran. In other words, all intellectuals, with rare exceptions, politically active or not, religious or secular, held common images of women, female sexuality and moralistic conceptions of appropriate gender roles. It is these images that can explain the hostility of the Iranian political culture towards women's struggle for autonomy and choice in both private and public life. These images promoted authoritarianism, exaggerated collectivism and the gender-based categorization of rights and responsibilities. They promoted self-denial in women and self-centredness in men. These images justified and legitimized women's subjugation in the private sphere of the family and in politics.

BEHIND THE VISIONS OF 'WOMEN'S RIGHTS'

In every society cultural factors, particularly those related to the conception of women and feminine/masculine differences, define women's life options and social status. The

concept of sexuality with its accompanying sexual norms shaped the beliefs, values and morality in Iranian culture, and decided women's place, rights and obligations. Women's perceptions of themselves and men's images of women were formed in the Iranian family, which was the site of sexual oppression and male authority. The social and ideological practices of gender hierarchy and men's privilege within the family originated with the images of woman as all-body and sex-object in Iranian culture more generally. This was a culture obsessed with sex which brutally suppressed women's sexuality and sexual expression.

The influence of Islamic and Shiite visions of female sexuality and sex-roles on Iranian culture is a key to understanding the unquestioning acceptance of gender hierarchy and male superiority, privilege and prerogative within the family and the extension of that vision to the political sphere. After fourteen centuries of coexistence and interaction between Iranian culture and Islamic tradition, it is of course impossible to determine which cultural practices, values and beliefs, with regard to the images of women and desirable sex roles, are Islamic and which Iranian. This is particularly difficult because there is considerable evidence to suggest astounding similarities on sex-based beliefs and practices in Sassanid Iran and the Islamic traditions that dominated the country after the seventh century.[4] This points to the legacy of male domination and female subjugation, sexual hierarchy and the view of women as a potential source for social disorder in pre-Islamic Iran. This, in turn, supports the analysis of some scholars of Middle Eastern culture and history, such as Germaine Tillion, that the historical tension between religion and sexuality existed in all traditions in the region long before the dawn of Islam.[5] Tillion concludes that the phenomenon she calls the 'solitary confinement' of women is not related to religion. Nonetheless, traditional beliefs and customs are not sustained by inertia, but maintained by powerful ideological and legal institutions. Islamic institutions and legal and textual discourse with regard to female sexuality have been instrumental in institutionalizing women's subservient status in Islamic societies, Iran included.

Many important studies of gender relations and sexual dynamics in Muslim societies by Middle Eastern feminist

scholars have discussed the social and political consequences for women of the obsession of Islamic culture with sexual relations, the female body and sexual power. Fatima Mernissi, for example, sees the stubborn survival of female seclusion and oppression in Muslim societies as the outcome of the way Islam uses space as well as laws and other mechanisms of control to regulate female sexuality. Women must be controlled to prevent men from being distracted from their social and religious duties.[6] The Islamic practices of sexual segregation, the veil and polygamy are all institutions that foster male dominance and are aimed at controlling destructive (female) sexual power. Unlike other traditional religions, Islam recognizes sexual desires and the need for their fulfilment for both sexes. But it attaches so many conditions to the rights and wrongs of male/female relations that the Islamic concept of sexuality becomes self-contradictory.

For Fatna Sabbah, woman-as-body and an exclusive physical entity is explicit in both Islamic legal discourse and particularly erotic discourse. In erotic discourse femaleness is erosion; female sexuality has animal energy; it is irresistible, sending out rays, like radar, which hypnotize the male body. In erotic literature, as Sabbah demonstrates, women's desire appears to surpass by far that of men, and is hard to satisfy. Woman, therefore, is the source of male anxiety. Men are forever preoccupied with sexual power, the size of the penis, with prolonging intercourse, and with searching for a sexual strategy to meet female expectations in bed. Hence, sexual relations constitute a continuing crisis for the believer, because they divert attention from God.[7]

The psychological impact of this culture is lack of self-esteem among women and over-confidence among men in almost every area of their lives. The superiority and power that men feel in the sexual domain and the legal and sexual norms which provide them unrestricted access to the female body shape men's images of woman and what she should and should not do in the 'non-sexual' spheres of life. These practices give men privileges both in the public and private worlds. The force of these sexist values, attitudes and customs has been as influential as economic and political factors in constraining women's behaviour, restricting their roles, and suppressing their individuality and rights.

The central place of family integrity and honour in the life of every individual essentially derives from an obsession with women's sexual conduct. Women, therefore, carry greater responsibility for retaining family honour, and normally the personal conduct of female family members, more than anything else, can jeopardize family dignity and respect. Protecting female kin, defending their honour and supervising their proper conduct are a male duty and preoccupation from childhood. It is not unusual in Iran to see a 13 or 14-year-old boy ordering his 20-year-old sister around, criticizing and supervising her appearance and behaviour, particularly in the absence of the father. Even an uncle or male cousin may exercise a vigorously protective attitude towards their female kin, and men may murder women on the legally sanctioned grounds of the defence of family (male) honour.

This male fixation with women's conduct and the overt system of sexual oppression, which stems from a preoccupation with women's sexual purity and specifically virginity, is itself a manifestation of sexual inequality between the sexes. The obsession with virginity, for example, as Mernissi puts it, 'locates the prestige of a man between the legs of a woman.'[8] In Iranian popular culture, a virgin is often referred to as an 'unpierced pearl' that is pure and untouched. From early childhood a girl is taught that virginity is her 'capital'. The popular saying that equates the wedding night for a man to coronation day for a king is associated with the consummation of a virgin. A man's capture and possession of a woman as a means of asserting his virility and power is unmistakable in the word *Tasarrof*, which is often used in Iranian popular culture to describe the consummation of marriage on the wedding night. Through the consummation of marriage, a man establishes his rights over a woman's body that has been kept untouched for him. If it were not for this power-relation, why should the wedding night ceremony, which can be a most unpleasant sexual experience for most young men and women in Iran, be so important? It places enormous pressure on both parties deriving from the man's performance anxiety and the woman's sense of helplessness, fear, and pain.

Paul Vielle is right to argue that in Iran a woman is not sex for herself. She is sex only for men. Hence, the premature loss of virginity is an offence against man's honour. The value

attached to virginity constitutes the cultural and legal protection of a man's rights to goods that are unused and pure. Vielle perceives a contradiction here between the ideal representation of sexuality, as a God-created motivating force only to incite men to procreation, and its practice, that is, sex as a constant subject of dreaming, and conversation.[9]

SEXUAL CULTURE AND SEXUAL POLITICS

Not surprisingly, Shiite cultural norms and patriarchal presumptions have influenced the lives, social norms, attitudes and morality of many lay and secular intellectuals. The glorification of motherhood and the importance attached to woman's sexual purity and modesty are values of the typical Iranian male, be he a practising Muslim, a secular nationalist or a socialist. They share a dislike, to say the least, for women who hold and express independent views, pursue their own independent interests and exercise their will. The alliance between religious and non-religious Iranian men resides in their sexual politics, even though secular men may oppose the Islamic practice of veiling and the restrictions imposed on women's public activities. This opposition cannot be taken as unqualified and unconditional support for women's right to equal personal rights and freedoms, or equality in rights and responsibilities in the family. Underpinning the sexual norms and practices of most Iranian men and women is a belief in 'natural' attributes as the justification for male superiority which legitimizes men's position as 'the manager of women's affairs'.

So rigid are the socio-cultural norms, the division of labour and values with regard to male/female differences and sex-roles that femaleness appears as an infection that any man should avoid. For this reason, being called or considered 'effeminate' (*Zan sefat*) is the most severe insult to a man's honour. How could this conception of women, as nothing more than the object of male gaze, derision and violence, fail to affect women's self-esteem and their position in social and political life? How could the intellectual's conceptions of women not be influenced by this? How could anyone escape his/her sexual fears and taboos? In this culture woman's expression of her desires and the pursuit of her interests con-

tradicts the interests of men and violates the entrenched conception of family honour. Women's pursuit of their collective interests also violates the societal order. The refusal of female rights to choice and sexual expression within the family is correlated with male-centred and male-defined values and perceptions in political life.

Since the early twentieth century, many enlightened men supported women's access to education not as a basic human right, but rather as a means to enrich and enhance the mother's competence for rearing the nation's future generation. *Hejab* was criticized not because it denied women's right to their own bodies, but because it was seen either as a deterrent to their social responsibilities or a sign of the country's retardation. Thus woman as a subject of discourse in both religious and non-religious writings was woman for men – woman defined and idealized by men according to their expectations. No one addressed the questions of how women saw themselves or what women wanted.

The dominant image of femaleness in Iranian culture fabricated two types of women. One is a woman who is well aware of her physical and mental weaknesses compared to men, knows her place, talks little and wants little. Feeble, emotional and dependent, she looks up to her man and masculine values. Aware of the mortal danger of having or expressing sexual desires, she has accepted and internalized her passivity. She denies her wants and desires, honours and serves her man and his needs. She does not demand reciprocity, respect or individuality in marriage, and suffers quietly and gracefully. In the popular culture, this woman is highly esteemed and admired.

In the second category is a woman who in many ways represents the opposite values of the first woman. Strong in character, outspoken, independent and aware of her capabilities, she does not have high regard for masculine values and is critical of oppressive male-centred cultural norms and traditions. Neither does she respect or admire men's values and authority, be it in private or public life. She is well aware of her own needs and desires, does not care to hide them, and has a language to express them.

The first type of woman is to be appreciated, admired and supported for her weakness. The second is to be reprehended, condemned and castigated for her strength. The Iranian intellectual tradition did little to change these two images of

women in the popular culture or to bring out the specific individual and economic/political interests which promoted these two images. Quite the contrary, influential intellectuals articulated and rationalized these images. They intellectualized sexist cultural beliefs and practices, and promoted their accompanying norms and values, to maintain engendered standards, norms and values in social and political life. In this sense, they were instrumental in normalizing and reinforcing gender hierarchy and male superiority.

These gender-biased images of women were universal among Iranian intellectuals, with isolated exceptions. True, the organized left in Iran has been the forerunner in the equal rights campaign since the late nineteenth century and the most consistent advocate of unveiling, women's rights to education and paid work. Yet, woman as a sex with distinct interests, independent needs and legitimate desires and rights has been absent entirely from the discourse of secular intellectuals with liberal, nationalist or independent leftist convictions.

The contradictory and complex sex-negating, yet sex-obsessed Iranian culture left deep marks on modern secular intellectuals. This was manifested partly in their negative images of modern urban women who seemed to be transgressing sexual norms. With the acceleration of capitalist relations after the Second World War, and particularly with the full-fledged modernization programmes, both women's position and the position of secular intellectuals towards women underwent some transformation. The increased participation of women in the labour force and their growing access to education created a more visible population of middle-class women. Their presence in the public world threatened and disturbed the men. Thus, with the emergence of 'modern' women, a transmutation took form in the thinking and writings of male intellectuals.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example, the campaign for women's democratic rights was an important part of the struggles of individual intellectuals for the democratization of Iranian society and adoption of Western values, constitutional government, the rule of law, secularism and modern education. The core of Mirza Fathali Akhundzadeh's criticism of the Islamic Sharia, for example, was its treatment of women. In sharp and unreserved language he discussed forced marriages, *Hejab*, polygamy, the depriva-

tion of women and their lack of education and social activities.[10] Mirza Aghakhan-e Kermani was also in the vanguard of the struggle for women's democratic rights. For Kermani, Iran's socio-economic retardation stemmed from 'the arbitrary rule and corruption of the kings and the tyranny of Muslim jurists. This prepared the ground for foreign aggression and intervention'.[11] He found the situation of women an obvious sign of mixing religion with politics and of clerical tyranny. In pre-Islamic Iran, a nostalgic Kermani wrote that women were men's equal partners enjoying all rights except 'ruling and commanding the army'. After the Islamic invasion, women were enslaved and imprisoned in their homes and deprived of participation in any activities, trade, industry, science and art. They could not support themselves or socialize with men. Arranged marriages with strangers and polygamy transformed love and bonding into animosity and vengeance between women and men. For Kermani, women's restricted and deprived life marked even women's physical appearance: 'The tall, graceful, healthy looking and beautiful women, portrayed in books on Iran's ancient history and on carvings in archaeological sites were changed to what we see now, pale, frowning, crooked-back, timid and scared figures.'[12]

In the post-constitutional period, raising issues of women's rights, unveiling, bringing women outside the confining walls of their homes and substituting non-traditional, egalitarian relations within the family for undemocratic and hierarchical relations constituted a dominant intellectual trend. This strong emphasis on the democratization of family through social reforms in favour of women was missing in the intellectual discourse post-Second World War. The ideas and writings in praise of women's democratic rights as a genuine Iranian tradition and cultural heritage, promoted by Kermani, were replaced with the claim that women's liberation was a Western phenomenon and irrelevant to Iranian society. Women who voiced their individual interests and desires for personal liberation and tried to manoeuvre within the suffocating bonds of cultural norms and values were condemned as Westernized individuals who had turned their backs on indigenous traditions.

This intellectual retreat served to re-legitimize sexual segregation and reinforce gender inequalities. Criticism of social relations which exploited and victimized women was replaced with

criticism of and often hostility towards women's 'embourgeoisement', their Western values, behaviour and appearance. These charges provided a new rationale for both overt sexism and resistance to the democratization of family relations. Women were accused of placing their interests and personal desires above those of the family.

One modern, secular intellectual, who was nonetheless traditionalist in terms of gender equity, was Ahmad Kasravi, a prominent historian whose anti-clerical and anti-superstition crusade eventually cost him his life in the 1950s. In a 1944 pamphlet entitled 'Our Sisters and Daughters', Kasravi criticized *Hejab* as a pre-Islamic aristocratic practice taken up in Muslim countries. This ancient non-Islamic invention, Kasravi argued, exacerbated superstitious beliefs and practices among women and limited their world views to the affairs of the family and the household.[13] Kasravi, however, believed that 'God created men and women to do different things', and work outside the home was not a woman's job. Women, according to Kasravi, were not even supposed to be educated in scholarly fields such as philosophy.[14] He specifically criticized women who ran through the streets in the early morning to get to their offices as though they had neither husbands nor children to care for. Kasravi argued that nature created woman to bear and rear children. Men needed clean clothes and meals.[15] Kasravi defended and encouraged women's education and their involvement in the political life of their country in support of a national (male) cause, but he criticized the advocates of women's suffrage for the 'improper song they were singing'.

Kasravi also criticized 'liberated' women for their 'extravagant clothing and cosmetics and their improper behaviour in parties and dances'. In the social setting of 1944 Iran this was anything but well-intentioned. Kasravi's statements were aimed at discrediting women's attempts and struggles to gain some elements of choice in their lives. Therefore, while Kasravi sided with women in opposing polygamy and the veil, he held a very conservative and sexist position on women's equal rights to enter politics, the judicial profession or even the civil service.[16]

The scholarly and literary works of the period normally were silent about women's rights, and relationships between men and women, except for criticizing either women's ignorance or excesses. If women appeared in history books at all, it was only

to record the sacrifices they had made for their country as supporters in the success of their men, or their destructive role in historical disasters and national defeats. For example, the historian Bastani-Parizi, in his work on Safavid Iran, traced 'woman's footsteps' in lost wars and the decline of dynasties, even in ancient Iran. He urged his readers 'never to forget the corrupting influence of women and the role of genitals in history!' He even defended footbinding in China, because women, 'are the central cause of all corruption and conflicts on earth'.[17] Bastani-Parizi was a secular intellectual.

This intellectual tendency, presaged by Kasravi and Parizi, gained stronger ground after the 1960s. The 'modern' woman was presented as the instrument of Western cultural influence, and even as an agent of Imperialism. As Tohidi pointed out 'westoxication' was the nation's disease and the Westernized woman, the carrier of its virus.[18] Woman, the nurturer, the mother and the one with Heaven under her feet, now became the symbol of corruption, moral degeneration, and cultural malaise in the nation. The blame for cultural and social crises was placed solely on the shoulders of 'modern' women. Hence there developed nostalgia, shared by religious intellectuals like Shariati and seemingly secular intellectuals like Al-i Ahmad, for the simple rural woman.

Jalal Al-i Ahmad, a leading essayist and former Tudeh member, was an influential intellectual figure in the *Niru-yi Sevum* (Third Force) and a close associate of Khalil Maleki.[19] Al-i Ahmad's anti-West, anti-industrial crusade, his nostalgia for the golden past and his call for a return to origins and later to Islamic roots went well with the sombre intellectual mood arising from the defeat of the socialist and nationalist movements after the 1953 coup. His works formed a major source of populism in Iran. Al-i Ahmad's book, *Gharb Zadegi* (Westoxication or Occidentosis), was an argument against Western technological and cultural influences in Iran in the 1960s, and the most influential lay Muslim apologia. Al-i Ahmad lamented the machine invasion of farms and villages which uprooted the peasantry and compelled urbanization. He discussed the inevitable contradictions arising from invading Western capital, technology and cultural values including the emancipation of women. Given the way in which emancipation has been implemented in Iran, he argued, 'we will have succeeded only in

swelling an army of consumers of powder and lipstick – the products of the West's industries – another form of occidentosis.[20] In reference to the new urban non-traditional women whom he categorically condemned, Al-i Ahmad wrote:

> We really have given women only the right to parade themselves in public. We have drawn women, the preservers of tradition, family, and the future generation into vacuity, into the street. We have forced them into ostentation and frivolity, every day to freshen up and try on a new style and wander around. What of work, duty, social responsibility, and character?[21]

Al-i Ahmad uses the same crude populist and misogynist language when he describes the characteristics of the disease of Westernism. The occidentotic, according to Al-i Ahmad, is a disbeliever, a syncretist, with no faith, no direction, no character and no speciality. 'He is like the old women in a household who in the course of lifetimes of experience have learned a little about everything, although their knowledge is limited by the perspective of illiterate women'.[22] Worst of all, the occidentotic was effeminate. He attended a great deal to his grooming, spent much time sprucing himself up and attached a great deal of importance to his shoes and his wardrobe.

Al-i Ahmad's arrogant and sexist attitudes and language are observable in his other works. In *Dar Khedmat va Khianat-e Rowshanfekran* (On the Service and Disservice of Intellectuals), he presents an analysis of non-religious intellectuals who have turned away from their roots by opposing the clerics and supporting the separation of church and state. He blames Westernized intellectuals for their non-commitant and 'womanish' behaviour.[23]

For Al-i Ahmad, every modern institution established in the country was a door opened to Western influences. Publishing houses, universities, even health institutions, were breeding grounds for westomania intellectuals who had betrayed their country. Women who worked in these institutions deserved condemnation and insult. His references to female secretaries in government agencies demonstrate not only his hostile attitudes towards non-traditional women but also his ignorance of the realities of women's conditions and the pervasive gender hierarchy in the labour force.

> These ladyships are the expressive manifestation of Westoxication in this society...If the ladyship secretary is worthy of anything why is she not in charge of a department herself. And if she is not worthy of that and is merely used as an ornament for the waiting room then what can I say...[24]

What is important to emphasize is that Al-i Ahmad enjoyed great respect and influence in the intellectual community and his populist tendency with deep misogynist undertones enormously influenced other literary figures and the public at large.

Reza Barahani, secular intellectual, poet and writer, demonstrated an awareness of the plight of women and the masculine character of Iranian history in his book, *Tarikh-e Mozakar* (The Masculine History). He recognized and criticized the fact that no woman in Iranian history had been allowed to have an independent vision and voice: 'Man, the ruling sexual force, creates a social atmosphere which is totally male and which conditions women according to male peculiarities'.[25] In such an atmosphere, he wrote, women judge themselves according to the values of men. A keen observer of male behaviour and values, Baraheni touched upon the most important taboo in Iran – male sexuality, when he argued that the typical Iranian male is obsessively preoccupied with sex. Almost all the jokes in Iran are about sex, the majority about women and some about young boys...The conversation of men becomes totally absurd when a woman joins them. They have only one thing in mind: to mate with that meat standing in front of them.[26]

However, Baraheni too ultimately blames women for their submission to the Western cultural assault and the alienation and cultural crises of the 1970s. In criticizing the styles and values imposed on 'us' by 'them', Baraheni finds Westernized women to be more West-beaten, more irresolute and easily impressed (*Dahanbin*), more deracinated (*Birisheh*), more alienated and less cultured than men.[27] Of course, neither Baraheni, nor any other male intellectual who has spoken about and for women explains why women overtake men only when negative characteristics are at issue. Perhaps it was because non-traditional, modern professional women did not know 'their place' any more. Even though the structural changes in Iranian society were sex-biased and had not challenged male authority, the mere presence of women in the

public sphere was seen to threaten men's authority and privilege in the home.

The sexist attitudes of Iranian males toward Forugh Farrokhzad, the only female poet who refused to succumb to male values, mirror the dominant sexual norms and perceptions of the 'cultured' circles. Farrokhzad refused to reject her sexuality and to live and write according to male-defined norms and religious moral codes. Moreover, as Farzaneh Milani has pointed, Farrokhzad changed the 'physical inaccessibility of men to female representation'. In her poetry, 'man is stripped of this veil of mystery. He is presented in his all-too-human frailties and contradictions...he is mystified, terrorized by signs of emotion, softness, and nurturing.'[28] Consequently, male intellectuals were harsh critics of her and her poetry. In his fine biography of Farrokhzad, Michael Hillmann analyses the 'male myopia' of Forugh's critics, and 'her treatment at the hands of the most liberal, educated, human-rights-oriented' segment of the Iranian population, as well as those who were her lovers. None of these men, he argues, had a literal faith in Shiite Islam or based their decisions on moral questions on Quranic doctrine and Islamic religious law. Nevertheless, Hillmann argues that, while 'paying lip-service to the notion of woman's rights and equality, [they] seem to have been unable to maintain consistently or ultimately a sense of equality in their relationships with Farrokhzad.[29]

Farrokhzad paid a high price for her frankness in her personal life, the feminine character of her poetry, and her refusal to live according to the dictates of male-centred values and customs. In a letter written in Europe, Farrokhzad offers a telling account of the pressures she endured:

> I wanted to be a 'woman', that is to say a 'human being'. I wanted to say that I too have the right to breathe and to cry out. But others wanted to stifle and silence my screams on my lips and my breath in my lungs. They had chosen winning weapons, and I was unable to 'laugh any more'...In order to get fresh energy and strength for 'laughing' some more, I suddenly decided to put some distance for a while between myself and this environment.[30]

Farrokhzad had the awareness, courage and means to choose her life-style and to continue to maintain her voice and

creativity despite all the pressures. Very few women had these prerequisites to lead independent lives and to pursue their own interests, outside men's interference and control. For the overwhelming majority of women artists and writers, it was much easier and safer to reject their sexuality and to hide or suppress their womanhood in order to acquire social acceptability and intellectual recognition. Many other women simply looked at themselves, their needs and desires as well as their intellectual creations, through men's eyes.

The country's political arena was no exception to this rule. Men's prerogative and power over women and the cultural values that demanded the sacrifice of women's desires and voices to men influenced perceptions and conduct in political life. Women were required to relinquish their distinct political interests to the male-defined revolutionary movements, as they were forced to surrender their sexuality and desire by the force of sexist cultural norms and values transmitted from one generation to another and produced and reproduced in the Iranian family. This cultural context that promoted male authority and female submission was instrumental in defining the revolutionary practices and strategies of the socialist opposition forces in Iran towards the women's movement. The majority of women activists succumbed to male political culture, values and discourse. Consequently they failed to recognize that gender equality and the democratization of relationships between men and women were prerequisites for the democratic society they aspired to build.

5 Sexual Politics of the Left

Iranian socialists have been the most consistent advocates of equality rights between the sexes. Nonetheless, this has been an abstract and ambiguous commitment that was scarcely an Iranian invention, but rather, in Lise Vogel's words, an 'inherited ambiguity' in socialist tradition.[1] The socialist commitment to women's liberation, predominantly and perhaps exclusively, centred on their social and political liberation. As summarized by Brodsky Farnsworth, this commitment was to educate less politically conscious women to understand the larger, long-range impact of the socialist revolution on their lives, to incorporate women into the economy, to protect women's labour in shops and factories, to provide maternity legislation, and to end prostitution.[2]

The reluctance of the Iranian left to discuss issues connected with individual liberation and personal freedoms, women's sexuality, equal rights to sex, and birth control fit the socialist legacy. In fact, the absence of an analysis of the oppression of women in the Marxist tradition – that is, not women as mothers, sisters and daughters whose problems were subsumed under family – accentuated the ideologically and culturally based sexual division of labour in the personal and political lives of the secular left in Iran. There are two aspects to the left's theoretical orientation that bear upon this analysis: its theories of women's oppression and emancipation on the one hand, and its anti-imperialist and populist tendencies on the other. This theoretical orientation compounded and maintained the force of patriarchal culture and masculine values that informed the personal and political lives of left activists.

THE 'WOMEN'S QUESTION' IN THE SOCIALIST TRADITION

A good part of the analyses of women's oppression by socialist theorists, most notably Lenin, centred on criticism of feminists who paid 'too much' attention to marriage and sex. His comments were repeatedly invoked by Iranian socialists to oust

'bourgeois feminist' tendencies. This was a somewhat selective invocation of Lenin, of course, who had also regarded the timid efforts of both the international socialist movement and his own Bolshevik party on promoting sex equity as 'insufficient'. He saw the need for 'a campaign against ideological backwardness', particularly the 'backwardness of male comrades'.[3]

Lenin took pride in the fact that in the sphere of legislation the Soviet government had done 'everything required to put women in a position of equality'. Yet, he was aware that laws alone were not enough: 'You all know that even when women have full rights, they remain downtrodden because all housework is left [to] them. In most cases housework is the most unproductive, the most savage and the most arduous work a woman can do.'[4] Nevertheless, the oppression of women in the sphere of reproduction, and the patriarchal structure of the institution of family and mothering in the working-class family, was scarcely the theoretical focus for either Lenin or his contemporaries. Following the theoretical tradition of Marx and Engels, they believed that the socialized labour process and the proletarianization of women meant the abolition of pre-capitalist patriarchal life. The development of the capitalist mode of production and its exploitation of women's labour had relieved the proletarian woman of 'having to fight to tear down the barriers which have been raised against her participation in free competition of the market place'. Now, in the words of Clara Zetkin, the working woman fights because 'her rights as wife and mother need to be restored and permanently secured. Her final aim is not the free competition with man, but the achievement of the political rule of the proletariat'.[5]

Among socialist thinkers, Kollontai, whose understanding of the important connection between the personal and political brings her close to contemporary feminists, worked tirelessly to raise issues about love and sexuality and to develop a new communist morality on sexual relations. Kollontai repeatedly emphasized maternity as a social and communal concern and discussed the need to liberate women from the time-consuming tasks of childbirth. Yet, she approached women's issues in post-revolutionary Russia in terms of women as workers/mothers. Motherhood had to be protected in the interests of the new Soviet state:

> In a labour state...maternity is protected and provided for not only in the interests of woman herself, but still more in the interests of the tasks before the national economy during the transition to a socialist system: It is necessary to protect [women's] health in order to guarantee the labour republic a flow of healthy workers in the future.[6]

Not surprisingly, Kollontai did not see birth control, legalized abortion, women's rights to control their own bodies, or their reproductive capacity as major concerns affecting the equality of sexes. In fact, she spoke less of the liberating potential of birth control and more of women's duty to have children. She hoped for the 'gradual disappearance of the evil of abortion... when the country's economic problems were solved and when women understood that childbirth was a social obligation'.[7]

This one-sided emphasis on working-class women and the consequent failure to address various dimensions of women's oppression has meant that socialists have historically been suspicious of all other activities aimed at improving women's rights. In a conversation with Clara Zetkin after the 1917 Revolution, for example, Lenin criticised German Social Democrats who wasted energy on problems of marriage, sex and sexuality in their discussion groups with women workers. This uncompromising approach blocked the formation of separate women's committees or groups within social democratic and communist parties in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Socialist women generally had great difficulty overcoming the anti-female prejudice of their parties to gain 'permission' to organize working women.[8] They had to fight for acceptance as equals in party organizations and for a greater understanding of women's problems. Clara Zetkin, a prominent leader in the German socialist movement, was legally barred from membership in the German Social Democratic Party until 1889.[9]

Socialist theorists and activists of the nineteeth and early twentieth centuries defined the task of socialist women as preventing the working-class women from becoming infected with bourgeois feminist ideas.[10] Even Kollontai, who emphasized the connection between women's subjugation and political actions and fought for separate party work for women, was no exception. In 1905, when the Russian Social Democratic Party finally agreed to allow a separate women's group, Kollontai

openly criticized the party for 'how little it was concerned with the fate of the women of the working class, and how meagre was its interest in their liberation'.[11] She objected, however, to the 'poison of feminism' and its 'narrow concerns and its exclusively women's demands'.[12] The general belief among socialists was that in a society based on class contradictions there was no room for a separate women's movement.

Clara Zetkin at times addressed women as a homogeneous group and used a vocabulary not markedly different from that of contemporary feminists. In her call to socialist women of all countries to end the First World War, for example, Zetkin appealed to women as women: 'When the men kill, it is up to us women to fight for the preservation of life. When the men are silent, it is our duty to raise our voices on behalf of our ideas.'[13] Nevertheless, the emphatic point in Zetkin's speeches and writings was that she did not speak as a woman but as a party comrade. She too believed that the revolutionary task of women was not to conduct special women's propaganda or address the 'petty, momentary interests of the female world', but socialist agitation for class struggle. She commented: 'Women's propaganda must touch upon all those questions which are of great importance to the general proletarian movement. The main task is, indeed, to awaken the women's class consciousness and to incorporate them into the class struggle.'[14]

The women party members who advocated a separate party organization for women usually argued along the lines laid down by the socialist tradition. Central to their political position on women's issues was the rejection of feminism and its call for ending the superiority of one sex over the other. This was defined as irrelevant to the lives of working-class women. Women's organizations, therefore, were not to be organizations of women as women, or a group with particular interests, demands and concerns. Rather they were to be party organs, committed to the general political goals of the party, sometimes – as in Iran – under the male leadership of the Central Committee.

In her analysis on the origin of women's subjugation, Zetkin discussed the problem solely in terms of class, and opposed arguments that supported the existence of a particular form of subjugation common to all women. For her, the 'woman

question' and the content and forms of women's struggle differed for women of the proletariat, women of the petty-bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, and ruling-class women, or what she described as the 'upper ten thousand'. In rejecting the false universalism of feminism, Zetkin denigrated any analysis of women's oppression that was not related to women's position in production. She and her contemporaries within the socialist tradition, in Lise Vogel's words, 'glossed over the issue of domestic labour within the family household... underestimated the contradictions that arise from sex division of this labour in all three classes'.[15] Even when women's working committees within communist parties were finally accepted, they did not enjoy the respect and prestige attached to other revolutionary activities. Work among women had generally a low priority.

For this reason, after the Russian Revolution, some communist women accepted their assignment to Zhenotdel with resentment. They thought they deserved more important work. This was the direct result of women internalizing the dominant male views on work among women. One leader of the Women's Section, recalled 'the hoots of laughter at the announcement that she would be working among women – she who had been in jail for revolutionary activity more times than she could remember and had built up a record of bravery'.[16]

Anti-feminism and lack of gender consciousness, common to almost all communist women, was also prevalent among the socialist women active in the organized left in Iran. The general impression was that working for and among women would not only be considered by their male comrades as divisive of the proletariat, but would also diminish these women's revolutionary prestige. The idea of women's committees and groups was accepted only if they were directly led by the communists in the service of the proletarian revolution. This was a cross-cultural practice whose objectives had been clearly defined and formulated by the Comintern, with the general political goals of the organized parties of the left in mind.

The second International Conference of Communist Women, which was organized with the Executive Committee of the Third Communist International and under its direct leadership, had called upon communist parties everywhere to 'carry out the resolution of the Third International, and take

seriously the organization of the broad masses of working women'.[17] Among the basic principles of this work was 'the enormous danger presented to the revolution' by 'the masses of passive working women who were outside the movement and who were under the influence of the bourgeois world-view, the church and tradition'. It was therefore 'in the interests of the working class [that] women were drawn into organized ranks of the proletariat' as it fought for communism.[18] This position assumed that the organization of women was necessary to achieve the goals of socialist movement. The Third International was explicit in this regard:

> There is no 'special' women's question, nor should there be a special women's movement...any alliance between working women and bourgeois feminism or support for the vacillating or clearly right-wing tactics of the social compromisers and opportunists will lead to the weakening of the forces of the proletariat, thereby delaying the great hour of full emancipation of women.[19]

This policy was faithfully followed by the Iranian left whose commitment to the liberation of women centred around fighting for a socialist and classless society. In principle, 'the women's question' was simply part of the general social problems, to be resolved after the socialist revolution. Because of the class character of the women's question, only the immediate concerns and demands of working-class women deserved the attention of the (organised) left. All other women's concerns were considered to be of secondary importance and lower priority. Organizationally, this meant that only women's associations directly led by the left were accepted and supported, though half-heartedly. In practice, the activities of women's organizations and committees, which were performed under the 'patriarchal wing' of the communist parties and organizations, manifestly confirmed the inviolability of the rules set by the Communist International. This point can best be illustrated by a brief analysis of the activities of the women's organization of the Tudeh (communist) Party.[20] This set the tone for all left-oriented women organizations, long after the decline of Tudeh popularity in Iran.

The Tudeh Party was the most consistent and active supporter of women's rights. In its manifesto and programme, the

Party advocated equal wages for equal work, and two months paid maternity leave for women workers, and emphasized the Party's commitment to improving women's social rights and material conditions and to supporting women's struggle for political rights. It was, therefore, in women's interests, to join the Tudeh and 'take manly steps [*sic*] towards their emancipation'.[21] The Party first organized women through the Society of Women in 1943, and later, by founding the Organization of Iranian Women (*Tashkilat-e Zanan-e Iran*/OIW).[22] Many socialist women who had fought alongside the Patriotic Women's League and other socialist-feminist organizations (discussed in Chapter 2) joined the OIW. The largest and most organized women's group, it recruited a relatively large number of middle-class educated women. Among the OIW leaders, Maryam Firouz, Akhtar Kambakhsh and Azar Tabari were relatives of the Tudeh Party leaders. In its journal, *Bidari-ye Ma* (Our Awakening), first published in 1944, the goals of the organization were outlined: to struggle for women's social and political rights; to organize and mobilize women; publication of a women's journal; cultural advance and fighting illiteracy; struggle against prostitution; fight moral decadence; and struggle against exploitation of women and young girls in the factories by establishing set working hours, paid holidays, equal wages with men and so on.[23] The Organization waged an extensive campaign for women's enfranchisement and economic independence, and against prostitution, superstition and, particularly, reveiling women. The first few issues reflected the Organization's strong focus on women's issues and criticized clerical attempts to reverse the social and legal reforms of Reza Shah's time. Articles in *Our Awakening*, some written by male party leaders, also discussed the inefficacy of Reza Shah's reforms, criticized the brutality of his police against women in the process of unveiling, and demanded equalization of male and female rights. The need for radical changes in family laws, which favoured the equalization of the rights of women and men in marriage and divorce, and the oppressive provisions of the Iranian civil code in family matters, such as men's unilateral right to divorce and the guardianship of children, polygamy, temporary marriage, were only addressed indirectly. In other words, neither in its programme nor its publication did the Organization make explicit

reference to men's prerogatives and control over women's lives in the family.

Our Awakening gradually became more explicit in following the Party line in favour of Soviet interests in Iran. For example, the journal supported granting the Soviet Union a concession to explore the oil fields in northern Iran. Such a concession, it was argued, was most beneficial to Iran both economically and politically by creating a balance in the state's foreign policy.[24] It failed to comment on the consequences of such a policy for the lives of women, and ignored the fact that the country was then in the midst of a struggle against foreign interests in Iran and moving towards the nationalization of Iranian oil industries.

In 1949, with active branches in major cities, the OIW changed its name to the Democratic Organization of Women (*Tashkilat-e Democratik-e Zanan*/DOW). The focal points of its activities became anti-fascist struggle and ideological and organizational mobilization for peace, reflecting the pivotal points of Soviet foreign policy in the 1940s and echoing Tudeh politics. This occurred at a time when the movement for the nationalization of the British-owned Iranian Oil Company, led by Prime Minister Mossadegh, had politicized the public and drawn many young middle-class women to politics. The Tudeh Party also played a direct role in organizing women in this period. The deputies of the Tudeh Party in the Majlis, for example, introduced a bill in 1944 that proposed enfranchising women.[25] It is worth mentioning that the same year, in Azarbaijan, where the Soviet-led Democratic Party of Azarbaijan had formed an autonomous government, women had acquired the right to vote and to hold public office.[26] The bill presented by the Tudeh Party, however, was defeated, and the Tudeh's move criticized not only by the clerics but also by secular intellectuals outside parliament, such as Kasravi.

By making their policies derivative of the Tudeh politics, socialist women missed opportunities for the mobilization of women in support of fundamental changes in women's rights during 1941–53. The Democratic Organization of Women, the most visible, active and highly organized section of the movement, failed to use the relative political freedom of the period to reorganize and revitalize the women's movement. As a protegée of the Tudeh Party, the organization did not mobilize broad sections of the female population in support of women's

democratic rights. This is not to say that the socialist women had easy choices, nor to dismiss the importance of the close connection, solidarity and cooperation between the women's movement and other political movements. The close identification with the Tudeh Party, however, held back and disoriented DOW as a women's organization.

DOW expended too much energy on the issues that preoccupied the Tudeh Party and faithfully followed the Party's contradictory analysis of Mossadegh's government. As an appendage of the Tudeh Party, it attracted few women who were not Tudeh sympathizers. It did not show sensitivity to or concern for the issues that most affected women and failed to mobilize them against oppressive social and political structures. True, DOW highly publicized the issue of women's enfranchisement, but it led no compatible debate or campaign for specific legal reforms in the family, probably the most important sphere of women's lives. In the end, DOW effectively mobilized the female intelligentsia for political democracy and national liberation; yet no comparable ideological and practical struggles were mounted for women's liberation, especially democracy in the home, where women were oppressed, dehumanized and most hurt.

However, the Tudeh party and its women's organization were simply and resolutely following the theoretical guidelines set by the international communist movement, in which the focus of party work was the sphere of production and state power. Issues of love, sexuality, reproduction, and women's oppression within the family received little if any attention. The central repetitive theme in socialist literature was the class character of women's subjugation. The image of women was primarily and exclusively a worker/mother image. Women's position in the family and in the relationship between the sexes was seen as a mere reflection of women's position in the economy and sphere of production. For this reason, any radical reorientation of personal life has been unacceptable.

The legacy of the Tudeh and DOW continued through to the post-revolutionary period. The position of the Iranian left on gender issues and on the post-revolutionary women's movement was not an aberration from socialist gender politics. However, the half-hearted support of the left for women's organizations and its inaction in the face of women's immedi-

ate struggle against the reactionary policies of the clerics had a more conveniently justifiable and widely supported basis, namely the goal of anti-imperialist struggle. The left's theoretical position and its desperate attempt to avoid confrontation with the Islamic rulers in this regard had its deep roots in the anti-imperialist stance of the Iranian left.

LEFT POPULISM AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The anti-imperialism of the Iranian Marxists placed the strongest emphasis against the interference of external forces, that is, Western powers, in the Iranian economy and polity. Foreign influence was (and still is) considered to be the main obstacle to the country's development. The theoretical underpinnings of the left's anti-imperialist stance derived from the Leninist theory of imperialism, political and strategic principles laid down by the Third Communist International and later at the International Conferences of the World Communist Parties, and dependency oriented analyses on the role of foreign capital and powers in holding back third world development.

Marx contended that capitalism's penetration into colonies was ultimately progressive. Lenin's theory of imperialism had declared the end of the progressive role of capitalism in the colonial and semi-colonial world.[27] With its stress on the end of an era for the progressive role of capitalism, Lenin's theory was determined later as having 'set in motion an ideological process that erased from Marxism any trace of the view that capitalism could be an instrument of social progress even in pre-capitalist societies'.[28] Once 'the unconscious tool of history' in transforming the social and economic structures of 'backward' societies, imperialism was henceforth declared the root cause of underdevelopment in colonies and ex-colonies.

By the formation of the Third International Comintern, in 1919, this view was the guiding force for communist parties in most third world societies. The resolutions of the Comintern Congresses, beginning with the Congress of Eastern People in Baku in July 1920, identified imperialism as the main enemy of the 'oppressed people' of the colonies and ex-colonies, and explicitly defined the revolutionary tasks of the oppressed

masses of the East. If they united 'with the Russian workers' and peasants' Red Army', they would be able 'to defy the French, English, and American capitalists'.[29]

The 'Theses on the Eastern Question', adopted by the Fourth Comintern Congress in 1922, called on communist parties of the colonial and semi-colonial countries to participate in the anti-imperialist front and, through support of the national bourgeoisie and the liberation movement, 'gain a firm foothold among the masses'. The Congress warned: 'the refusal of the communists in the colonies to take part in the struggle against imperialist tyranny, on the ground of the ostensible "defence" of their independent class interests, is opportunism of the worst kind.'[30] This Comintern policy was essentially grounded on the unmaterialized hopes of the Soviet leaders and Comintern for socialist revolutions in western Europe and the rise of nationalist movements in the East. The 'Theses on the Eastern Question' stated: 'Since tribute from the East was a main source of capital accumulation, the independence of the eastern world as a whole...means in itself the end of Western imperialism, and pre-eminently British imperialism.'[31]

The endorsement of the Comintern's policy of support for every national movement against imperialism at the 1957, 1960, and 1969 International Meetings of the Communist Parties (which had replaced the Comintern) and the 20th and 21st Congresses of CPSU, established this theory as the standard viewpoint of Soviet development theories. It was also adopted by traditional communist parties in many third world nations, including Iran. The focus was on the alliance of the communist parties with the anti-imperialist bourgeoisie in the struggle against imperialism and the remnants of feudalism.

Later the focus of the alliance shifted from the national bourgeoisie towards collaboration with the petty-bourgeoisie, now characterized as 'revolutionary democrats'. Based on this theory the most important contradiction of the transition to socialism was between socialist and imperialist camps on the one hand, and imperialists and oppressed nations on the other.[32] That imperialism prevented the progress of the third world nations and preserved their backwardness was central to this view. Hence, the global revolutionary forces were identified as the oppressed people of the backward countries, as well as the working classes of capitalist countries, and the

socialist nations. All classes and strata of people in the national front, except for a fraction of the 'dependent' bourgeoisie, would form a united front against imperialism. Because the working-class parties were too weak to seize power, they should participate in the national democratic revolution and assist petty-bourgeois democrats to seize state power. The subordination of the working-class parties of some third world countries to the national bourgeois or petty-bourgeois 'democrats', and their submission to the authoritarian rule of 'anti-imperialist' leaders, therefore, was theoretically justified. The politics of the Iranian left in the post-revolutionary period and in its relations with Khomeini's regime falls exactly into this paradigm. The Iranian left did not go so far as to dismantle its organizational apparatuses, as happened in Nasserite Egypt. Under Nasser (1953–1973), one of the first heroes of the 'non-capitalist path of development', the two Egyptian Communist parties, the Communist Party of Egypt (CPE) and the Democratic Movement for National Liberation (DMNL), voluntarily dissolved themselves and directed members to join the Arab Socialist Union in 1965. Despite continuous arrests, tortures and death of the communists by the Nasserist regime, many communists argued that the 'Baathists, Nasserists, and Marxists objectively stood on the same platform', believing that 'the regime's policies opened the path towards non-capitalist development'.[33] But the silence or, at best, mild criticism of the undemocratic and tyrannical rule of the Islamic regime by a good part of Iran's left movement, strengthened the Islamic 'revolutionary democrats' and immensely weakened the position of opposition and progressive forces.

For a major part of the Iranian left, following Comintern tradition, it was not internal class structure and conflict, the nature of the state, or the forces and leadership of the anti-imperialist movements that determined the direction of the national liberation movements. The sole criterion was whether or not the leadership of the national liberation movement took an anti-imperialist stance and sided with the socialist camp. If it did, then the left was obliged to support it unconditionally, and to assist in every possible way in eliminating the domination of foreign capital. In this process, however, the undemocratic policies of the 'anti-imperialist' leaders and their serious political ramifications for the democratic

movement, among them women's struggle, seemed trivial compared to the goals of achieving national liberation.

This political stance of the Iranian left obtained inspiration also from dependency theory. Its central argument was that the world economy was composed of two poles, the 'centre' and the 'periphery', and economic development in the periphery was inimical to dominant interests in advanced capitalist countries. Gunder Frank's argument that development and under-development were opposite sides of the same coin, and that the sources of politico-economic problems that blocked the progressive social transformation of underdeveloped countries must be sought in their relations with the core, had much appeal for the Iranian left. Such a perspective fitted the dominant sombre political mood and the intellectual orientation of Iranian Marxists very well, especially in the aftermath of the 1953 CIA-backed coup d'état. As a result of direct interference from Britain and the United States, the nationalist movement which sought to revise the unequal relations between Iran and the British oil company had been defeated. The restoration of the Shah's rule through the 1953 coup d'état confirmed many contentions of dependency theory.

In the early 1970s the main foci of the left's underground literature, discussions and debates was the Shah's puppet role and the malaise provoked by American domination. The Iranian left propagated the crudest version of dependency theory in a populist analysis that blamed Iran's social, economic and political problems on imperialism and its dependence on foreign capital. Populism, as Gavin Kitching would say, is the twin sister of dependency theory, both having one common core, 'the denial of the possibility of capitalist industrialization in "late-starting" nations...[A]nd also a tendency to locate the source of exploitation and inequality in the realm of unequal international exchange'.[34]

Ignoring the internal obstacles to development, the left intellectuals blamed all Iran's social, economic and political problems on foreign powers. In *dependentista* tradition, they believed that nothing could get better until the country was rid of foreign influence and its local collaborators, the Shah and his associates. In a Narodniki's fashion, the Iranian populists abhorred the social and human costs of capitalist industrialization and proletarianization and showed a great deal of anti-Westernism, anti-

urbanism and romanticization of 'the people', their wisdom, and their collective tradition. As some Narodniki, in their hostility to liberalism and the 'moral sensitivity of the upper classes', went so far as to approve the anti-Semitic pogroms of the 1880s, believing that 'the standpoint of the poor man is more "realistic" than the pampered intellectuals',[35] the Iranian Narodniki, after the 1979 revolution, kept silent about many criminal policies of the Islamic regime against religious and ethnic minorities for the same ideological reasons.

The full support of Khomeini's 'anti-imperialism' after the revolution originated from this ideological orientation. Once the revolutionary priorities were determined, every other concern was defined as a deviation from the main struggle against imperialism. From this perspective women's demands were secondary, at best, to the 'anti-imperialist' struggle of the Iranian people under the leadership of the 'father of the nation', Imam Khomeini. As Ali Rahnema and Farhad Nomani persuasively argue, the Iranian left was totally confused about the clerical xenophobia and 'mistook its anti-non-Islamism' for anti-imperialism. Long after the regime's systematic repression and annihilation of Marxist groups, some left groups still considered the regime to be anti-imperialist and therefore worthy of their support. The regime, through its appropriation of the socialists' anti-imperialist theory and concepts, stripped them of their distinct character and managed to eliminate them as an alternative.[36] The left's obeisance had an ideological basis with strong populist overtones.

The left's politics of gender and its reluctance to take up issues related to the oppressive conditions characteristic of Iranian family life and the relationship between man and woman, however, also had deep-seated cultural bases in the internalized patriarchal culture of the socialists. Hence, they failed to clarify any difference existing between socialist morality and patriarchal, religious-based morality on matters related to sexuality, individual autonomy and women's personal freedoms. Some left literature written during and after the revolution reveal this male-centred perspective. Even today, in the statements of many socialist men, women appear predominantly as mothers, wives and daughters. Very often, in writing about women's sufferings under Isamic rule, they refer to women as 'our mothers', 'our wives', and 'our daughters'.

Iranian left activists above all were the products of the Iranian cultural value-system and as such were not immune to its dominant patriarchal presumptions. The Shiite value system and Iranian patriarchal culture, the glorification of 'motherhood', the value of women's maternal instinct, and praise for women's modesty, self-sacrifice, and rejection of sexuality, as the bases of men's prerogatives in society, were never questioned or challenged by the Iranian socialists. That the vast majority of the Iranian left activists came from lower or middle urban traditional petty-bourgeois families, where the hold of Shiite morality was strongest, was a determining factor in the left's approach to the 'women's question'.[37]

It is reasonable to suppose that the authority of the Iranian/ Shiite culture over a great many intellectuals explains the remarkable affinity among the views, rhetoric and politics of the organized left on the 'women's question'. A culture that perceives women as incapacitated by nature; that encourages, maintains and justifies separate boundaries for men and women; that does not see women as full persons and undervalues their wisdom and intellect, creates a mindset that sees whatever women achieve as peripheral and of less value than the achievements of men. On this fertile soil, the anti-feminist seeds of traditional socialism could flourish.

Otherwise, we have to wonder about the astounding harmony among Marxist organizations and groups when women have tried to voice their concerns and interests as women, and not simply as female members of this or that party. When women protested against forced veiling (*Hejab*), for example, many socialist men thought they were misled and feared their protest might endanger the unity of anti-imperialist forces. Almost all political organizations and parties advised their 'sisters' to pull together and not allow the 'reactionary forces' of the royalist and American imperialists to break the unity of the anti-imperialist forces. Even some of those left organizations, whose leaders and many activists had spent years in North America and Europe and considered themselves non-traditional left and more radical than the Tudeh Party and Fedayeen, joined their voices in the anti-feminist song of other populist left organizations. *Ettehadieh-e Kommunistha* (the Association of Iranian Communists), for example, in its weekly, *Haqiqat* (Truth), condemned women who 'had left all their

works and other responsibilities behind and are turning this insignificant issue (of veiling) into a major affair as if it is as important as democracy and the country's independence'.[38] And Rah-e Kargar, while condemning sexual politics of the new regime, referred to women protestors as 'a handful of fashion models and painted dolls'.[39]

Underlying such statements was an unstated and deep-seated contempt for and a repudiation of women's intelligence and cognitive capacity. Women did not know what they were doing, as they were acting not from an intellectual and political assessment of post-revolutionary events, but from their 'emotions'. Lacking judiciousness, women needed men's guidance to tell them what was in their best interests. Organizing in defence of women's immediate concerns and interests was 'selfish, deviating the attention of toiling women', and 'treacherous', as another radical left organization, Peykar,[40] angrily notified women in its weekly.[41]

With few exceptions, Iranian socialist men and women tended not to connect public and private forms of domination and gender discrimination. The continued sexual division of labour remained a fact of life, as typified in the personal lives of some women party members. Except for their political activities and paid work, in some cases, there was no marked difference in the domestic sphere between these women and their politically unconscious sisters. Both groups performed the 'natural' feminine role of caretaker, nurturer, and housekeeper, providing men with personal and sexual service and, what Marilyn Frye has called 'ego service', which involves 'encouragement, support, praise, and attention'.[42] Although the extent of these services varied in each household, according to class background, ethnic tradition, geographical location, the level of education, and the personality of particular men and women, the overwhelming majority of women activists accepted the sex-based division of labour as inevitable and endorsed a male vision of social change, revolutionary tasks and priorities. Their conformity and 'collusion with social and personal structures of patriarchy', to use Roberta Hamilton's words,[43] reinforced and legitimized the hierarchical and patriarchal family structure of the socialists' households. They internalized the male-defined feminine values and legitimized both the hierarchical structure of the family and the

undemocratic character of the political party. The image of a 'good' woman for the individual socialist man, with few exceptions, remained a woman who was modest in terms of the dress codes, behaviour, expectations and needs. She 'knew her place' and conformed to the social order which determined her place in the domestic arena and in public life, at least until the more 'important' social problems were resolved.

Women with strong voices and feminist consciousness and commitment in the post-revolutionary democratic movement usually did not belong to socialist and communist parties. Those women who did struggle to make their parties more active and responsive to women's oppression were outnumbered and faced strong resistance and hostile reactions. Often, party politics and power relations were used to silence their dissenting and independent voice. For the male leadership of all left organizations, there was (and for the most part still is) no room for the expression of women's distinct interests and gender-specific concerns, or for that matter, autonomous women's movements. On the glorious road of anti-imperialist and socialist struggle, there was no room for diversity of opinion, individuality and reciprocity.

Women paid a high price in the populist action or inaction of the left forces. The consolidation of Khomeini's power and the success of the Islamic regime in eliminating all oppositional forces, including the women's movement, would not have been so easily possible without the acquiescence of the populist left. In the search for allies against imperialist domination and class exploitation, those on the left ended up 'marrying the devil itself'.

The study of the politics and practices of the Organization of the Iranian People's Fedayeen (*Sazeman-e Fadaeen-e Khalgh-e Iran*/OIPF) and its affiliated women's organization, the National Union of Women (*Ettehad-e Melli-ye Zanan*/NUW), in the next three chapters provides a specific case of the troubled relationship between the liberation of women and national liberation. It confirms the persistence of unresolved conflicts between socialism and feminism within the socialist tradition, conflicts which burst out anew whenever the problem is not merely theoretical.

Part III: Women's Movement, Revolution, and the Left

6 The Fedayeen and Women's Struggle

In post-revolutionary Iran, the Organization of the Iranian People's Fedayeen (OIPF) was the largest and most popular left organization. Hence, its political position had a determining impact on leftist activities in general. The National Union of Women (NUW) also represented the strongest voice in the women's movement. The populist ideology that infiltrated NUW, through the socialist women appointed to its leadership, obstructed the growth of gender consciousness and stifled women's struggle for equal rights. Such struggle could have exposed the issues and conditions of women's oppression, specifically revealing the conservative and patriarchal character of the revolution and post-revolutionary development. The paternalistic and gendered attitudes of most socialist men, who dominated the leadership of the OIPF, also defined women's interests on behalf of women and women's organization around issues that these men perceived as women's goals.

THE FEDAII LEGACY

The Fedaii Organization evolved from the intellectual and socio-political ferment of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The social and economic reforms of the Shah's regime, following the 1953 coup d'état, together with general political repression, had effectively eliminated any open opposition to the Shah's regime. During this period, Iran had achieved a relatively high level of economic growth based on increased oil revenues and some social and economic reforms. As a direct result of the regime's pattern of economic development, the middle class and skilled workers enjoyed a certain level of prosperity and increased opportunity. However, this same process created social antagonisms that engulfed the country in a deep socio-cultural and political crisis by 1970. On the surface it seemed that the Shah had consolidated his regime *vis-à-vis* the popular movement and neutralized nationalist and communist forces.

Until 1960 the regime dealt with the opposition only through suppression, imprisonment, torture and execution. By the height of the regime's economic boom the Shah had succeeded, however, in incorporating a good number of intellectuals from the opposition, notably ex-Tudeh members, into his state apparatus. Under the constant surveillance of SAVAK (the Shah's secret police), the working classes, denied the right to unionize, could not challenge the Shah's hegemony through their sporadic strikes and work stoppages. Cynicism and widespread pessimism towards the possibility for change dominated the minds of the Iranian intelligentsia.

It was amidst this political 'stability' and middle-class prosperity that a handful of young men, armed with machine guns and hand grenades, attacked a gendarmerie base at Siahkal on the northern edge of the Alburz mountains north of Tehran. This attack, known as the 'Siahkal Incident' or the 'Siahkal Resurgence', marked the start of several years of armed struggle and the birth of the Organization of the Iranian People's Fedayeen Guerrillas (OIPFG), which inspired many other small groups to take up arms against the Shah's regime. In the words of the Organization's journal:

> In the wake of the strategic defeats sustained by the proletariat and the liberation movement in Iran, in the wake of defeatist and conciliationist attitudes adopted by the opportunist leadership of both left and right, and following years of underground "political" activities – all of which had failed seriously to shake the enemy – the start of armed struggle by the OIPFG represented a turning point.[1]

The OIPFG originated from two separate groups. The first group, known as the Jazani group after its central figure, Bizhan Jazani, who was in prison at the time of the Siahkal Incident, had been active since the mid 1960s. The second group was led by Masoud Ahmadzadeh, a university student, and Amir Parviz Puyan. The two groups merged in 1970 to create the OIPFG. The theoretical bases of the armed movement were elaborated in Ahmadzadeh's pamphlet, 'Armed Struggle: a Strategy and a Tactic' (*Mobareze-ye Mosalahaneh: Ham Estrategi Ham Taktik*) and Puyan's pamphlet 'On the Necessity of Armed Struggle and a Refutation of the Theory of Survival' (*Zarurat-e Mobareze-ye Mosalahaneh va Rad-e Teoriy-e Bagha*). Both

pamphlets presented their arguments, influenced by the Chinese and Cuban revolutions and the works of Che Guevara, Regis Debray and other ideologues of contemporary guerrilla movements.

The point of departure was a critique of other political organizations and the strategy of peaceful change. Declaring the (supposed) defeat of peaceful political methods, the armed struggle sought to find a way out of the political deadlock, open the way for a general mass movement, and counterbalance the influence of other Marxist forces, particularly the Tudeh Party who had adopted a policy of 'wait-and-see'. While the two guerrilla groups agreed on the necessity of armed struggle by 'the vanguards of the armed movement', debates among the Fedaii supporters over theoretical and tactical issues continued until the 1979 revolution and afterwards. Differences of opinion centred on the importance of building a viable working-class Leninist organization, as advocated by Bizhan Jazani and his group, some of whom had roots in the former Tudeh Party, against the role of the heroic deeds of a dedicated group of intellectuals for moving the masses. This view was supported by Ahmadzadeh's group, which had roots in the National Front. Both groups supported guerrilla warfare as a means of revolutionary struggle.

The Shah's regime took a major counter-offensive measure to suppress the guerrilla movement. In the first year after the Siahkal Incident, SAVAK managed to murder or arrest almost all the founding members of the Fedaii Organization. The regime also executed Bizhan Jazani, widely known as the leader of the armed struggle, as well as members of his group who had been imprisoned before the Siahkal Incident. By late 1976, the Fedaii influence was restricted to university campuses, a clear indication that the armed movement had failed to draw the masses into the struggle. However, the heroic actions of the Fedayeen and their many martyrs had won them the silent support and respect of many intellectuals. By the time of the revolutionary upheavals that led to the 1979 revolution, the Fedayeen and Islamic Mojahedeen – despite heavy losses – were the only two surviving guerrilla groups.

The release of political prisoners, many of whom were members or sympathizers of the Fedaii Organization, during the upheaval of the late 1970s, strengthened both groups, and

allowed them to play a significant role in the revolution. The Fedayeen, who enjoyed a large following, presented a positive image of an independent, nationalist and heroic left organization, in contrast to the dominant Soviet dependent Tudeh Party. Their resistance against the Shah's regime, their many years of imprisonment and, particularly, their effective role in the armed uprising of early 1979, earned Fedayeen substantial popularity and respect almost overnight.

At this time, the leadership of the Fedaii Organization consisted of a group of cadres who had spent almost one decade in prison, and some prominent left intellectuals who had close ties with the organization. Because of the execution or death under torture of almost all its founding members, some of whom had valuable political experience in the socialist and nationalist movements of earlier periods, the Fedaii Organization lacked the analytical and practical experience to realistically analyse the new political situation, assess the balance of forces, formulate immediate goals, and predict the direction of the revolution.

The main problem confronting the leadership of the Fedaii Organization throughout 1979 and much of 1980 was to determine the class-nature of the new regime and to formulate the Organization's strategy and policy *vis-à-vis* the Islamic forces. It was also totally inexperienced in organizing its fast-increasing number of sympathizers, who had become politicized and were in need of political direction and organization. This large following included individuals from almost all classes and strata of Iranian society, from university professors, scientists, artists, high-ranking officers in the Shah's army, to students, bureaucrats and housewives. They were drawn to the Fedaii Organization partly because of its heroic past and partly because, for a large section of the secular and educated middle classes, the Organization represented a non-religious alternative to the new regime. A group of Fedaii cadres had already been drawn to the Tudeh line, most notably by Farrokh Negahdar, who became the most influential and, by many accounts, a manipulative and monopolizing member of the new leadership. According to this line, the 1979 revolution represented the first stage of a two-stage model revolution. In the first stage – the popular, anti-imperialist stage, with an anti-capitalist character – the revolution was led by progressive petty-bourgeois

forces under the leadership of the 'progressive clerics'. The second stage would be a socialist proletarian revolution under the leadership of a working-class party. This perception of revolutionary change regarded democracy and democratic rights and gender issues as well as the democratic rights of national and religious minorities as subordinate to the general goals of anti-imperialist struggle and national liberation. Val Moghadam is right to say that this interpretation of revolutionary change showed a contempt for democracy as bourgeois and inferior to socialism. Democracy was equated with a stage of revolution (and a less important one at that), not with the inalienable rights of citizens.[2] Based on this crude populist perception, the Tudeh Party's policy toward the new regime was total and unconditional support. The position of the Fedaii Organization was more ambivalent, as a result of theoretical and analytical disagreements and debates among its cadres. The organization struggled hard to define an analytical framework for understanding the class character of the new regime and it did not demonstrate the discursive development of the Tudeh until the organization's first major split in the summer of 1980.

The second group within the Fedaii Organization opposed the idea that the state power was in the hands of petty-bourgeois forces. It emphasized the bourgeois character of the state and its religious, anti-communist and non-democratic dispositions which, according to them, implied its ambiguous commitment to the anti-imperialist struggle.[3] These ideological conflicts ended with the first major split in the organization. A group of the Fedayeen known as Aghaliat (Minority) and advocating radical platform separated. It retained the original name, OIPFG. The main body of the organization continued its activity under the name OIPF Aksariat (Majority). After the split, the leadership of Aksariat Fedayeen, despite internal differences, moved towards the Tudeh line. It revered Ayatollah Khomeini as the leader (*Rahbar*) of the revolution, and unconditionally praised the masses who had brought him to power. Khomeini's 'anti-imperialism' had fascinated, or rather, bewitched the Fedayeen.[4]

This is especially remarkable because the Hezbollah, the religious and non-religious mob calling themselves the Party of God, started their campaign against the left several months before the final uprising that led to the Shah's downfall.

Almost no anti-Shah demonstration was conducted without confrontation. Some left-oriented participants in those demonstrations, through non-Islamic and democratic slogans, would try to emphasize the diversity of the forces involved in the movement and their own left identity. This would immediately provoke the violent reaction of the Islamists, who allowed only slogans with explicit Islamic content, particularly towards the end of the Shah's reign. There were always a few well-intentioned supporters of 'the unity of all anti-Shah forces' who would remind the left individuals that differences of opinion should be suppressed until after the Shah had been overthrown. However, Khomeini's remarks on democratic rights, women's freedoms and Marxist organizations under the Islamic government increasingly concerned many sympathizers of the Fedaii Organization and the left in general. In his interviews with foreign journalists, Ayatollah Khomeini stated that Marxists would be allowed to remain active and express their views provided they did not conspire against the revolution, and that women would be free to continue their social and political activities provided they respected Islamic laws and the feelings of the Muslim masses. Thus, even before the final armed uprising, there was every indication that the Ayatollah and his associates were monopolistic and undemocratic.

The Fedayeen, the Tudeh and most other groups of the organized left, however, were cajoled in a strange self-negating and self-deceiving political strategy, whose central core was support for Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary ideas. After all, they shared Khomeini's contempt for Western democracy and society, dislike for intellectuals, and glorification of the simple life and the simple ideas of the man in the street and the dispossessed (*Mostazafin*). Instead of adopting a critical position against the obvious reactionary and violent policies of the new regime, the Fedaii Organization emphasized its allegiance to Khomeini, the leader of the masses, and its intention to cooperate with the Islamic forces to rebuild the country.

The Fedaii position was an obvious retreat from its pre-revolutionary position when, as a small underground group, it had explicitly emphasised the importance of individual liberties. Earlier, it had also criticized monopolistic and undemocratic tendencies within the movement, in an open letter addressed to Khomeini in the aftermath of the first open and

organized confrontation between their sympathizers and other Marxist groups with the Hezbollah in January 1979.[5] This was the first time that the left forces had openly marched under communist banners and slogans through the streets of Tehran. Agence France Press reported the event and the colourful parade of demonstrators as something 'in deliberate contrast to the marches of black-robed religious protesters of recent weeks'. This demonstration, according to the report, reflected 'the split between religious and Marxist elements in Iran that has become increasingly evident since the departure of the Shah'.[6] The Fedayeen letter to Khomeini proclaimed:

> The ugly behaviour of some false advocates of the people in recent months has put the necessity of defending the rights of the people and the democratic freedoms on top of the agenda of all those who are fighting for a free and democratic Iran.

The Fedayeen warned Khomeini that their admiration and support for him would continue only if his 'understanding of the Islamic Sharia and the Islamic movement means persistence in the anti-imperialist and anti-dictatorial struggle'. The Fedayeen declared they would condemn Khomeini if 'the purpose of appealing to Islam and its teaching is the repression of every opposing thought, form and opinion, the chaining of thought and revival of an inquisition and instruments of repression'.[7]

As subsequent events demonstrated, Khomeini's enormous popularity with and power over the 'masses' entranced the populist Fedayeen and numbed their political common sense. The more explicit Khomeini's verbal attack on the Fedaii became, the more the organization capitulated in order to maintain its links with the 'masses' and their leader. The Fedayeen offered assistance, but it was not being accepted. For example, ten days after the revolution, on 20 February 1979, the Fedaii Organization called on its supporters and all progressive forces to participate in a march towards Khomeini's place of residence. Khomeini, by then the unchallenged leader of the country and the revolution, sent a radio message advising the general public not to cooperate with the Fedayeen because they were not Muslim, and hostile towards Islam. The Fedayeen, perplexed at Khomeini's open rebuff, cancelled the march.[8]

Khomeini's denunciation of the Fedayeen and all communists only 10 days after the revolution encouraged the Hezbollah to institute criminal activities against the Fedayeen and other left organizations. Using blades, bricks, knives and then hand-grenades to wipe out 'the enemies of the revolution', they were determined not to let a single rally, march, book or photo exhibit by the communists to pass without incident and casualties. The Fedayeen became more confused about the nature of the new regime and the direction the revolution was taking. So, while part of the Fedaii forces, who believed in the anti-revolutionary character of the new regime, were fighting government forces and Islamic Guards in Torkaman Sahra in Northern Iran and Kurdistan, other parts of the leadership and rank and file were talking about the anti-imperialist character of the revolution. The latter placed much hope in the 'progressive clerics' of the power bloc, and tried not to alienate them by engaging in the defence of democratic rights, including women's rights and liberties. This was not a heavy sacrifice for the Fedaii Organization, for, compared to the anti-imperialist goal, these issues were unimportant. The rigorous defence of political democracy and respect for diversity of political, social and moral views were considered by the leaders of the organization as secondary to maintaining a fictitious unity among the anti-imperialist forces.

'REVOLUTIONARY TASKS' AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The post-revolutionary politics of the Fedayeen on gender issues developed from the general Marxist-Leninist ideas of women's oppression and emancipation. However, the Fedaii position towards the women's movement in the aftermath of the 1979 revolution was also consistent with its own previous internal policies and practices as a guerrilla movement. The force of populist, anti-imperialist ideology as well as the cultural/Shiite inertia with its sexist values and presumptions were powerful influences in shaping Fedaii politics on gender.

Since the inception of armed struggle, women were involved in the Fedaii Organization both as auxiliary workers and active militant members. The presence of the celebrated Ashraf Dehghani, whose brother, Behrooz was also a leading Fedaii

figure and martyr, in the leadership of the organization, was often invoked as a sign of the progressive gender-neutral character of the Organization. Captured and tortured by SAVAK, she had escaped from prison and written a book about the heroic resistance of the Fedayeen in the Shah's prisons. Among the 341 known Fedaii dead were 39 women, including 14 housewives, 13 university students, nine school teachers, two doctors and an office employee.[9] Many more women had fought as members of the Fedaii and been imprisoned, but were released before the 1979 revolution.

Many women Fedayeen participated in the military operations. There is no evidence, however, that they did so without surrendering their female identity and interests. A revolutionary woman who survived the underground activities and lived in safe-houses for several years before her arrest in the early 1970s gives the following account of women's position in the organization:

> My connection to the organization was first through study groups. I typed or hand copied the pamphlets and that sort of auxiliary work. But gradually the [political] situation changed in a direction that necessitated women's active involvement in the struggle. The comrades decided that we had reached the level to become active independently. Moreover, the security of our male comrades was at issue. Their living conditions without the presence of women appeared suspect and unusual and attracted attention. We [women] entered the scene as a cover.[10]

In other words, it was security considerations for male combatants living in safe-houses that, at least initially, elevated the status of these women from menial workers to active militants. It was not a belief in their capabilities and strengths to enter the political and armed struggle.

Mihan Ghoreshi, Bizhan Jazani's widow, offered the following account of her contributions to the revolutionary struggle and her relationship with Bizhan:

> We graduated from university at the same time. I got a B.A. in Philosophy and Bizhan an LL.B. But I willingly accepted all the responsibilities for the house and children so that he could freely follow his revolutionary activities. I accepted

> that Bizhan's potential and capabilities were superior to those of mine and that I couldn't expect him to share the household chores and care of the children.[11]

When asked if Bizhan's superior capabilities depended upon the suppression of her interests and capabilities, she replied:

> Well, that's the way it is. In fact one of our comrades whose fiancee refused to marry him unless he would accept an equal share in the day-to-day life and household chores told her she should spend a few days with me [Mihan] to learn her responsibilities as the wife of a revolutionary man. She lived with me in my hideout for a few days, was very influenced by my life story, and decided to marry her fiancee after all. Unfortunately they were both later arrested and the man was executed.[12]

Mihan was a dedicated revolutionary whose activities and courage had been at the service of the Fedaii Organization since its founding. But the Fedayeen always emphasized and highlighted Mihan's nurturing role, rather than her revolutionary potential as an independent individual. This is borne out by Mihan's own complaint that, after Bizhan's death, other Fedayeen members tried to silence her. They ignored her opposition to some political issues by constantly reminding her that she was 'the mother of the organization' and should watch her every move. More often than not, they would brush off her actions or comments as emotionally inspired. She was also criticized for being overly sensitive.[13]

It is clear that, while the Fedayeen rejected the old left's political strategy, quietism, and dependence on Soviet policies in Iran at least initially, they retained a patriarchal and gender hierarchy and sexual division of labour in politics. They encouraged women's involvement only when their womanness provided a cover for the real revolutionaries, the men, or when they were needed as revolutionary nurturer, secretary, or relief worker. Male supremacy and the dominance of male values were realities that were unquestioned by revolutionary women. In fact, women's own interpretations of social and political realities and revolutionary priorities were often male-centred and paternalistic. To acquire the prestigious status of a Fedayeen, a woman had to reject her sexuality, distinct inter-

ests and desires, and speak the male language and use male definitions. Only within the revolutionary struggle could women prove their worthiness and demonstrate that they had the same potential, talents and capabilities as their male comrades.

For example, Ashraf Dehghani reached the leadership of the organization for her 'heroic' resistance in prison and her bravery in escaping prison 'just like men'. In particular, she had proved her dedication to the anti-imperialist struggle and rejected all other concerns as trivial and unessential. She was the only woman in the OIPFG Central Committee. After the revolution, she argued with other Fedaii leaders over the revolutionary character of the new regime, and then formed her own Fedaii organization to continue the armed struggle. It is important to note that no other female cadre entered the Central Committee afterwards. Roghieh Daneshgari, another respected veteran female member of the organization, only reached the status of Adviser to the Central Committee after the revolution.

Like all other 'true' Fedayeen, Dehghani was used as a symbol for self-sacrifice, suffering and toughness. In her book published outside Iran in the mid-1970s, she explained how her torturers tried to extract information from her: 'Based on the assumption that women are scared of snakes, the torturers took a snake out of a bag and brought its head near my face. It wrapped itself around my neck, but I showed no reaction.' She goes on to write that 'the torturers acted upon their beliefs that women are weak and can easily give in to such torture, but they didn't understand why and what type of women are weak.'[14] In fact, Ashraf Dehghani herself explicitly accepts women's weakness and even considers those who have not joined the class struggle to be on the side of reactionary forces:

> Women are oppressed in class societies alongside men and are also exploited, insulted and used as sex-objects. But when a woman acquires class consciousness alongside a man who has also acquired class consciousness, a consciousness that leads her to break the corrupt class system, she is no longer a woman with reactionary values. She is a conscious human being dedicated to building a social system within which all humans regain their humanity and honour. Such a woman knowingly enters the struggle fearing nothing.

> Revolutionary women and revolutionary men ... fight for creating a society in which there is no room for such questions as to whether or not women should have freedom and whether or not women's freedom is good or bad.[15]

Women in the Fedaii Organization were thus confronted with a choice. They could only be worthy of the Fedaii name and trusted with the more important revolutionary tasks if they rejected their sexuality, and in some cases, their family responsibilities. One revolutionary woman stated that women were expected to show more bravery and courage than men to qualify as equal compatriots:

> Before our entry into the organization that was the case. You see, we had to demonstrate not only that we were politically transformed, but that we, like men and even more than men, were ready to break from our attachments, because in Iranian society women are more attached to and dependent on the family and other things.[16]

Underlying this statement is a belief in male superiority. Whatever men did was more political and hence more important and more worthy. To break old barriers, women had only one option. They must behave like men and repudiate their femininity.

In the Fedaii Organization too, the men demanded nothing less than absolute loyalty and a blind following from female activists of organizational rules and theoretical party lines. This loyalty often came at the cost of women's own political interests and their understanding of the directions of political change. That women did not enjoy the same rights and privileges as men was an accepted fact. Women's interests were intertwined with the general goals of the anti-imperialist movement. Hence, women simply had to wait until all exploited and oppressed groups and classes were freed from the bonds of imperialist and capitalist relations.

All women's problems, including unhappiness in love and marriage and power relations within the Iranian family, were ascribed to capitalist relations. The works of Engels, Bebel and Zetkin were adopted as theoretically definitive on the question of women's oppression. The only attempt made by the Fedaii Organization to articulate women's separate oppression and

interests was the translation of Engels' *The Origin of the Family...* into Persian in the late 1970s. It was believed that classical Marxist theorists had discovered and discussed the truth of women's oppression and had shown the way forward. The liberation of women depended on the restructuring of society. This would only materialize through the struggle of working-class men and women against the one and only enemy, that is, capitalism. In this interpretation of women's oppression, women had no specific identification apart from the interests of the working classes.

This limited definition of women's oppression dominated Fedayeen discourse. Even Fedaii sympathizers residing abroad, who were mostly university students and better exposed to feminist thought and practice, were often not immune to this anti-feminist bias and tried to discredit feminist ideas through various means. The most common charge against feminism was (and still is) its global origin, that is, that feminism is a specifically Western ideology. (This reason for discrediting feminism would be less hypocritical perhaps if Marxism was a non-Western invention.) This rejection of feminism or any analysis of women's oppression became even more problematic when the struggle was no longer simply theoretical. For example, when the Fedaii Organization became a major political contender in the post-revolutionary state, Heybat Ghafari, a veteran member of the organization, close associate of Bizhan Jazani in prison, and member of the OIPF Central Committee, described the position of the organization on women's issues as a 'non-position':

> To have a position on a political issue, you first have to have an analysis of that issue. The fact is that for us the women's issue never presented itself as a serious problematic. This is the case to this day. We did not have a thorough understanding of the dimensions of women's oppression. Neither were we conscious of what steps we had to take to address the problem. Our understanding was very abstract, very general and extremely shallow. This is the case even today. For this reason, I believe women should carry on the struggle and at the same time educate us and draw us to this struggle.[17]

It was from this theoretical vacuum that the Fedayeen faced the challenge of how to respond to issues of gender relations

in the post-revolutionary period. The leaders of the organization had no theoretical or practical understanding about how to mobilize forces around the immediate interests of women and women's issues. More precisely they saw neither any need nor any obligation to address issues of concern to women in the aftermath of the revolution. They were therefore caught unaware when thousands of women took to the streets protesting the veil in the first few weeks after the revolution. This response overwhelmed Fedayeen leaders and forced them to take a stand.

Even then, however, the Fedayeen dismissed any suggestion that the assault of the religious fanatics against unveiled women represented a threat to all other rights that women had achieved over the previous decades. Nor was an argument made that women's right to choose their clothing was a basic human right as part of women's right to control their own bodies. While the Fedaii Organization did not condone attempts for imposing Islamic *Hejab* or the physical attack against unveiled women, neither did they approve of the mobilization of women around the issue of veil and their spontaneous protest marches, sit-ins and meetings. After all, the Fedaii insisted the veil was not a concern to the toiling women who were always veiled. Moreover, women's protests would divert attention from the 'real' and more urgent problems of the anti-imperialist movement.

The organization sent a message of solidarity to a women's rally held in the auditorium of the Faculty of Literature following a protest demonstration against compulsory veiling. A more official position was expressed in the second issue of *Kar*, the organization's central organ. While admitting that equality of rights between men and women must be achieved, they warned against excessive preoccupation with issues of women's rights. The continued agitation among women, the paper asserted, was a conspiracy of the reactionary forces and the imperialists to divide the revolutionary forces.[18] This unsympathetic attitude towards issues that concerned many middle-class women remained the core of the Fedayeen's position on women's rights. It never occurred to the leadership that forced veiling or the exclusion of women from certain educational fields and occupations were unacceptable infringement upon women's right to choice and individual liberties. This position

did not change even when the open and systematic assault on women's rights and individual liberties left no room for any misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the government's intentions. With the government's execution of its systematic plans for the revitalization of Islamic Sharia and pushing women out of the public sphere at all costs, the Fedayeen's position did not waver.

A year later, on International Women's Day in 1980, a short article in *Kar* criticized the attempt by the Provisional Government of Bazargan and the Iranian Radio and Television Corporation to dismiss the commemoration as a Western phenomenon. The *Kar* article, however, described women's protests and demonstrations a year earlier in terms not significantly different from those of the Islamic government:

> Last year, on March 8, following Ayatollah Khomeini's statements that female employees of the ministries should wear the Islamic veil, a group of women, affiliated with the capitalist class, tried to divert the political demonstrations and protests of the progressive and revolutionary women and to alter the revolutionary content of International Women's Day. Fortunately the conscious and combatant women of Iran recognized the infiltration of their ranks by the liberal and even suspicious women and neutralized the danger posed by the counter-revolutionary forces at that time.[19]

The clerics attempted to discredit women who protested and resisted forced veiling. The Fedaii statement, which described the women who had challenged Khomeini's authority to determine how women should dress as 'suspicious' and stooges of the capitalist class, was not only factually false but politically wrong, for it undermined resistance against the new regime's infringements on individual liberties. It helped to intimidate the opposition on every front. Specifically, it confused and intimidated Fedaii sympathizers about the true nature of the post-revolutionary developments and, particularly, about how to respond to fundamentalist assaults on issues of women's rights and individual liberties.

The Fedayeen perception of feminists as bourgeois and their criticism of feminist demands greatly assisted the Islamic fundamentalists in dismissing women's specific concerns. The Organization even went so far as to hastily publish a pamphlet

on the role of bourgeois women in the 1971 coup d'état in Chile. This decision was no coincidence and demonstrates how little the Fedayeen valued either the women's rights struggle or women's resistance against the new regime. This definitely assisted the regime in its goal of discrediting women's resistance, even at the ideological level of the struggle. Neither was it a coincidence that the religious mob and Hezbollah gangs, whose members were mostly functionally illiterate and without any political education or experience, became overnight experts on the Chilean situation. They chanted rhythmic slogans against the left and against women, inspired by the Chilean example. This was an important moment in the political struggle in post-revolutionary Iran, when the Islamic movement successfully incorporated the left's anti-imperialist discourse into its own rhetoric, extended the opposition to the pre-revolutionary changes in women's social and legal rights, and put forth the Islamic solution as the only viable alternative.

What needs to be emphasized is that the *Kar* article was written a year after the revolution. By this time women had lost many of the legal and social gains made during the Pahlavi era. The new Islamic laws had curbed women's educational and employment opportunities, and the policy of sexual segregation had excluded women from the arts, sports and other leisure entertainments. Yet the Fedayeen's main and perhaps sole concern was to avoid creating a backlash by talking about women's personal and individual rights. For the sake of 'more important' political goals and the long-term interests of the anti-imperialist struggle, the Organization deliberately and consciously avoided raising issues affecting women's personal lives, relations between the sexes, or any discussion of Islamic Sharia in this respect.

It was also a time of pressing necessity to resist the Islamic fundamentalists in defence of democracy and individual liberties. The Islamic government had launched a major military offensive against the Kurdish people in the western provinces, using Phantom jets and helicopters against a civilian population and causing thousands of casualties. Alarmed by the increasing membership in the left and Islamic oppositional forces, the government restricted all political activities and curbed freedom of expression and the press. Assaults by the Hezbollah, now systematically mobilized by the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), made

peaceful demonstrations by the Fedayeen, other communist organizations or the Mojahedeen impossible. The headquarters of the Fedaii and the Mojahedeen, which had been seized after the final armed uprising of 1979, were now occupied by Islamic guards. Tehran had already been the scene of open street-fighting between secular forces and the left on one side and Islamic Guards and the Hezbollah on the other, over the closure of the progressive anti-government Tehran daily, *Ayandegan*. According to government sources, at least 270 people were hospitalized as a result of this bloody confrontation.[20] A successful campaign for the desecularization of education and plans for the closure of all universities was also well under way on the pretext of the need for a 'cultural revolution'. Well-known socialists and anti-government activists were constantly being kidnapped, tortured and murdered. The Workers and Employees Councils, the grassroots organizations of democratic participation in managing the affairs of the industries and government agencies, had been dismantled or were in a state of disarray under the pressure of the Hezbollah and the emerging Islamic Councils.[21]

Khomeini's populist-radical rhetoric and his huge mass support had intoxicated or perhaps paralysed the populist left. Despite signs of rising Islamic fundamentalism and the increasing consolidation of the regime, the Fedayeen, through their justificatory discourse, dismissed the danger of Islamic fanaticism, which was destroying the gains of the revolution. A revolution, whose most powerful and all-embracing mottos were democracy, political freedom and individual liberties, was being lost to the most backward-looking forces in Iranian history. There is no discounting the major role played by the so-called progressive and forward-looking forces who placed false hope in the new regime and its supporters.

Why did a political organization, which for more than a decade had fought for freedom and suffered so many terrible losses, fail to see the direction in which Khomeini's heavy-handedness was leading the revolution? Its leaders had to be totally unfamiliar with Iranian history not to see the danger of emerging orthodox Islam and its projects for the desecularization of society and the re-establishment of clerical control over politics. It had to be totally intoxicated by populist anti-imperialist discourse to look for counter-revolutionaries everywhere else but among its 'natural allies', the 'radical Islamic forces'.

The political position of the Fedayeen in the aftermath of the revolution also represented a regression from the national and socialist movements of the previous decades and the long-standing struggle of Iranian intellectuals against the mullahs' interference in the country's social and political life. The founding members of the Fedayeen never compromised their general principles for the short-term goals of anti-imperialist struggle. For example, during the guerrilla warfare of the early 1970s, when both the Fedayeen and Mojahedeen were major targets of SAVAK surveillance, Jazani and other Fedayeen did not obscure the principal ideological differences between the socialists and the Islamic Mojahedeen, merely to forge an alliance against the Shah's regime. Jazani maintained his critique of religion even from prison. In a pamphlet, 'Islamic Marxism or Marxist Islam', Jazani had warned the socialists of the danger of clerical hegemony over the anti-Shah movement.[22] Jazani criticized modern interpretations of Islam and predicted that eventually attempts to revive Islam would play into the hands of the reactionary clergy. According to Jazani, modernizing Islam would prove futile. He argued: 'The reading of progressive ideas into the Quran grossly distorted the original text which legitimized not only feudalism but also slavery and women's oppression.'[23] For this reason, he argued, the left, while continuing its fight against the Shah's regime, should also try to educate the masses about the true nature of religion.

The new generation of Fedayeen, who led the organization in the post-revolutionary period, included many men drawn to the Tudeh populist line and not at all to a progressive, humanitarian and secular critique of religion and religious ideas. Their lack of commitment to secular socio-cultural change manifested itself in the organization's central organ, *Kar*, and its articles dealing with women's rights as well as various statements or open letters prepared in the first year of the revolution. For example, between March and July 1979, a period characterized by open democratic activities for non-religious political groups, the Fedayeen wrote many open letters to the Prime Minister protesting the suppression of Kurds, Torkamans, and Iranian Arabs, and issued numerous statements defending the demands of workers, teachers, and the unemployed, and addressing many more issues. No statement was issued, however, against the regime's continued assaults on

women's rights, including the official annulment of the Family Protection Act by the Revolutionary Council.[24]

In the first year after the revolution, very few articles in *Kar* dealt with women's specific concerns. Moreover, the content of the articles that touched upon the issue hardly differed from the older socialist rhetoric with its general and abstract demands for women's emancipation. In other words, the Fedayeen demands for women's rights in Iran, a Middle Eastern country torn by a civil war and living under one of the most uncompromising and orthodox interpretations of Islamic Sharia, were not in essence any different from the demands of the early twentieth-century German or Russian socialists. No effort was made to address the issues of women's oppression in the Iranian context, that is, with particular reference to the practices and policies of a clerical state dedicated to revitalizing the traditions and practices of the seventh century in so far as the personal and social lives of women were concerned.

The Fedaii Organization even lagged behind the Tudeh Party in this regard. Like the Fedaii, the Tudeh Party saw women *qua* members of an oppressed proletariat, emphasizing the class character of women's oppression. Yet, in the first year of the revolution, the Tudeh Party's central organ, *Mardom*, had several articles and news stories on issues relating to women's rights, such as the banning of women from the judicial profession, the lowering of the legal marriage age for girls, and women's sit-ins at the Justice Ministry. Moreover, *Mardom* demanded the annulment of the articles of the old civil code and Family Protection Act which were, according to the paper, enacted under the dictates of the imperialists to enslave women. While *Mardom* recognized the rights of women as wives and mothers, it also demanded the annulment of polygamy and temporary marriage (*Mut'a*), the legal recognition of both parents' equal rights to child custody and women's right to employment. *Mardom* also demanded an end to the execution of women on charges of corruption and prostitution.[25] None of these issues were discussed or even mentioned by *Kar*.

Nevertheless the Tudeh Party adopted an opportunistic policy towards the new regime, particularly, because of its populist fascination with Khomeini and his allies, whom the Tudeh literature identified as 'revolutionary democrats'. The Party was, at the same time, very careful not to provoke the

fundamentalists. For example, *Mardom* quoted Khomeini's remarks in support of women's involvement in politics, and concluded that Khomeini intended complete equality between men and women in political, economic and social rights. The paper's purpose was to draw the readers' attention to the similarities between Khomeini's and the Tudeh's views, for 'all of these goals have been those of the Tudeh Party since its inception'.[26]

During the first months of the revolution the new Iranian constitution, including its articles dealing with women's rights, received the central attention of almost all political groups. *Kar* discussed the issue and very briefly touched upon the articles of the new constitution dealing with women. In one article, the paper emphasized the differences between a bourgeois and a proletarian perspective on women's emancipation:

> The bourgeoisie provides women's emancipation only in appearance, while it in fact enslaves women and blocks the development of women's personality. Our understanding of women's emancipation is fundamentally different from that of the bourgeoisie. We believe it is through women's participation in political and revolutionary struggle that they break the chains of their enslavement and develop their revolutionary potential. Then, by using their revolutionary potential in the service of social production women will materialize their complete freedom.[27]

The article then described the important role women had played in the revolution. Women had proved that they could make enormous contributions to the economic development of the society and to its social life if their potential was utilized in the production process. It recommended that the new constitution should reflect these new realities and ensure women's total freedom and equality in the sphere of social production. Finally, it concluded that any restrictions on women's rights in the political, social, economic, cultural and legal spheres would restrict women's productive potential and hence the economic potential of the country.[28]

These words revealed not only the abstract and unspecific way in which the Fedaii advocated women's rights and freedoms, but its total unawareness and reluctance to take seriously the specific and day-to-day concerns of the female population. It presented a

crude instrumentalist perspective on women's rights issues. Women's labour power was needed for the country's economic growth, and only for this reason should women be permitted to participate in the social, economic and political life of the country. Women's legal and social equality with men was meant to facilitate the use of women's labour in the service of a society dominated and ruled by men. The sad thing is that this view was presented as advocacy for women's rights from a proletarian perspective. Fedaii theorists and many of their sympathizers had obviously forgotten that, not long before, they had criticized the legal and social developments of the Pahlavi era, as inspired by the capitalist relations of production and its need for women's cheap labour. Indeed, this had been a rationale for decrying many policies that had changed the lives of a large number of Iranian women and for obscuring the systematic oppression of women in pre-capitalist Iran. One could easily ask: what progressive socio-economic changes in post-revolutionary Iran had made the exploitation of women's cheap labour justifiable for the Fedayeen?

The Organization's official position and discourse clearly revealed the deficiency of their understanding of gender issues in contemporary Iran. For instance, in the first and only post-revolutionary elections for the Assembly of Experts that allowed the participation of secular and left forces, the Fedayeen nominated a woman, Roghieh Daneshgari, along with several male Fedaii members. Like other Fedaii leaders, Daneshgari based her campaign and speeches on women's participation in the pre-revolutionary political struggle and their heroic resistance in the Shah's prisons, of which she had first-hand knowledge. For her, this proved that despite all the stereotypes, women could be as politically committed and courageous as men. She did criticize the constitution of the Islamic Republic for emphasizing motherhood and women's capacity for bearing children as a justification to push them back into the home. The core of her discussion of women, however, echoed that of other traditional socialists:

> Only when the society is based on equality can the equality between men and women be materialized. That is, when there is no longer a group of people who rob and others who are robbed, i.e. the workers, peasants and toilers who toil and the capitalists and landowners who take the loot...[29]

Daneshgari recounted the list of Fedayeen's demands and a programme for change which included the equality of women and men, the establishment of daycare for toiling women in the factories, and equal pay for equal work. She concluded her discussion by saying '[A]ny law that does not respect these equal rights will not be sacred for us'.[30]

What needs to be clarified here is the point often made by Iranian Marxists and the Fedayeen in particular that class determines women's life options. Certainly, even in an openly and legally sanctioned patriarchal social system like Iran, gender relations have differing practical implications for women of the upper classes, for women of working-class households and for women coming from non-dominant racial and national groups. A woman's class position has central importance in determining how gender relations affect her life options. But the Fedaii like every other traditional Marxist-Leninist organization was, to use Heidi Hartmann's term, 'sex-blind'. The understanding and knowledge of the Fedaii leaders, and indeed most left intellectuals in Iran, on issues of gender relations and women's oppression were lifted in unexpurgated form from nineteenth-century Marxist-Leninism. These Iranian intellectuals were neither familiar with contemporary feminist ideas and messages nor ideologically prepared to familiarize themselves with feminism. No ideology or political demand that did not directly and strictly deal with the concerns of 'toiling' women was to be taken seriously. Moreover, they had a very narrow and economistic definition of the demands and concerns of 'toiling women'. According to such definitions, women's main and only concerns were employment, equal pay and daycare. The personal realm of these toiling masses, such as love, marriage, sexual relations, violence against women and children and other manifestations of power relations between 'toiling couples', did not deserve the attention and concern of the socialists. There was strong resistance to acknowledging male domination and oppressive cultural structures and values that affected the lives of women of all classes. Ironically, and contrary to left perceptions, male domination and male power has been more persistent in working-class households. Women 'toilers' have had fewer life options and have been more restricted in their choices of marriage partner, sexual relations and freedom of movement than upper and middle-class

women. Male power and control over women and male demands on women's labour and sexual services were also more openly accepted in working-class families. This was only partly due to their limited financial resources. Stronger attachment to old traditions, social values and religious beliefs among the toiling masses meant more rigidity in male/female relationships and the sexual hierarchy. Therefore, the dominance of male values that were being revitalized and encouraged by the patriarchal Islam under the post-revolutionary clerical state clearly undermined the concrete interests of toiling women. This point was apparently invisible to most left leaders and intellectuals.

GUERRILLA MENTALITY AND THE PROBLEM OF GENDER EQUITY

The sexism and masculine values that dominated the Fedaii Organization were a problem of the Iranian political culture. However, there were other reasons for the Fedaii position on the women's question. The Fedayeen's culture had been formed through an articulation of elements from the patriarchal Iranian culture which worshipped male values, such as physical strength, aggressiveness, emotional control, 'bonding', dauntlessness and independence, which were idealized in the macho guerrilla culture. In this convenient blend, the cause of 'serving the masses' and 'fighting for liberation' focused on masculine values, roughness in behaviour and clothing, self-discipline, self-sacrifice and rejection of pleasure. It required preparedness, alertness and eventually a readiness for martyrdom. This not only meant the rejection of the unglorified life of ordinary intellectuals, but the suppression of all earthly desires, sexual instincts, love, marriage, drinking and other leisure activities.

The simplicity, colourless clothing and guerrilla ascetic life found acceptability among the young intelligentsia and university students. Suffering, as an important part of the guerrilla culture, meant both to prepare oneself for future torture and imprisonment as well as making oneself aware of the hard life of the suffering masses. The Fedaii, like most populist movements, lacked the intellectual and analytical potential to

reassess the old traditions and social customs and to identify their patriarchal, sexist and undemocratic character. Instead, they glorified the masses and their culture and tried to follow the masses in their manner, clothing, interests and tastes. An important element of the guerrilla culture was also the rejection of intellectuals and intellectualism (*Rowshanfekr Bazi*). The word intellectual had a strong negative connotation and was used to distinguish between political activists who were against armed struggle and 'professional revolutionaries'. Many intellectuals were drawn to study, research and theorizing. They supported the organization of the working class but were against the populist fascination with the 'masses' and the glorification of the wisdom of the masses. Their political views, as well as their non-traditional values and life-style were detested by the Fedayeen.

This was a source of conflict in the post-revolutionary period, particularly after many well-known intellectuals had joined the Fedaii Organization and put their expertise, knowledge and resources at the service of the Fedayeen. Nonetheless they were never totally trusted or granted the same status as the core Fedayeen, who had spent several years in the Shah's prisons. As a former Fedaii cadre, Samad Rahaii (pseudonym), put it, in a sense, a caste system existed within the organization, with ex-political prisoners at the top of the hierarchy and intellectuals who had lived and worked in Iran before the revolution, and the group returning from abroad, with rare exceptions, at the bottom. This rigid division of labour, status and power deprived the organization of a serious and effective 'collective wisdom' (*Kherad-e Jame'i*) which was repeatedly part of the organization's rhetoric but had no truth to it because of the dominating authority of veteran Fedayeen over theoretical and practical considerations within the organization.[31]

Self-sacrifice in the service of the proletariat, rejection of individual interests and rights, and austerity and self-discipline in personal interests and desires were more rigorously and religiously respected by the Fedayeen than a great number of other left activists. At its core, this culture could not be reconciled with women's claims to individual rights, autonomy and self-determination. A prominent Fedaii leader, Ali Keshtgar, explained this lack of understanding and support for women's issues in post-revolutionary Iran:

> A guerrilla organization by nature is an ascetic movement (*Riazat-kesh*), and doesn't approve of anyone who doesn't practice self discipline. For this reason, from the guerrilla point of view, even a well-dressed woman had to be detested. I want to tell you that even a beautiful woman was a bit suspicious, because exactly like in Islamic Sharia where a woman's beauty should be covered under the veil, from a guerrilla point of view a beautiful woman should cover her beauty. The more ugly-looking and the more lousily dressed, the more dedicated you appeared. This was the general feeling in the guerrilla movement.[32]

There were in fact striking similarities between the Fedaii culture and the Islamic culture of the Mojahedeen. They both had great respect for martyrs who had sacrificed their lives for the creation of a more just society. In their culture of martyr worship, suffering and pain were glorified. Surviving members had also made many sacrifices. They had suffered long prison terms and torture, and denied themselves the fulfilment of individual interests and desires. They were living martyrs. Most veteran Fedayeen refrained from love/marriage relationships which they thought would impede their devotion to revolutionary activities. Not coincidentally, there was an extraordinary upsurge in the rate of marriage among ex-political prisoners after the revolution, and many others who had refrained from having children started families. In fact, an organizational recommendation was issued to this effect and nearly all the Fedaii cadres married after the revolution.[33] In most cases, the partners were also members or sympathizers of the Organization. For many it represented a shared ideological commitment, rather than love, tenderness and a developed friendship that might lead to marriage. In essence, they were arranged marriages of a political type.

Both the Fedayeen and Islamic groups praised, promoted and utilized the institution of motherhood for political propaganda and formed their own 'Mothers of Martyrs' (*Madaran-e Shohada*) support groups. This emphasis on the symbol of motherhood reproduced the Islamic gender values which recognized women only as mothers and wives. There is every reason to suppose that most Fedaii members accepted the sexual division of labour within and outside their homes. In

fact they tended not to connect private and public forms of domination and gender discrimination. Thus, for them, the continued sexual division of labour was unremarkable. There appeared no difference between the moralistic outlook and explicit sexual division of labour and clearly defined sex-roles operating within Fedayeen, non-Fedayeen or non-political households. The personal life of some Fedayeen women was in substance not different from those of their sisters of the same social class and geographical location. It was modesty, self-denial, patience, loyalty, and attending to the needs of their men, whether it was in feeding, healing, copying, typing, supporting and loving them, that made ideal women. Many of these women followed their husbands' ideological and political work. Some joined the Organization, and occasionally even were assigned some organizational responsibility, depending on their husbands' position in the organizational hierarchy. Rarely did they exercise independence in their activities or political views. They were so-and-so's wife or sister.

Interviews with some men and women point to the similarities between the moralistic views of the left and the Islamic forces in matters of women's rights, freedoms and expectations of what constituted a 'decent woman'. A Fedaii ex-sympathizer recalled endless debates over the appropriate outfit for the young women who sold *Kar* in the streets and a serious squabble with her 'superior comrade' over a pink shirt she wore while selling *Kar*.[34] Women were asked to wear simple dresses, not to wear bright colours, make-up or jewellery. Wearing a scarf was often recommended. As Keshtgar put it:

> The ascetic attitudes of the guerrillas who didn't even appreciate or approve of a woman's beauty influenced the organization's position on women's concerns and the women's movement in general. The reaction to the talks about women's rights to choice or personal freedoms got only one response: Women who demand these rights don't understand the problems of toiling (*Zahmatkeshan*) women.[35]

In the summer of 1980 wearing the Islamic veil was declared mandatory for all women in the workplace and in educational institutions. Shopkeepers were even ordered not to sell goods to unveiled women. This coincided with the split of Fedaii Aghaliat (OIPFG Minority). However, neither Fedaii organiza-

tion, the radical Aghaliat or the Aksariat, opposed compulsory veiling as a violation of women's elementary rights to choose their clothing. Their position was a discernible indication of their limited understanding of women's rights, and their political ignorance about the significance of compulsory veiling for the democratic struggle of progressive forces in general.

The position of Aksariat and Aghaliat recalls the messages of Islamic culture: women are the source of men's corruption and their sexuality is potentially destructive to Muslim social order. It reinforces the similarity between the populist socialism of the Fedaii and the populist Islamic discourse of Shariati and Motahari on the role of women in promoting Western consumer goods and facilitating imperialist cultural penetration. The Aghaliat *Kar* began with the suggestive argument that struggling against 'imperialist culture' is an important part of the anti-imperialist struggle. The article did not show any substantial disagreement with the Islamic populist position which emphasized the cultural aspects of imperialist relations of domination. The most important factor in cleansing society of the disease of imperialist culture was to purify the female population – the reservoir of society's honour – from the influence of this culture. It then explained:

> Women, like all toiling masses, want an end to imperialist domination and dependent capitalism. Women toilers do not desire unrestrained looseness under the name of liberation. They want genuine equality of women and men and realization of their political rights, and full participation in all political, social and economic activities.[36]

In their moralizing and paternalistic support of toiling women, the Aghaliat *Kar* separated these women from the non-toiling women who obviously sought 'unrestrained looseness under the name of liberation'. The article condemned compulsory veiling 'as part of the anti-democratic policies aimed to push women out of social activities'. However, because it contended that women could not be trusted to recognize their own interests, were not political, and could easily be deceived by any political group, it offered them the following advice: 'While fighting against the anti-democratic policies of the ruling power, women should also fight against royalists and the liberals and expose the ugly face and the evil intentions of these

false supporters of women's liberation, who just pretend to be defenders and supporters of women's liberation'.[37] The *Kar* Aksariat also condemned compulsory veiling:

> To pose the question of the veil and force women to wear the Islamic veil would threaten the unity of the people and adds grist to the mill of American imperialism and its internal allies at a time when the front of liberal capitalists with the active support of American imperialism attempts to destroy all the gains of the revolution and defeat the democratic anti-imperialist movement of the Iranian people.[38]

Here again, the Fedayeen Aksariat took it upon themselves to speak for women and interpret their concerns:

> The heroic struggles of the women of our homeland show that they are aware of the necessity of a consistent struggle to destroy the causes and roots of social corruption. Toiling women, enlightened women, and all those who are on the side of the people in the anti-imperialist front are all struggling against the relations that present women as "commodities".[39]

The Aksariat *Kar* then went on to say:

> While we fully support all democratic rights of the masses, including equal right of women and men in all social affairs, we ask all militant and conscious women to mobilize their forces in the struggle against imperialism and its internal allies.[40]

Indeed, the two articles, by the 'radical' and 'non-radical' sections of the Fedaii Organization might have been written by the same person. Curiously, when another major split occurred within the OIPF Aksariat[41] predominantly over the Organization's relationship with the Tudeh Party and the Soviet Union, no substantial or even minor change occurred in their position on issues of women's rights. Positions taken by the new Aksariat, following the inauspicious tradition of Fedaii, remained reactive and occurring only in response to arising political events that affected women. Worst, since no women's group or committee existed even as an appendage of the Organization in that period, the leadership felt less pressure to take a more active and prospective position on the increasing sex-

segregation and gender-inequality in education, paid work, sport and cultural activities. Personal testimonies confirm that the only women-related activity in that period occurred when one of a handful of women whose main political work concentrated on other organizational committees was occasionally called to work out a short article or position paper for *Kar*. Sometimes, the article was published in the paper or was printed only in a censored and distorted way.[42]

Whatever the political disagreement and conflict among the leadership of the Fedaii Organization, different interpretations and understanding of women's rights was not one of them. On the issue of *Hejab*, for example, the Fedaii advice could easily be decoded by their female sympathizers. If women objected to commodification of their bodies, they would comply with the imposition of the *Hejab*. To be 'revolutionary', according to the male leadership, was to surrender your interests and your individual rights as a woman. What the leaders of the three major Fedaii organizations suggested to women was submission and conformity: don't make a fuss over such trivial issues as lack of control over your bodies; let the clerics decide the way you should dress; or don't try to resist the sexual and patriarchal/hierarchical structures. Individual liberties, right to choice and self-expression are bourgeois values. Don't aspire to them. Instead, they advised women to join the 'anti-imperialist' forces, the fundamentalists and the Islamic populists; ignore the fact that they deny every other dimension of your womanness but your body, and that they manipulate and degrade you; be 'political' according to male definitions and values. Implicit in this advice was: surrender your individuality, your body and soul for the 'general goals' of the revolution, that is, to the male struggle for power.

The elimination of semi-open political opposition to the Islamic regime meant a common fate for the three Fedaii organizations. Starting with open clashes between the Mojahedeen and supporters of President Bani-Sadr with the Hezbollah and Islamic Guards (Pasdaran) in early 1981, and the Mojahedeen's unsuccessful armed uprising in June 1981, the secular and Marxist political organizations became subject to non-stop police suppression. The Fedayeen Aghaliat took up arms against the Islamic regime in 1981 and lost many members in combat or to prisons. The total elimination of the left

as a viable political force came in the spring of 1983 when the entire leadership and cadres of the Tudeh Party, including the general secretary, Nooreddin Kianoori, were arrested and charged with plotting to overthrow the government and spying for the Soviet Union. The crackdown on the Tudeh Party was followed by the arrest of numerous members of the Aksariat and the section that separated from it.

The fate of the Fedayeen and the left in general in post-revolutionary Iran bears witness to the importance of having a realistic analysis of the constraints of progressive change and development in third world societies. The Fedayeen faced neither an easily manageable political situation nor a clear choice in post-revolutionary Iran. A core of professional revolutionaries from a small guerrilla organization, released from the prisons by the revolution, faced the enormous challenge of organizing and leading a political movement which was born almost overnight. They had no experience in organizing mass demonstrations, working with non-professional political activists, or providing political education for thousands of sympathizers who joined their cause from all walks of life and social classes. As one such leader, Heybat Ghafari honestly confided:

> Left intellectuals usually tend to romanticize political prisoners and to glorify the state of being in prison. They do not see all the losses involved. And I'm not talking of personal losses only. I'm talking of the valuable time lost in prison with no opportunity for learning, of acquiring experience, knowledge and analytical ability to better understand your society, your culture and social and political realities.[43]

The leadership of the Fedaii Organization in post-revolutionary Iran lacked the subjective vision, ideological and intellectual preparedness, and imagination to make a realistic and thorough analysis of political developments and to formulate strategies to meet the challenges of the revolution. Neither did other left organizations and parties, despite their admirable dedication and sacrifice. Yet no other organization had the influence and the large following of the Fedaii to make an impact on post-revolutionary developments.

Now it might be ahistorical to speculate on what would have happened if the Fedaii Organization had not supported Khomeini's anti-imperialism, surrendered the post-

revolutionary gains and separated from the progressive, independent intellectuals who struggled to expose the anti-democratic nature of a political system which claimed divine origin and rejected criticism or accountability. It is, of course, much easier now, so many years after the revolution, when political realities leave no room for false hopes and delusions, to propose what could have been a more well-defined, sound and effective political strategy than in the midst of the pressing demands of the revolution. Yet it is reasonable to advance that the Fedaii's support of the clerics against democratic forces and liberals was a fatal mistake that could have been avoided. Worse, they assisted the fundamentalists to isolate the liberals and discredit liberal reforms. Many articles, special issues and enclosures in the *Kar* in the first few months of the revolution were devoted to exposing Bazargan's liberalism and his so-called pro-United States stance, and to attacking and discrediting members of his cabinet.[44] This was a fatal mistake that damaged the Fedaii image as a viable, progressive and realistic opposition. It also damaged the struggle for democracy, including gender democracy. The Fedayeen's fascination with the masses and their strong faith in the intuitions of the masses to direct the revolution led them to overlook the fact that mobilization of those uninformed masses could only serve the interests of right-wing political movements and fascist-type charismatic leaders.

This recalls, too painfully, Mikhailovsky's writings about the destructive potential of sacrificing one's opinions for those of the masses. He urged intellectuals sincerely seeking to serve the people to distinguish between the people's 'interests' and their 'opinion':

> Though one could sacrifice one's own interests for some higher purpose or for a loved one, it is not possible to give up one's opinion. Nor would anything be gained by doing so. To share the opinions of the people in time of an epidemic, for example, would mean to search for the sorcerer, whom the people considered responsible for the misfortune instead of following one's own enlightened "opinion" and removing the real cause of the epidemic.[45]

B. Parham, (pseudonym), a renowned political figure and long-time prisoner of the Shah's regime, raised the same point

in his analysis of the left's fascination with 'the masses' and their demands:

> If people are agitated and drawn into the streets to demand or support this or that, can we say that they are right? Then a dictator sits there, makes a statement and whoever questions the legality of what he has said, he calls upon the masses, forges a demonstration and imposes his will that 200 people should be executed. In post-revolutionary Iran, the left, by supporting Hoveida's [prime minister during the Shah's time] execution in fact voted for the execution of the left's own political prisoners.[46]

As my discussion of women's movements in the next two chapters will demonstrate, not all women activists shared the simplistic Fedaii analyses and prescriptions. But the main players in this game were leaders who had the power of political manoeuvring, entering or breaking alliances and justifying the serious handicaps of the anti-imperialist movement. They also had the power to prevent dissenting women from expressing their frustrations and attaining acceptability and support amidst the anti-imperialist frenzy that had engulfed the country.

7 The National Union of Women

In her introduction to *Women, Resistance and Revolution,* Sheila Rowbotham writes that women respond to the 'pain, emotional violence and intense rejection' they experience in male-defined revolutionary movements in two ways: 'subservient acquiescence' out of loyalty or the need to preserve unity, or angry denial that 'their' movement has anything to do with women.[1] This chapter is about the experiences of Iranian women in the male-defined revolutionary movement between 1979 and 1981. It is about both the acquiescent women and the defiant, subversive ones.

The aim of this chapter is to unravel the conditions under which the women's movement in post-revolutionary Iran was born and defeated. However, the voices of women also reveal the transformative impact that experiences of 'pain and emotional violation' can have. Through these experiences, each woman, in her own way, gained the self-confidence to assert her ability to define the issues and goals of the struggle.

WOMEN'S RESPONSE TO FUNDAMENTALISM

On 7 March 1979, less than one month after the armed uprising that ended the monarchy in Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini demanded the reveiling of women. In a speech delivered from the holy city of Qom, Khomeini called upon the provisional government of Bazargan to turn revolutionary. The ministries and government offices, he said, were full of sin with naked women, just like they had been at the time of the Shah (*Taghoot*). He allowed women to go to work provided that they observed the Islamic *Hejab.*[2] Those reporting the 'sinful' state of the ministries to Khomeini were aware of the increasing tension between unveiled women and the Hezbollah in the streets, universities, and high schools. They were also well informed about plans for International Women's Day celebrations the next day. They knew that small groups of women

wanted to use the occasion to mobilize forces against the increasing assaults on women's rights.

In the week before the International Women's Day, much concern was expressed over rumours that the Family Protection Act had been abolished. In response to a letter from a 'private citizen' in the Ministry of Justice, Ayatollah Khomeini's office had issued an order, declaring the Act to be against the Islamic Sharia and announcing its formal abolition shortly.[3] Newspapers were full of letters from individual women and women lawyers appealing to the government not to abolish the Act before a new and better law had been enacted.[4] The day after the Ayatollah's pronouncement on *Hejab*, the National Television which had already been effectively used for propaganda against the progressive and left forces, broadcast a statement by a group calling themselves the Islamic Mojahed Women (*Zanan-e Mojahed-e Musalman*). The statement claimed that March Eighth was a Western phenomenon and promised that an Islamic Women's Day would soon be announced.[5]

March Eighth 1979 marked the first celebration of International Women's Day after more than 50 years and should be remembered as a turning point in the history of the 1979 Revolution. Women protesters basically captured the streets of northern Tehran, as high-school and university students, teachers, female employees from government and non-government agencies marched from all directions towards Tehran University, where a celebration was planned. Clashes between women and Hezbollah gangs had already started. The number of participants and their apparent agitation overwhelmed the organizers of the event. Women hardly managed to sit through the speeches. Few seemed really interested in the history of March Eighth celebrations or women strikers in New York, as they pressed the speakers to address their more immediate concerns. In a spontaneous gesture, women voted for a march, leaving the Technical College auditorium at Tehran University and bursting into the streets. It was snowing hard and most were without umbrellas.

The protests targeted not only the Bazargan government but Ayatollah Khomeini himself. Thus women were not only the subject of the first post-revolutionary political conflict, but they put forth the first powerful challenge to Khomeini's authority

by launching the first radical opposition to the revolution's leader. For Ayatollah Khomeini the reveiling of women symbolized the re-establishment of Muslim identity and cultural continuity that the social changes of the Pahlavi era had disrupted. The women's protests signified their will to resist the rising tide of fundamentalism that they felt would sweep away all the reforms of previous decades that had positively affected them. Their anti-veil slogans displayed a political awareness of the inevitable direction the revolution would take if the fundamentalists were not challenged: 'Freedom is neither Eastern nor Western, it is global', they proclaimed. 'Down with the reactionaries.' 'Tyranny in any form is condemned.'

The March Eighth event signified the emergence of an independent women's movement for the first time in Iranian history. Tens of women's associations and groups were created in public and private institutions and agencies, and in every university. On the third day of protests before a huge gathering at the Ministry of Justice, many declarations and letters of support from various professional associations and political organizations were read and an eight-point manifesto was issued. The manifesto demanded equality between women and men in legal, social, economic and political rights and status and guaranteed fundamental freedoms for all women and men. Women also demanded job security. Articles one and eight specifically addressed their most immediate concerns. Article one stated that the decision over women's clothing, which is determined by custom and the exigencies of geographical location, should be left to women. Article eight demanded the removal of the shortcomings of the Family Protection Act to secure rights that women had so far been denied.[6] Both the government and progressive opposition forces were caught by surprise. The government attempted to pacify the protest movement by reinterpreting Ayatollah Khomeini's statement as a recommendation, not an order. The Ayatollah's son-in-law, a clergyman himself, was hastily put on the air to reassure women that Islamic *Hejab* did not necessarily mean wearing the *Chador* (long veil), but any 'respectable' dress that covers women's hair and does not display women's bodies. He denounced assaults against women and demanded an immediate end to such atrocities as were taking place in the name of Islam.[7] This was hardly sufficient to deter women. The protest

marches, sit-ins and work stoppages in ministries, hospitals, government agencies and girls' high schools lasted for several more days. Throughout this time, the Hezbollah continued to attack women protestors with abusive slogans and physical assault.

The women's insurrection astounded everyone. Kate Millett, who had travelled to Iran for International Women's Day, told Iranian reporters: 'Before coming to Iran, I did not know I would encounter so many militant and gender-conscious women. We, in the United States, have much to learn from Iranian women. This is extraordinary'.[8] She later described the women's protests in the following terms:

> These demonstrations are a question of survival...I had no idea I would arrive in the middle of an avalanche, I had understood there to be a few struggling feminists in Tehran – a few weeks ago that was the situation – now there are thousands in the streets...Women in Iran are now the centre of our struggle in the world.[9]

The strength of the women's movement and its ability to organize demonstrations and meetings, despite such hostile conditions including the refusal of the radio and television even to report on these events, was amazing. Women were emerging as a political force on a scale unprecedented in Iranian history. For the first time also, no political organization or party could take credit for the mobilization of women. Yet, while a handful of left-inclined men supported protesting women and stayed with the marchers to the end, the community of secular intellectuals did not endorse the sustained women's protest movement. They considered issues raised by the women as peripheral to the goals of national and anti-imperialist struggles, and they did not approve of the anti-veil demonstrations, particularly since women's protests were taking place without the left's guidance. This could not fail to affect the militancy and continuity of the movement. It became smaller each day, as many nationalist, left and liberal women who had initially participated in the protest marches feared that a continued anti-veil movement would jeopardize the 'more important' goals of the anti-imperialist revolution. Many more, however, stopped their protest simply because they took the regime's retreat as a final victory. The absence of an auto-

nomous women's organization and a lack of political experience and historical knowledge of the experiences of pioneers of women's rights in Iran contributed to the demise of the women's autonomous movement. These factors also obscured the fact that continued collective resistance was the only effective means to challenge the fundamentalists' offensive. The regime's temporary retreat in the face of anti-veil demonstrations manifestly denoted only the power of women's collective and autonomous action, not the lack of need for it.

Many women, however, believed the regime's claims, echoed by left organizations and individuals, that the loyalists and *agents provocateurs* had infiltrated the women's demonstrations and were instigating their non-compliance. They let themselves believe that the regime's authority should not be challenged any longer lest such challenges help royalists and supporters of the US presence in Iran. This is how even some prominent female scholars and popular writers, who had opposed forcing the veil on women, joined the voices that invited women to conformity and silence in order not to endanger the revolution and the stability of the regime.[10] Women's independent demonstration highlighted the courage of the women who poured into the streets, despite the dominant unsupportive attitude of the left – supposedly women's main allies.

A POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The majority of left organizations responded with disbelief and disapproval to women's forceful protests against the Islamic regime. For years women had been represented in socialist discourse as acquiescent and politically passive creatures who could through political education and mobilization become aware of and prepared for struggle. To become liberated, women had only to follow the path drawn by the proletarian parties in struggle against the Shah's tyranny. But women had emerged as the first strong and open progressive opposition force to the fundamentalists' tyrannical rule and political projects. In the prevailing political attitudes of post-revolutionary Iran, however, feminist notions of women's autonomy and right to choice were totally irrelevant. Hence, women's

uprising could not inspire and move the acquiescent populist left in defence of women's and all other democratic rights and individual liberties.

Nonetheless, no political organization could afford to ignore the burgeoning women's movement. Women were potential recruits for all political parties and organizations. Many left organizations had already formed their own women's groups or organizations. The Fedaii Organization could not afford to ignore this fact. Moreover, the Fedayeen were under pressure from their supporters to become more active in the women's movement or, rather, to assume the leadership of that movement.

Mihan Jazani (Ghoreshi) gives this account:

> I attended a meeting of women gathered in the Ministry of Justice in protest at the Hejab and read a message of solidarity on behalf of the Fedayeen. I reported back to the organization on the enthusiasm and support of the protesting women for the Fedayeen. I told the comrades that at a time like this revolutionary organizations should be active in the women's movement. However, the fact is that the organization did not feel women's issues were important enough at that point.[11]

The Fedaii organization, however, finally gave in to the pressure and temptation to recruit this potential new force and decided to establish a women's organization. Fedaii sympathizers were instructed to start a democratic organization and try to mobilize and unite women from various ideological tendencies. Hence, the formation of the National Union of Women (NUW) was endorsed by the Fedaii organization. Initially, the NUW intended to preserve its democratic character and constitute a bridge between the Fedayeen and other Marxist and non-Marxist and even Islamic forces. But the organization could not hide its distinct socialist character because women such as Mihan Jazani, Atefeh Gorgin-Golsorkhi,[12] and many other known Fedaii sympathizers held leadership positions. The Fedayeen told the women activists that they did not have a cohesive plan for a women's organization, and that, although women activists would have Fedayeen's support, they were on their own. This policy, however, changed overnight. Immediately after the formation of the NUW, the Fedaii organization

tried to harness 'their' women's organization to the service of the central organization. In fact, this instrumentalist approach had determined the timing of the NUW's formation as March 1979, when a general referendum for the establishment of an Islamic Republic was under way. Hence the NUW announced its formation and, in another statement, published the same day, rejected the undemocratic character of the referendum which required a 'Yes' or 'No' vote for the Islamic Republic without the possibility of supporting another alternative.[13]

The founding members of the NUW fell into several distinct categories. Among them were Marxist-feminists who were educated and had resided in Iran before and during the revolution. There were also Marxist-feminist women educated in Europe and the United States who had returned to Iran after the revolution. Some women were Fedaii sympathizers who had no belief or interest in women's specific concerns or feminist ideas, and the final category consisted of Fedaii functionaries. What had inspired the Marxist-feminists to organize a female-focused political organization was their horror at the fanatical and exclusionist character of the Islamic revolution as it unfolded on the streets. One woman recalled:

> At first we were very excited to see anti-Shah sentiments acquiring a mass-base, but we soon became very suspicious and concerned. I remember my distress in the first mass demonstration in Tehran on Eid-e Fetr [the last day of Ramadan]. All women were in black chadors. I was foolish enough to try to reason with a group of men, accompanying a young clergyman in one of the adjacent avenues of Shemiran Street. I told them that the revolution belonged to everyone. We all opposed the Shah and not letting women like us (I was wearing jeans and a long loose shirt) join the demonstrations would create divisions within the anti-Shah movement. All I heard from the clergyman was angry words complemented by threatening gazes from his followers.[14]

The situation had in fact become more threatening after 17th Shahrivar[15] when Islamists' hegemony was established beyond doubt over the revolutionary movement, and the fanatics became more aggressive. Unveiled women were attacked in the streets and any woman who was not in a black

Chador or completely covered in a tunic, trousers and large scarf was not allowed to join the anti-Shah demonstrations organized by the clerics. This dress was later to be forced on all women as the official Islamic dress code. Many left women voluntarily wore black *Chadors* to cover themselves from the eyes of SAVAK agents or simply so they would not stand out in 'the sea of the masses'. This anti-Shah gesture helped the Islamic forces to obscure the diversity of revolutionary forces and insist on the Islamic character of the revolution as had the nightly chanting of '*Allah-o-Akbar*' (God is Great), in defiance of the military curfew on roof-tops during the last few months before the revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini, in fact, later claimed that no unveiled secular woman had participated in the revolution, because 'they have been corrupted by the Shah's regime. Only those who were socialized according to Islamic values participated in the movement, spilt their blood and won us our victory'.[16] He asserted that 'people, women and the youth who went on the roof–tops and cried out loud, wanted Islam'.[17]

Many left intellectuals, men and women alike, did not agree that left activists should give up their distinct identity and camouflage their secular beliefs. Tactical veiling and joining the chants of *Allah-o-Akbar* were no doubt gross mistakes on the part of secular forces. Some left activists not totally absorbed by the populist frenzy of the revolutionary period were alarmed by such moves. Some had even tried to establish an independent women's voice before any women's organization existed. Minoo recalled the situation:

> The first serious crack in my solidarity with the movement occurred when I saw its claim of being an Islamic movement in action. This was when we were thrown out of a demonstration just because we wanted to assert our identity and not be "soldiers of the Imam" (*Ma Hameh Sarbaz-e Toim Khomeini*) as women and men used to chant in those days. No women's organization existed. A huge anti-Shah demonstration was scheduled for Tasuaa [a Shii holy day]. A short announcement in a Tehran daily, *Ayandegan* I believe, had called upon all women who were concerned with women's status and freedoms in Iran to meet in Farvardin Avenue the next morning to join the main demonstration in Shahreza Street. It said we

> women would join forces against the Shah's regime but also assert our will to defend our rights and freedoms.[18]

Fewer than fifty women showed up the next morning:

> Some women had made a banner and a song printed on small pieces of paper. We chanted rhythmic slogans about women's rights and tried to stop the women who passed by, even begged them to join us. We told them how important it was for women to raise their voices in the anti-Shah movement before it was too late. Only three or four women responded positively. Among those women who ignored us were undoubtedly some socialists. As soon as we joined the main demonstration with our banner, a number of lumpen-type men in black shirts surrounded us, pulled the banner's poles out of our hands and threw us out of the demonstration. I had never felt so humiliated and angry in my whole life.[19]

Against the rise of this fundamentalist tide, a group of Marxist-feminist women tried to organize a women's group in order to 'at least publish some statements or articles in newspapers to warn women and to make our voices heard'. The problem, however, was that none knew where to start. More than that, women did not value their own power, initiative and will, perhaps even their own intelligence. Haleh put it this way:

> We had no illusions about what the revolution had in store for us, particularly when we heard the cold and unresponsive reactions of some of our comrades to concerns about the anti-women offensives of the Islamic forces. It was as if the anti-imperialist movement had a magical spell over them. They did not hear or see anything else. And this was not confined to men. Our first attempt for getting together with a group of women did not go anywhere, simply because some women did not take the rising fundamentalism or their own ability to resist it seriously. Some women I knew were so rigid in their ideological attachments to Marxism-Leninism, or what they thought to be Marxism-Leninism, that they were totally closed to any political issue that had not been elevated to an issue of importance by the "comrades" before we could even discuss them.[20]

Obviously the progressive and democratic views of the liberal and socialist forces who actively supported Khomeini's anti-imperialism had major flaws. The internalized patriarchal morality had stifled women's sense of what was in their best interests. Gender equality and women's rights were not included in their political discourse as major preconditions for the democratization of the Iranian society. Despite their cries against the Shah's tyranny and lack of individual liberties, no one seemed to be concerned about the clerical advances, the undemocratic nature of their behaviour, and remarks about every aspect of social and political life which disregarded individual liberties and individual choice. In an interview, only a few weeks before the armed uprising, Ayatollah Khomeini had said 'wearing the *Chador* will not be mandatory and women will be free to decide what to wear'. He qualified this promise by saying: 'The Islamic government, however, will only prevent women from wearing indecent (*jelf*) clothing'.[21] Many men and women were reassured by these statements which aimed at ending the rumours about clerical plans to reveil women in the future Islamic Iran. But the Ayatollah's remarks could have been interpreted differently if the male-defined ideology that prioritized the revolutionary goals had not paralysed activist women and men from pondering the inevitable direction of the revolution, a revolution whose leader wished to reassert men's authority over women's bodies.

Progressive people in the revolution denied the importance of having the right to choose one's own clothing. With this denial they gave the fundamentalists the right to decide upon women's clothing and to define what was decent for women to wear. The religious mob, men with years of suppressed sexual yearning, attacked women in the streets, undoubtedly experiencing a perverse sexual satisfaction in beating up women and degrading their bodies. All this was extremely frightening, and yet these events did not provoke the attention they deserved.

A small group of Marxist-feminist women among the founding members of the NUW who were educated in western Europe and the United States had been active in the Confederation of Iranian Students abroad and in anti-Shah political movements of the time. Some were members of smaller left political groups with new-left tendencies, such as Jenah-e Chap (Left Wing). They were, however, outnumbered by Fedaii sup-

porters, who argued that the Fedaii should not let slip the opportunity for mobilizing women to the Maoists, royalists or Islamic forces. They favoured the establishment of a socialist feminist movement which would defend the gains of the anti-imperialist struggle but, at the same time, articulate the interests of the broad masses of women. These women believed in the need for women's struggle in a democratically organized movement but also thought that only socialist women receiving their direction from the Fedaii Organization should lead this movement. Zohreh put it this way:

> My understanding was that we should organize a "democratic" women's organization. But I also believed that the central core of such an organization should comprise of Marxist women. So I used every means to contact the Fedayeen, particularly through well-known Fedaii women such as Roghieh Daneshgari and Mihan Jazani, to convince the Fedayeen of the need for a Fedayeen-led women's organization.[22]

For Marxist women active in other Marxist groups which did not share Fedayeen's interpretations of the revolutionary character of the new regime, the NUW represented a coalition of various Marxist feminist forces for a unified struggle in defence of women's rights. These groups had already taken the first steps to create an anti-imperialist women's organization by participating in an open forum on women's issues at Shemiran School of Higher Education, almost a week before the March Eighth event. There they had met with other women, some from other left groups, and a few with distinct socialist-feminist identities. Many of these women were later instrumental in pressing the NUW to take a more aggressive and independent feminist stance against the regime. They, however, remained a minority and of lesser influence throughout the organization's history. These women agreed on the need for continued dialogue on women's issues, regardless of their party affiliation, and scheduled a meeting for 12 March 1979. The anti-*Hejab* protests only encouraged the pro-Fedaii women to pressure the organization to approve the formation of a women's organization. In this they succeeded.

There were other women among the founding members who believed it was important to resist the fundamentalists'

assaults against individual liberties. However they did not necessarily believe that women should have a separate organization. If the revolution succeeded in its goals, they argued women would automatically be emancipated. Homa Nateq, the prominent Iranian historian and activist, was among this group. The fundamentalist women, who unconditionally and blindly supported Khomeini, confirmed her belief that women almost always are mobilized easily by reactionary forces, simply because 'they are inexperienced and unaware of even their own interests and lack any socio-political consciousness'.

> Women's role in this revolution was extremely reactionary as it has been in all democratic movements of this century. The first demonstrations in the early stages of the revolution simply horrified me: all women in black chadors. When I heard what they were chanting, my hair stood on end: "O beloved Khomeini, order me to shed blood" [*Khomeiniy-e Azizam Bego Ta Khoon Berizam*].[23]

The last group among NUW's founding members were women assigned to the organization by the Fedaii Organization to act as go-betweens among the two organizations. What had qualified them to fulfil this role is hard to imagine, except that they had spent at least a few years in the Shah's prisons and proved their loyalty to the organization. In almost every meeting from the NUW's inception, they kept a very low profile and hardly spoke. But they were the real decision-makers in the NUW. They had no particular knowledge of feminism or interest and faith in women's struggle. The decision to appoint them to the NUW was based on one consideration, their dedication to the Fedaii cause. Consequently, they lacked the commitment, intellectual capability and organizational skills required to lead a socialist-feminist organization. They were even incapable of articulating the interests they were supposed to represent. They followed the theoretical and practical guidelines set forth by the Fedaii Central Committee unquestioningly and took obsessive care to work strictly within those guidelines. As Fedaii functionaries, these women saw to it that non-Fedaii members did not take positions or oppose policies that would divert NUW from the 'correct' Fedaii line. They were instrumental in promoting the populist policies of the NUW.

In male-led socialist and communist parties, assignments to women's committees are less prestigious than others, and the women assigned to the NUW knew this. They were even reluctant to be identified with NUW, except as liaison officer for the Fedaii organization. The idea of a women's organization appealed to them only in so far as it could promote Fedaii party interests. It was their task to preserve the Fedaii character of the NUW and NUW's primary role as a 'democratic' front for the Fedaii. Many more women with similar views later joined the NUW. For them the organization was simply an appendage of the Fedaii which provided a short-cut to working with and for the Fedaii and to which they had been drawn more by political sentiments than political ideas.

By sending the female Fedayeen to assume the leadership of the NUW, the Fedaii leadership openly undermined the ability of NUW's founding members to define their own issues, goals and methods. Why did women who were more gender-conscious and critical of the populist tendencies of the Fedaii go along with this intrusion? It was the same reason identified by Sheila Rowbothan in the early years of the contemporary Women's Liberation Movement:

> Women have come to revolutionary consciousness by means of ideas, actions, and organizations which have been made predominantly by men. We only know ourselves in societies in which masculine power and masculine culture dominate, and can only aspire to an alternative in a revolutionary movement which is male defined. We are obscured in brotherhood and the liberation of "mankind".[24]

For this reason, even more gender-conscious women, under the influence of a male-centred culture that promoted the belief that women's desires and interests were trivial, did not resist the undemocratic decision of the Fedayeen. This represented only the beginning of Fedaii paternalistic intervention in the day-to-day activities of NUW. In some sense, the women themselves undermined their own intellectual and personal capabilities by accepting a male leadership, albeit through a female front of Fedaii.

For many gender-conscious women with Fedaii affiliation it was an ideological and emotional roller coaster. The regressive and exclusionary character of the Islamic revolution and the

role of women fundamentalists in that revolution proved the need to work with women to raise their consciousness and make them aware of an alternative to the 'Islamic solution'. They were torn between their feminist ideas, the reality of their day-to-day experiences on the streets, and their socialist/Fedaii populist ideology which had led them to work for socialism under the leadership of the Fedaii Organization. In private meetings, however, there were often fierce disputes between them and Fedaii functionaries over policies dictated by the parent organization. The opposition, however, was usually silenced by Fedaii functionaries who used the phrase, 'These are comrades' views.' Some Marxist-feminists resisted these policies more strongly and consistently. Yet, for most, the problem with NUW was not so much its increasing Fedaii character as it was its non-feminist or rather anti-feminist stance. They had high hopes of changing this stand through debates and by encouraging more non-Fedaii Marxists to join the NUW.

The NUW's charter was drafted by these diverse categories of women under the guidance of the Fedayeen. In its charter, NUW declared its most fundamental objective to be the goal of anti-imperialist struggle:

> If equality is in deeds not in words, our women proved their equality with men in prisons, under the torture, facing firing squads and in martyrdom during the years of repression. They showed that they are no less than militant men in physical and psychological strength. Our women showed that society is not divided between women and men but between the exploiters and the exploited. Thus women's emancipation is dependent on liberation of their nation from exploitation and colonization. Despite the fact that our women over centuries have suffered from double oppression (both as women and as individuals) never separated their demands from those of their nation. They put their liberation in the pledge of the liberation of all the toiling masses.[25]

Six principles supported NUW's ideological and practical guidelines:

> 1. [W]e will not cooperate with any group or party dependent on China, Soviet Union and other countries.

2. [W]e will not cooperate with those who have not clearly stated their political position or those who mobilize forces or at this sensitive time mobilize women around deviationary and unessential issues [*sic*].
3. We are prepared to cooperate with all nationalist individuals and groups regardless of their ideological or religious beliefs.
4. In relation to the popularly elected government, we declare our readiness to participate in all aspects of social, political and economic aspects of life for the construction of Iranian society and for struggling against institutions of the *ancien regime* and we demand to be included in the process of forging the country's legislation, particularly those dealing with family and work.
5. We consider struggle against imperialism our primary objective, for it is capitalist society and dependent capitalism that exploit the toiling masses, cause the inequality of rights between women and men, and turn women into consumers of luxury goods.
6. Our emancipation is not separate from emancipation of the toiling classes. Hence we consider as our principal responsibilities the establishment of close links with the deprived classes, and investigation into the welfare and the health of toiling women. We invite all freedom-loving and open-minded women to join us in the construction of a free and democratic Iran.[26]

In reality, however, even the process of writing the charter compromised the democratic values claimed by the NUW. As Zohreh rightly put it:

> This charter was the first breach of our promises to women. We claimed that we were going to form a democratic organization and that the NUW was the product of open debates among women. But the charter itself was not such a product. It was hastily put together and was imposed on the NUW by the Fedayeen, because they wanted us to formally denounce the up-coming referendum as an organization.

The Fedaii leadership sought to prevent the women's movement's deviation from the anti-imperialist goals of the revolution. Ali Keshtgar, member of the Fedaii Central Committee

and its Political Bureau at the time, summarized the guidelines the Fedaii organization used in its relationship with NUW:

> The Fedayeen's policy towards the NUW was based on three considerations: First, the Fedaii organization looked at all democratic organizations as a means for the pursuit of its political goals and nothing more. This was our general policy and thus our policy towards the NUW. Second, on the women's question we believed that women's emancipation was not possible until all class contradictions were resolved and until we achieved justice for all. Third, the women's question was about the toiling women and women of the working class. The objective was to penetrate the NUW using a handful of Marxist-Leninist women who would push for a Marxist-Leninist line, would capture the leadership organs in support of the interests of the toiling masses and would shut out the intellectual women who were considered as suspicious, petty-bourgeois and counter-revolutionary.[27]

Keshtgar gave examples of how the Fedaii leaders viewed some of the specific concerns of women in the post-revolutionary period:

> In the Central Committee we often discussed topical issues such as women's ban from the judicial profession. There were two contending views. One view believed that we should support women's rights to public work unconditionally. The view presented by those who eventually moved towards joining the Tudeh Party, however, was that these were [*sic*] deviationist points and would twist our cause towards the demands of intellectuals and a few well-to-do women (*Zanan-e Bi Dard*). For example, they would say: "How many women are judges? Twenty or thirty. Nothing would happen if these few are removed from the bar." So the issue was never discussed as an unalienable right of women and that what was at issue was democratic rights and individual freedoms, and that these freedoms were being crushed under the new regime's feet...[28]

Keshtgar recalled that some women from the NUW demanded that the Fedaii central organ, *Kar*, take a more radical position in favour of women's rights and freedoms:

> Most members of the Central Committee believed that the central organ of the Fedaii was not the place for dealing with such divisionary issues which would estrange our relations with the anti-imperialist forces and the government. They argued that these issues were not so important at that point. And if you asked them why then was our organization active in the NUW, they would bluntly respond because we want to establish a correct Fedaii line there. I often raised these issues under the influence of some of my friends in the NUW who discussed their concerns about our patronizing and often ignorant policies towards the NUW and the women's question in general. The response I usually got was that these are the concerns of the petty-bourgeois women and not the toiling women. They would even refer to the bourgeois manners and clothing of the women in question to fortify their own position.[29]

As Keshtgar notes, towing the NUW along on the Fedaii line did not go smoothly, and the decisions reached in the party cells within the NUW were not accepted unquestioningly by other women. Hence from beginning to end, and despite the fact that the NUW was under the virtual control of the Fedaii functionaries, continual debate, conflict, plots and counter-plots dominated the NUW's activities. As Haleh put it:

> The conflict was predominantly over theory and practice. But there were also lots of other things that divided us and affected a coordinated and sincere effort towards working on the issues of women's rights that were supposedly the reasons that had brought us together. Personality clashes, rivalries and disagreement over what is the revolutionary way of life and personal behaviour and so on divided us.

This was of course not a practice unique to the Fedayeen or even to the Iranian organized left. In her account of the politics of the new left, civil rights and women's liberation movements in the United States, Sara Evans suggests a parallel situation:

> ...strategic questions are being turned into matters of basic moral principle; positions are being asserted as matters of absolute non-negotiable finality; personality clashes are becoming ideological conflicts and vice versa; fairly

> vituperative labels and stereotypes are coming to replace honest confrontation of opposing views, etc.[30]

Many women regretfully admitted later that most political positions they took during their involvement with the NUW conflicted with their genuine feelings about the political situation in Iran. In fact, it seems they blindly followed the Fedayeen or other political pressures that led them to change their initial ideas. They supported the 'radical clerics' against the liberal government of Bazargan, even when their gender interests required the opposite, for Bazargan's liberal government was more tolerant of secular views and ways of life, and more prepared to accommodate the inevitable adjustments in the religious institutions and instructions that the economic, social and political realities necessitated. In the dominant political mood of the time, however, common sense no longer prevailed. Nor was there any room for reflection on historical experience. For most of the women, the political and even moral principles they had always believed in were replaced by the organizational and ideological tenets dictated by the Fedayeen. Minoo bitterly recalled:

> I was an independent woman all my life, to the extent that even my way of life astounded some of my very liberal friends. I had a voice in the family, in the workplace and in every sphere of life and was very outspoken. Almost nothing and no one could intimidate me. I even enjoyed a sexual freedom that was very rare for women in Iran of the 1960s. I was practically feminist before I was introduced to feminist ideology. Self-determination, autonomy and right to choice were such dominant values in my life that I could not even think of any other way of life. And yet my political ideology turned me into a thoughtless populist. I wore the black *Chador*, participated in predominantly religious demonstrations and supported a regime whose most urgent "revolutionary" goal was to curb individual and intellectual liberties and to curb women's rights and freedoms. I did not think any more before making a personal and political decision. My ideology replaced my thought and common sense.

Haleh described similar sentiments:

> The party loyalty, the organizational principles of following the leadership's decisions as well as our strong sentimental ties to the Fedayeen prevented us from holding on to our opinions. So we justified every means for the general goals of anti-imperialist struggle. We would shamelessly act as ardent supporters of a policy in our general meetings, having fought against it in small party cells and been defeated. We called this principle "Democratic Centralism". In my view it was nothing short of mindlessness and sacrificing your intellectual and moral principles.

Mihan Jazani explained the women's lack of resistance to the Fedaii line in the NUW in the following terms:

> I agree with the argument that as "politically aware" women we were in fact very "unaware" of our own rights. I admit that this was our problem. Yet the Fedayeen name was very prestigious and we were afraid that if we resisted their decisions they would boycott the NUW. And we are talking of the time before the many splits among the Fedaii, when the Fedaii name drew much respect. The NUW was afraid that the Fedayeen might withdraw their support.

These recollections provide excellent examples where an attachment to a political organization or party overtakes the cause, and commitment to the organization or party becomes an end in itself. Respect for the Fedaii name and the emotional attachment of some of NUW members sometimes took surprising turns. For example, one member of the NUW Editorial Board of the NUW organ, *Barabari*, had compiled and translated two pamphlets on the lives and works of Alexandra Kollontai and Clara Zetkin. Instead of presenting the pamphlets to the NUW for publication, she presented them to the Fedayeen, who published them without hesitation. It did not occur to the woman to give her work and first loyalty to the NUW. Her prime consideration was to benefit the Fedayeen by adding new items to their publication list. The Fedayeen, for their part, obviously did not think that the NUW would be a more appropriate benefactor of such feminist pamphlets. They simply could not be bothered with such trivial issues.

In hindsight, even Marxist-feminists within the NUW, who believed in women's cause as women and had varying experience in the struggle against gender inequality and patriarchal standards, could not wholly resist the paternalistic and divisive policies imposed on their organization. These women, who had created the NUW, let the male-centred analysis of the political events overwhelm their own judgement and commitment to women's cause. They let their initial agreement to work together on specific issues of women's rights be undermined and violated by male-focused ideals and goals of revolutionary movement. Major responsibility for this failure must rest with the women who supported the Fedaii line. Their ideological rigidity and uncritical following of the party line was stronger than gender considerations. It did not matter that this line was less critical of the Islamic regime and its policies inimical to women's rights. Maybe it was this same political rigidity that divided the Fedaii supporters even among themselves over the correct strategy and tactics for the NUW's position *vis-à-vis* the Islamic state, and its relations with other opposition forces. The conflict within the Fedaii core of the NUW echoed similar opposing views among Fedayeen that eventually led to the first major split among the organization in the summer of 1980.

8 A Failed Socialist-Feminist Experience

The politics of the National Union of Women, like other organizations of the post-revolutionary women's movement, was closely linked to the ideological stance and revolutionary practices of its parent organization. Conflicts over the 'correct' strategy and tactics would also determine the theory and practice of the NUW. This had ramifications for women's resistance in general, as it was not feminist ideology but the populist socialist ideology that defined the goals, conditions and methods of the struggle. The populist ideology that infiltrated NUW through socialist women appointed to its leadership obstructed the growth of gender consciousness and of the struggle for women's rights in the aftermath of the revolution. Such struggle could have advanced the issues of women's oppression specifically by exposing the conservative and patriarchal character of the revolution and post-revolutionary developments.

The NUW used a Marxist-Leninist theoretical and conceptual framework for its analysis of women's oppression in the Iranian context. Except for the translation of a contemporary Western socialist feminist work,[1] the NUW drew on classical Marxist-Leninist texts for the political education of its members and to develop its theoretical and analytical framework. The NUW's publications and statements, despite some references to 'toiling women', clearly lacked a feminist approach to the demands of women of various classes. The overwhelming majority of the NUW leaders lacked any knowledge of feminist thought and practices or of women's movements in the West or elsewhere. At best, they had a very sketchy and stereotypical understanding of feminism and feminist ideology. An interview with two founding members of the NUW, published in a Tehran weekly, *Ferdowsi,* a few weeks after the organization's creation, is very illuminating in this regard. They declared that the main objective of the NUW was to involve women more actively in the revolution, and to raise their consciousness of class exploitation.

> Our main objectives are to prepare the ground for the unified action of Iranian women in order to increase the level of women's consciousness; to achieve social, economic and political rights; to collaborate with political struggles of the progressive forces and individuals against imperialist domination and influence; and to participate in the construction of an independent, liberated Iran, free of all forms of exploitation and domination.[2]

The NUW leaders stated that the target of their organizational activities was 'toiling women'. They aimed to educate them on social and political issues, and were organizing literacy classes in southern Tehran.

In the interview, they were very careful to fend off any perception that they were feminists. When asked about the possibility of their cooperation with international feminist organizations, they said:

> There are many women's organizations in the West whose concern is men as enemies, not the deteriorated rights of women. These organizations that are called feminist, do not analyze the problems as historical, cultural and class problems. They want to have the rights to do whatever men do in their societies, without questioning the rights or wrongs of their doings. For us the enemy is not men. It is the existing social relations that oppress women. It is with the organizations with this line of thought that we can see the possibility of cooperation.[3]

Clearly this sweeping generalization suggests a very hostile approach to Western feminism. Indeed, throughout the NUW's existence, its 'political education' of women never included attempts to familiarize NUW members or leaders with feminist analyses, concepts and goals or even with the history of the women's movement in Iran. In fact, except for one short article in the organization's journal, *Women in Struggle*, there was little, if any, recognition of the past struggles of pioneers for women's rights in Iran. Neither was any attempt made to revaluate or benefit from the organizational and ideological experiences of the previous generation of activists. It was as if the NUW and the whole women's movement, for that matter, was acting in a vacuum with no history upon which to draw.

One reason for this, I would argue, relates to a lack of gender-consciousness and the fact that these new women activists had accepted and internalized male interpretations of history as well as male-centred definitions of politics and past political activities. This was particularly acute among younger women activists who were newcomers to political struggle. This recalls Sara Evans' analysis of feminist consciousness among the old left or old-timers as opposed to its lack among the emerging generation of activists in the United States. The 'woman question', she writes, has a prominent place in Marxist literature. The old left had to pay at least lip service to the struggle against male supremacy. Although the new left was engaging in a cultural revolt, championing openness, honesty and sexual freedom, it actually embodied the heritage of the feminine mystique far more strongly than had the older left. Evans explains that 'the devastation of the McCarthy era' had erased the previous history. As a result, she points out, 'the new insurgents built their movement virtually in a vacuum'.[4]

Interestingly Mihan Jazani, with her extensive first-hand knowledge of the Fedaii organization, made the same distinction between the old and new generations of the Fedayeen in Iran. She observed that the new Fedayeen recruits had little awareness of women's issues, while old-timers like herself who had attended the youth and women's organizations of the Tudeh Party became sensitized to the issues of women's oppression. She recalled how the Fedayeen removed her from the NUW and 'reassigned' her because of her commitment to women's autonomous organizations:

> The leadership who at the beginning had told us they did not have a program for a women's organization and that we should go and mobilize women according to our own initiative, soon changed course and wanted to dictate everything. They did not want us to concentrate on any issue but the class struggle and working class women. I, however, had a firm belief in independent women's organizations and because I refused to follow Fedaii orders and was outspoken, they removed me from the NUW on the pretext that I was needed in the Pishgam [Fedaii] Teachers Council.[5]

From the outset, one single objective determined the NUW's political activities and that was how best it could serve

the political and organizational needs of the Fedaii. This goal manifested itself in the ways in which the NUW organized its activities, planned its programs, assigned its members, and formed alliances with other groups. Another NUW member, Maryam, recalled that she was removed from the NUW, despite her own desires, and sent to Pishgam's (Fedaii) Teachers Council:

> I was told I should put my energy where I was needed most. They said "we have enough people in the NUW, but have to have energetic people at Pishgam". I was very unhappy. Besides, I did not want to be known as a Fedaii teacher in my school. But I could not question an organizational order.[6]

Maryam was eventually expelled from her teaching job in 1983, and forced into exile on account of her pro-Fedaii activities at her school.

The NUW established several committees with the aim of mobilizing women of various classes for the struggle. An Employees Committee, a Teachers Committee, a Nurses Committee, and a Toilers Committee were organized to mobilize women in their work-places, while the Research Committee and Cultural Committee shared the responsibility for the Marxist education of the NUW rank and file and for producing an analytical framework for addressing women's status in Iran. The NUW also opened a clinic in a poor area of Tehran, where its members taught literacy and sewing classes, and organized occasional photograph and slide exhibitions. These activities aimed at recruiting women to the Fedayeen cause.

The NUW published five or six issues of a fortnightly paper, *Barabari* (Equality), during the summer of 1979. The name was chosen following the tradition of *Gleichheit*, the organ of the German Socialist Women's Movement, edited by Clara Zetkin. *Barabari* ceased publication when the Islamic regime banned all the papers of progressive opposition forces. A few months later the NUW started publication of a periodical, *Zanan Dar Mobarezeh* (Women in Struggle), which ceased after its fifth issue.[7]

The key article in the first issue of *Barabari* drew upon the writings of Engels, Zetkin and other classic Marxist texts to provide an overview of the historical roots of women's oppression. The article might have been written in Turkey, Iraq, Brazil, or any other country for that matter, because it made

no reference to specific forms and causes of women's oppression in Iran. The article argued that women's inequality in the family, in the work-place or in society in general was rooted in the dominant social relations (and not women's sexuality). Hence, the basis of women's oppression was their exclusion from social production and the devaluation of their socially necessary labour in the family which resulted from capitalist relations of production. The only route to women's emancipation, it argued, was the eradication of these relations, for they provided the grounds for the exploitation of the majority of women and men by a small group of (capitalist) women and men. Until that day women, like men, will be divided into the rich and the poor. In these two different worlds toiling men are the friends and allies of toiling women as much as rich women are the partners of rich men. The article exhorted women to unite and struggle against discrimination and injustice without separating themselves from their toiling brothers. For their enemies are not men. Their enemies are the blood-sucking women and men who live off the miseries of all toiling people.[8]

Another article, published in *Women in Struggle* in early 1980, defined the views of the editorial board on the relations between women's struggle and the national liberation movement in Iran. The article was a contribution to the ongoing debate and antagonistic views on the role and responsibilities of the women's movement *vis-à-vis* the anti-imperialist struggle:

> Differences of opinion and often deviationary views over the woman's question have created an intellectual distraction and disunited practices that are neither beneficial to the woman's question nor are they at the service of our people's struggle for national independence. On the one hand there are incorrect and deviationary views of [women's] groups, for whom to achieve legal and social equality with men is a goal in itself.... On the other hand there are the views of some progressive forces who do not value the democratic struggles of women within the framework set by the anti-imperialist and freedom-seeking struggles of the country. They believe that with national liberation, women will automatically be emancipated. They, therefore, consider women's struggle for legal, social and political rights with men as divisive of the ranks of women and men.[9]

The article criticized the 'incorrect and deviationary' group, for whom the main antagonism was the one between women and men. According to the authors, the widespread assault against women's rights by the men in power provided the grounds for these groups to mobilize unaware women against the anti-imperialist movement through agitation and propaganda. The second group was also criticized because it did not value the democratic struggles of women. Many vanguard women in this group found it beneath their status to participate in women's movements. They did not recognize that such movements were not simply reformist, but had been instrumental in extending women's participation in the general struggle, as the example of women in Vietnam and Dhofar had shown.

The editors were writing at a time when some of the NUW's editorial board were becoming disillusioned with the anti-imperialist character of the Islamic regime. However, in the end it seems their discourse did little to clarify a position which favoured a women's movement independent of other anti-imperialist organizations. Their tone *vis-à-vis* the government was somewhat radical, though contradictory and unspecific.

The article also criticized the policy of revitalizing old, reactionary traditions and customs 'that neither served the anti-imperialist struggles nor the unity of the anti-imperialist forces'. Yet it did not specify which reactionary practices were particularly harmful to women. Neither did it clarify who were the 'men of power' rejuvenating these traditions. Moreover, it blamed imperialist powers for those old, reactionary traditions:

> The conscious women of Iran are aware that the causes of their inequality and deprivation are not the social and religious beliefs and customs and the reactionary laws and legislation. These are themselves the reflections of imperialist penetration, patriarchal culture and social and economic inequalities. Hence, opposing the traditions and laws that can hinder the common, unified struggles of women and men against colonialism and exploitation is absolutely in the service of extending the anti-imperialist struggle of the masses of Iran.[10]

After reading such articles, what was a person to think about the main roots of women's oppression in Iran? In what ways and by what means could one struggle against that oppression?

A more specific, though as contradictory, analysis of the conditions of various classes of Iranian women was presented in an essay written by a member of the NUW Executive Council in the summer of 1979. This essay was a discussion paper, that also followed the Marxist framework to articulate the interests of women in Iran. It started with the argument that 'the double exploitation of women begins with private ownership and is resolved only by its total eradication and the disappearance of a class society'.[11] The paper then analysed the position of various classes of women who had emerged as a result of the development of dependent capitalism in Iran. First, it looked at peasant women. The land reform, which had released human resources and proletarianized the peasantry, had also changed the position of peasant woman. While the specific impact of these changes on the position of peasant women was not analysed, the paper seemed to suggest that 'the patriarchal relations dominant in the peasant households had been considerably undermined'.

Second, it looked at working-class women. According to the essay 'the hold of men over women is quite weak' in working-class households. Following Engels, it argued that this was because in the working-class family there was no trace of wealth and ownership. Lacking these means to exercise male domination, working class culture 'is based on the equality of man and woman at work, in the family, and class solidarity'. For 'as soon as the woman, too, is forced to work outside the house she is just another breadwinner like her husband and the differences between them disappear'.

The situation of 'petty-bourgeois' and particularly 'bourgeois' women, who comprise a 'consumer stratum' was, however, different, the article argued. As products of dependent capitalism, these women were manipulated and mobilized against the toiling masses by the Shah's regime. Influenced by the culture of colonialism, capitalism and Western women, these women were still 'subject to the dominant patriarchal ideology'. The article also made some references to Islam and 'its particular approach towards women in marital and sexual relations', without explaining what these relations were in an Islamic culture.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

Throughout its existence, the NUW was divided sharply over its relations with other women's groups. Except for the Fedaii women and their supporters, all other NUW cadres supported some level of cooperation with other groups. This cooperation, however, was hard to achieve, as almost all other secular women's organizations were affiliates of other political parties and organizations. They too worked strictly within the theoretical and practical framework of their parent organizations. For example, cooperation with the Tudeh Party's Democratic Organization of Women (*Tashkilat-e Democratik-e Zanan*) was out of the question because of their unconditional support for the Islamic regime. This was true also for women's groups generally known to be appendages of Maoist organizations, such as the Revolutionary Union of Militant Women (*Etehad-e Enghelabiy-e Zanan-e Mobarez*) and the Society for the Awakening of Women (*Jamiat-e Bidariy-e Zanan*). Some other groups were considered insignificant by the Fedaii organization and the NUW, for the NUW was not only the best organized and largest women's organization, with many well-known people in its ranks, but it also had the backing of the Fedaii, the largest and most prestigious political organization at the time.

The NUW had generally one condition for cooperation with other organizations. That condition was that they join the NUW. If they did not comply, no cooperation was possible. Negotiations between the NUW and the Emancipation of Women (EW) (*Anjoman-e Rahaiy-e Zan*), an affiliate of the Organization of Communist Unity (*Sazeman-e Vahdat-e Komonisti*), foundered on this issue. The EW was a small organization that developed an analysis of the Islamic character of the state and its consequences for women. Following the general line of its parent organization, and unlike the NUW, EW did not believe in the anti-imperialist character of the Islamic regime and thus was more openly opposed to the regime's policies on women.

As Zohreh and Haleh both recalled, when the meeting between representatives of the two groups took place, women from the EW read their charter, and issues of priority were discussed. Nothing however came from the meeting. The EW

suggested that the two organizations should start a new organization, but the NUW wanted the EW to join them. Representatives of the NUW argued that their organization already existed and was active. Besides, they considered the EW's position too leftist and confrontational for a women's organization that hoped to attract broad masses of women. As Zohreh pointed out:

> We were more concerned with imperialist plots and national unity than with women's rights. In that sense we negatively affected the women's movement. We emphasized that we were not like western feminists. What we meant by that was not clear. You cannot define feminism by its national character. You either are or you are not a feminist.[12]

The sectarian attitude and the claim to having a correct line that everybody else should follow was shared by all women's organizations and other political groups and parties. Thus Nahid Yeganeh is quite right in her critique of all women's organizations:

> On the one hand cries were reaching the sky over what was being done to women, and on the other opportunities for effective oppositional alliance and action were being lost one after the other. This was true of both the pro- and anti-government sections of Marxist feminism. Both being wary of "reformism", they were faced with two revolutionary choices: either to follow the Islamic state and become apologists for its policies; or reject it *in toto* and become completely isolated from the scene.[13]

Yeganeh suggests that another alternative open to women was 'to carry out opposition and alliance on women's issues on the basis of particular policies, instead of rejecting or accepting the state in its totality'.[14] I would argue that cooperation around particular issues would have been particularly hard to come by for two main reasons. Doubting one's beliefs and practices, listening to others, and particularly exercising moderation in judging others have always been absent from the political culture of the Iranian left. This quasi-religious dogmatism undermined any possible inter-organizational relationships. The key to political cooperation and alliance is mutual trust and respect; this was non-existent in the intellectual

tradition of the left. The NUW and other socialist feminist organizations were very much under the influence of this political culture. Second, the lack of organizational and ideological autonomy for women's movements impeded cooperation among women. The women who led these movements accepted the totality of the Marxist analysis of women's oppression in its Iranian version, and had no sense of the greater complexity of women's oppression that Western feminists had been elaborating. Hence they were unable to introduce feminist definitions of women's interests and oppression into Iranian politics.

With such theoretical and political rigidity, and ideological as well as intellectual reliance on male-defined revolutionary strategies, cooperation on any particular issue with other groups appeared as capitulation. Even partial and tactical alliances could not be viewed as active involvement in a collective project for formulating women's immediate demands and mobilizing forces around them.

The only political cooperation the NUW entered without the encouragement or recommendation of Fedayeen was its participation in the first unified women's conference, initiated by the Coordination Council for Women's Rights (*Shuray-e Hamahangi Dar Omur-e Marboot be Huquq-e Zan*) in November 1979. The Council had been formed by a group of professional women – with left tendencies but not necessarily with organizational ties – in the summer of 1979 for the purpose of working towards the following goals:

> First, to bring about solidarity amongst women regardless of their differences, religious or ideological; Second, to make the necessary steps in order to bring about and protect equality of rights between women and men; Third, to initiate programs in order to raise women's awareness about their rights.[15]

The Council invited all political groups to join and work towards these goals. Although the NUW had a representative on the Council, there was strong disagreement over how actively it should participate in deliberations around women's rights in the new Constitution and the Islamic Family Law. These were issues of debate in the NUW for a long time.

In the summer of 1979, some women among the NUW leadership tried to organize a public meeting with other political organizations to publicize women's concerns about the new Constitution. They had even convinced the Fedaii functionaries in the NUW, who were against such a meeting, not to 'kill' the idea and at least to discuss the proposal with the Fedayeen leadership:

> We even had a brief meeting with a representative of the National Democratic Front of Iran [NDFI], Shokrolah Paknezhad [a celebrated left political figure and long-time prisoner during the time of the Shah, who was eventually executed after the revolution], who attended the meeting on very short notice, and supported the idea whole-heartedly. He reassured us of the support of the NDFI and suggested Tehran University as the site for the meeting. Our attempt at bringing such an important issue to national attention and mobilize forces around it ended at that, simply because Fedayeen overruled our decision. Both Fedayeen (and Mojahedeen who were contacted on this occasion) did not find such a meeting appropriate and we knew very well that without their support such a meeting did not have the slightest chance to succeed.[16]

In November of the same year, when the issue of a women's unified conference was raised by the Council, the NUW decided to join other women's groups, under the banner of the Council, to protest against the new laws and specifically the ratification of the new Constitution by the Assembly of Experts (*Majlis-e Khebregan*). The Fedayeen women in the NUW leadership did not approve of this initiative. The meeting had enormous importance for women, not only in terms of the issues on the agenda, but particularly because women had succeeded in doing something that none of the male-led left organizations and parties could achieve. They had succeeded in forming a coalition to work in harmony on a particular issue, despite differing and often conflicting views on others. Fedayeen, however, not only discouraged this move, but opposed it adamantly and showed their disapproval by organizing a competing demonstration in support of the American Embassy take-over on the same day and at the same time. This had the desired effect of drawing the crowd and the media attention away from the women's conference. Many women among the Fedaii sympathizers like Zohreh

thought the decision was 'one of the most disgraceful political positions they had ever taken against the women's rights campaign'. The reason for this inexplicable move was clear. Fedayeen, who had become even more intoxicated with the anti-imperialist struggle after the hostage-taking in the US Embassy by the Students of the Imam Line (*Daneshjooyan-e Khatt-e Emam*), had no tolerance for discussion around women's rights at that stage.

The NUW cadres continued their dialogue with the Women's Council for a while, despite Fedayeen disapproval and resistance from some Fedayeen supporters within the organization. This was possible simply because the Fedaii Organization itself was torn between conflicting views and political disagreements. The political conflicts which eventually led to the formation of the Aghaliat and Aksariat factions of the Fedaii had spilled over to the NUW, and prevented the dialogue with the Women's Council from proceeding towards more constructive support of women's legal rights campaign. The NUW did not join the Council to celebrate International Women's Day on March Eighth 1980. The Fedaii youth organization, Pishgam, had made a separate NUW celebration a precondition for its assistance and protection. Its support was thought to be essential to any meeting or gathering

The NUW's relations and tactical alliances with other groups were also predominantly tied to Fedaii political goals. This was particularly the case when and where the NUW supported the Mojahedeen's position. Immediately after the revolution there was much hope for the formation of a united front of progressive forces, most notably the Fedayeen and the Mojahedeen against the fundamentalists. Fedaii was pressed by part of its leadership and rank and file to open a dialogue with the Mojahedeen. As a mass-based Islamic organization the Mojahedeen, for their part, were totally reluctant about cooperation with the Marxists.

Cooperation between the two organizations was first tested by their women's organizations. Haleh recalled the meeting with the Mojahedeen. The date and place of the meeting were decided by the Mojahedeen and the Fedayeen leadership cadres:

> The three women who represented the NUW went to the Mojahedeen headquarters in the Boulevard Square. We

> waited behind the gate for almost an hour until we were allowed in after we were thoroughly searched by a Mojahed woman. We thought we were going to meet the representatives of the Mojahedeen's *Anjoman-e Zanan-e Musalman* (Society of Muslim Women).[17] But a man came and led us to a room where we waited another few minutes for another man who came and talked to us or rather interrogated us. He asked questions and we answered: What was our analysis of the revolution? What was the class basis of the revolution? Which classes were present in the regime and so on. There was not even a mention of women and women's organizations. He did not ask about the NUW, or even how we defined the terms and methods of the women's struggle in general. He then excused us very solemnly saying that they would soon let us know about their decision.[18]

According to Haleh, the NUW never heard from the Mojahedeen on this issue. 'They only got in touch with us from time to time to ask us to support their position on this or that issue or to participate in their demonstrations that we did dutifully. It was an entirely one-sided relationship'.[19]

This support for the Mojahedeen was most dramatically demonstrated when, on behalf of Fedayeen, the NUW endorsed Ayatollah Taleghani as a presidential candidate. The Fedayeen who at the time did not want to endorse a cleric, but wanted to appease the Mojahedeen, used the NUW for this political purpose. The NUW was the only socialist and secular organization to support this Mojahedeen candidate.[20] Taleghani's virtues, as formulated by the Mojahedeen, included his belief in Islam (*Eslamiat*), the fact that he was a clergyman (*Rohaniat*) and was totally trusted by 'Imam Khomeini'. All these factors should have alarmed any women's organization concerned about gender inequality. Yet the NUW supported Taleghani against the views and wishes of the majority of its leadership, who nonetheless voted to obey Fedayeen instructions. This decision angered a good part of the NUW rank and file and a number of non-Fedaii women left the NUW in protest. Many other NUW activists expressed distress and even anger over this issue, at least in retrospect, both at Fedaii for imposing such a decision and at themselves for not resisting more forcefully.

With respect to almost all political issues and in relations with other opposition groups, the NUW followed the course defined and set by the Fedayeen. While the NUW issued official statements and co-signed protestations independent of the Fedaii organization, these were all cases which Fedayeen did not consider very important or about which they had some ambivalence. For example, the NUW issued a statement in defence of the Society of Lawyers, when it became a target of the fundamentalists because of its pro-democracy stance.[21] It also signed a protestation along with other groups against issues such as replacing the clerical-dominated Assembly of Experts with a Constitutional Assembly, as advocated by the progressive forces.

On more important political issues though, the NUW acted as an appendage of the Fedaii organization. Such was the case with the closure of the Tehran daily, *Ayandegan*. The incident, widely referred to as a clerical coup d'état, ended the relative freedoms of the press and of expression after the revolution, and constituted a significant turning point in post-revolutionary struggle for democracy and political freedom. Immediately following the revolution, *Ayandegan* became a forum for the progressive opposition to criticize the new regime. This, together with its general pro-democracy stance had infuriated the fundamentalists including Khomeini himself, who believed dissent and disagreement were counter-revolutionary. Khomeini spoke against *Ayandegan* and the editors of the paper suspended its publication. Subsequently the National Democratic Front of Iran (NDFI), the only major political group that persistently criticized the government for its undemocratic policies and violations of freedom of expression, called a meeting in support of *Ayandegan* and against censorship of the press.[22]

The Fedaii, Mojahedeen and a number of other political groups supported the NDFI's position by attending the meeting. The NUW also participated in the meeting and Homa Nateq read the NUW statement in support of *Ayandegan* at the gathering. This counter-offensive by all progressive opposition forces against the government's interference with the free press and the new atmosphere of repression proved successful. Confronted with the united front of the opposition, the fundamentalists retreated and *Ayandegan* resumed its publication. The NUW was among the groups who also issued a statement

in support of 'those open-minded journalists who expressed themselves fearlessly and spoke sincerely to the government and the people'.[23]

Ayandegan and its supporters, however, had won only a small battle. They needed to reinforce their united front and mobilize forces to halt the advancing Islamic fundamentalism, as the success of the NDFI's meeting had further angered Khomeini. He referred to the meeting and its participants as pro-democracy and anti-Islam and called upon the Muslim people not to 'co-operate with these groups...[to] distance themselves from them' and urged them not to tolerate these actions.[24] Khomeini's statement was an obvious directive to the Hezbollah gangs, who subsequently disrupted every NDFI meeting. In August, after the bloody suppression of anti-government forces in Kurdistan, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards accompanied by gangs of Hezbollah attacked the *Ayandegan* offices, arrested members of its editorial board, and closed down the paper. Publication was immediately resumed under new Hezbollahi management and with the name *Azadegan* (Freedom Lovers)!

Following *Ayandegan*'s closure the NDFI called for a protest march against 'the political strangulation' of the free press and democratic rights.[25] This time, however, the Fedayeen and Mojahedeen refrained from supporting the NDFI call. Nevertheless, a crowd of several hundred thousand was reported to have participated in NDFI's march. Fred Halliday, who was visiting Iran at the time, rightly described the paper's closure as a turning point in the Iranian revolution and criticized the Iranian left's miscalculation about Khomeini and the repressive import of his policies. He reported that spokespeople for left organizations that he had interviewed declared freedom of the press, women's rights and issues of the nationalities to be secondary.[26]

The NUW's position against the *Ayandegan* closure and its response to the NDFI's call for a demonstration also followed the Fedayeen line. Despite pressure from some leadership cadres the NUW decided not to officially support the NDFI by announcing its participation in the march. However, it told supporters that they could participate as individuals in the NDFI march, at which, as it turned out, there was the bloodiest street-fighting since the demonstrations before the revolution.

As predicted by many left intellectuals and organizations, the assault against *Ayandegan* signified an onslaught on all

non-Islamic and non-conformist press. Soon after the paper's closure the Fedaii and Mojahedeen headquarters were taken over by the revolutionary guards who instituted a new reign of terror. The NUW also ceased publication of *Barabari*, mainly because publishing houses refused to print the paper. Haleh, a member of the editorial board, recalled moving in vain from one printing house to another to get the last issue of *Barabari* published. NUW closed its office, and soon after moved to a new location, where it started publishing its short-lived journal.

THE FAILURE OF A DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCE

The intensification of the regime's attack on opposition forces helped disintegrate the NUW. Political conflicts from within and political repression from without pulled the organization apart, as political activities became more reactive than proactive. Many founding members had already left the NUW, or at least resigned from its Executive Board. Very few of the women remaining in the central leadership cared about preserving the democratic character of the NUW. Instead the position of the Fedayeen women in the leadership was reinforced by the assignment of more aggressive cadres who had only one concern: to establish the Fedaii viewpoint (*Khat-e Fedaii*). They used every means to pursue these objectives, including bypassing the decisions reached democratically by the NUW leadership Council and committees. In March of 1980, for example, contrary to editorial policy, the picture of three male Fedayeen, murdered by Islamic Guards in Torkaman Sahra, appeared on the cover page of the NUW journal, *Women in Struggle*. The decision surprised and angered the editorial board. One of its members, Haleh, recalled the incident:

> We were pressed for providing the expenses of *Women in Struggle* and had to do basically everything ourselves, from typing the articles to type-setting the pages. One of the Fedaii functionaries, Mina, who was not officially a member of the Editorial Board but was present at every stage, from deciding upon the articles to the final technical work, would take the final work to a trusted print-shop that also printed the Fedayeen organ *Kar*. We did the same for the March

> issue. So it was not only surprising but terribly upsetting for me to see the pictures of these Fedaii martyrs on the cover page of the journal.[27]

According to Haleh, the decision to change the cover page had been taken in the print shop at the very last minute by the Fedaii women, without consulting or even informing the NUW Editorial Board:

> They brushed off our protests by arguing that as petty-bourgeois women who were not in contact with the toiling masses in poor areas we did not understand that to publicize the murdered Fedaii comrades in Torkman Sahra was to respond to the urgent concerns of the toiling masses. As for the undemocratic character of the decision, they simply said it had been the "comrades' decision", meaning that it was above and beyond democratic procedures.[28]

As mentioned earlier, since the spring of 1980, the conflicts between the two Fedaii factions, now out in the open, basically had paralysed the NUW. The theoretical and political disagreements between the contending Fedaii factions centred on the class nature of the Islamic state and the revolutionary strategy and tactics of the communists. Both the Majority and the Minority factions evoked Marxist 'testaments' in support of their position. The Majority used Marxist-Leninist texts to prove that the state comprised the 'revolutionary petty-bourgeoisie' and the 'anti-imperialist' forces under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. They contended that the politics and class interests of these forces would eventually be transformed in favour of the working-class. Hence, the revolutionary task for socialists and all progressive forces was to support the anti-imperialist forces within the clerical power bloc. The Minority contended the post-revolutionary state had already been taken over by the 'bourgeoisie'. All state apparatuses, the bureaucracy and the army were under the control of the bourgeoisie and a conformist section of the 'petty-bourgeoisie'. Accordingly, the task of the revolutionary forces was to expose its nature to the masses and educate them not to trust it.

None of these theoretical and political differences had, of course, anything to do with the women's question. Whether

or not the new regime included only bourgeois or petty-bourgeois forces was actually not a determinant factor in the revolutionary strategy of the NUW as a women's organization. Whether 'bourgeois' or 'petty-bourgeois', the ruling clerics were proceeding in their march towards the Islamization of Iranian society. One most obvious outcome of this drive was the nullification of the structural changes of the previous decade in the area of women's legal rights and social status.

In the summer of 1980, the Islamic *Hejab* was finally forced on women with no effective resistance from women's organizations or other progressive forces. The lack of an effective and organized resistance made it easier for the new regime to carry out other Islamization policies. The marriage age (*Senne-e bolugh*) for girls had been lowered to 13 (and later to nine).[29] The Family Protection Act was suspended.[30] Girls' technical and vocational high schools were closed. During this time the NUW, as an appendage of the Fedaii Organization, was consumed with internal political strife. Disagreements within the NUW turned into open hostilities among Fedayeen supporters and women's issues became increasingly irrelevant as the point of common struggle. The ideological and practical divisions within the NUW reflected conflicts over theoretical and political issues that were produced, debated and fought over outside the NUW. The first major split in the Fedaii in the summer of 1980 had direct consequences in the NUW and translated into political inconsistency and inaction for the women's organization. The NUW was immobilized and could not protest against compulsory veiling, or even support the spontaneous, though sporadic, protest marches by independent women. Long before the police and political repression made all democratic and intellectual activities impossible, theoretical disagreements and internal party-line conflicts were tearing the NUW apart. Each Fedaii faction tried to pull the organization, its members and its limited resources to its side. One group of the Majority Fedaii leadership had already decided to dissolve the Fedaii Organization gradually and merge with the Tudeh Party. One way to facilitate this process was to disintegrate the OIPF from within.

This important decision, reached secretly by a handful of members of the Majority Fedaii Political Bureau, was not only

undemocratic, but against the wishes of the majority of the Fedaii rank and file. The Youth Organization, Pishgam, had already started the gradual process of disintegration. Its members had been advised to join their Tudeh counterpart, the Organization of Democrat Youth (*Sazeman-e Javanan-e Demokrat*). The case of the NUW which, from the perspective of the members of the Political Bureau, was the least important organizational unit of the Fedaii, required even less preparation. Fedayeen women were already doing their job and the NUW could be used as a case to test the extent of resistance to dissolution within the Fedaii rank and file. The Fedayeen leadership decided to dissolve the NUW and instruct its members to join the Tudeh Party's women's organization, the Democratic Organization of Women (*Tashkilat-e Democratik-e Zanan*).[31] This was in total accord with the Fedayeen general policy toward all democratic organizations.

This process, however, did not go as smoothly as expected. The NUW leaders harboured strong anti-Tudeh sentiments. Even those members who did not agree with Aghaliat's class analysis of the Islamic regime, agreed with its position against the Tudeh Party. For them the Tudeh party was an opportunist, pro-Soviet, pro-Khomeini party. These anti-Tudeh sentiments were sometimes even expressed in the pages of the NUW journal, *Women in Struggle*.[32] The debates and political conflict ended in the autumn of 1980, when the pro-Tudeh group left the NUW. The Fedayeen women who led this split, however, failed to convince the splitting group to join the Tudeh. Many former members of the NUW, as Haleh recalled, stopped working around women's issues and were reassigned within the Fedaii organization. Activities on women's issues were reduced to the occasional preparation of articles for publication in *Kar*, which were approved, changed or censored by the *Kar* editorial board. Other activities included participation in the Neighbourhood Associations, working with women and providing support to the Iran–Iraq war effort. This, as Faranak noted, involved wearing the *Chador* and attending the Islamic Councils in neighbourhood mosques.[33]

As for the Fedayeen Aghaliat, they kept the NUW office for a short while. But, according to Zohreh, 'our concerns were no longer related to women's issues. The Iran–Iraq war and the dilemma of Aghaliat and how to define the war and how to

deal with it preoccupied us'. With the outbreak of war, the political repression and surveillance of progressive opposition forces had increased. The remnants of the semi-democratic political movement of post-revolutionary Iran had been defeated by internal and external forces. The NUW ceased to exist in early 1981. Yet, even before political repression put an end to the NUW, it was in a sense already doomed as an autonomous women's organization. For its activist leaders, other political issues and specifically the party's interests were more important and more urgent than women's rights. This was so, despite the fact that these rights were by then under systematic and lethal assault by the new regime.

LEARNING FROM MISTAKES?

When they look back at the theoretical and practical issues that dominated the left's politics in general and especially those of the NUW in that period, most NUW activists are now critical of their own actions and that of their organization. They differ in their analysis of the NUW's problems and on what they should or could have done to be more effective in their political endeavour. But they all agree that if they had the freedom to express their differing views and analyses, a more comprehensive and cohesive programme of action could have been developed.

Homa Nateq claimed the main problem with the Fedayeen women and the NUW was their uncritical following of the 'masses' and the 'masses beliefs':

> I still strongly contend that our problem was not the NUW's dependence on the Fedaii patronage and its lack of autonomy. Suppose it was independent. Were there not another 10 to 12 other women's organizations at the time? Why could they not work together? I believe our problem was (and still is) cultural rather than political. When you stress "respecting the masses' beliefs", this means respecting Islam, respecting discrimination, respecting ignorance and the blind following of the unaware masses.[34]

For her, the most urgent demand of the NUW, as a women's organization, should have been the separation of politics from

religion and the state from the mosque. 'We should have first provided a critique of the revolution, of ourselves, of our own politics and populism. We saw imperialism and nothing else as our national problem.'[35]

Haleh similarly blames the Fedayeen's populist tendencies and the NUW leadership for the failure of the NUW and its lack of organizational and political independence from the Fedayeen:

> I think that if we had been an autonomous organization, we could have addressed issues that the Fedaii could not or would not address, such as the reactionary character of Islamic traditions and laws. The women, who poured into the streets against the new regime, had enormous courage. Both political courage because they were swimming against the popular tide, and physical courage because they faced serious threats and physical coercion. But what did we do? Under the direction of the Fedaii organization, we circumscribed women's resistance. We not only left the movement, but abandoned women's democratic cause by trying to discredit the women's movement for its spontaneity and lack of (male) leadership.[36]

In Haleh's view the NUW did not have the power to change anything or to stem the rising tide of fundamentalism. But, she contended, there was still an important role that the organization could have played:

> The NUW could have used the post-revolutionary semi-democratic political atmosphere to at least more effectively publicize the plight of women. For that, we had to be independent of the Fedaii. For me the question comes down to two points: First, what is the individual's role and responsibility? Did we have to put up with a political organization which led us to act in directions contrary to our intuition, moral principles and beliefs? Secondly, could the Islamic regime have so easily eliminated all forces of opposition, including our organization, without our blind concern with one thing and one thing alone, the unity of anti-imperialist forces?[37]

Mihan Jazani, suggested that 'the most important point for all of us is to honestly and unambiguously admit our mistakes

at all costs and yet try to contextualize them based on the dominant political situation of the time'.[38] Zohreh explains what she thinks these mistakes were and why they were fatal for the women's movement:

> The first object of the Islamic onslaught was women, even before the regime's attack on Kurdistan. The first force that resisted the regime was also women. "Apolitical" women poured into the streets with great enthusiasm and revolutionary passion, and those who were supposed to assume their leadership were looking out to their "holy shrines" (*Emam-Zadeh*) for guidance. We basically blocked women's will to resist the regime.[39]

There is little question that by placing central emphasis on the interference of external forces in the Iranian economy and polity, the Fedayeen prioritized the issue of national liberation and class exploitation over sexual oppression. Caught up in the revolutionary mood of the period and preoccupied with the need to preserve unity, women in the NUW internalized their subordination and subordinated their demands. This recalls what Sheila Rowbotham has described as 'the paralysis of consciousness in a male-defined revolutionary movement'.[40] The paralysis of women's consciousness prevented these women from comprehending other forms and levels of oppression. They did not see the suppression of women's voices and women's interests in the political organization in which they had devoted so much of their energy.

In retrospect, the damage to women's cause was done not only, perhaps not even mainly, by the Islamic regime and its Hezbollah force, but by the assimilation of the women's movement in the male-defined anti-imperialist movement. Here I am not trying to argue that women's movement for gender equality could or should be separate from the struggle for economic and political democracy, peace and social justice. But in a variety of cases women's lack of personal and political identity in a struggle has led to their physical, mental and emotional energy being used in a struggle whose goals and directions they have had no power to determine. Time and time again it has been proven that the struggle for national liberation or for socialism has not necessarily increased gender consciousness or changed the entrenched sexist values and

perceptions of activists, male and female.

Personal testimonies of Western feminists, more than a decade ago, unmasked the patriarchal and sexist values and practices of the left. They showed how falling back on the exigencies of anti-imperialist and socialist struggles had been used to silence women's dissenting voices within progressive movements. Whenever women tried to fight for equality in such organisations, as Lydia Sargent, among others, has observed, 'the problem of theory arose...and women were simply going to be quoted chapter and verse of Marx, Lenin and Mao, or fraternally/paternally encouraged to go read their *Communist Manifesto, Eighteen Brumaire,* [or] *On Contradiction*'.[41]

Moralizing and paternalistic attitudes and masculine visions have dominated party politics everywhere. This seems to be a cross-cultural and cross-temporal phenomenon. Feminists from the Middle East have started to break their silence and expose the prevalent sexism of the revolutionary movements and particularly the similarities between the views of the left and Islamic forces in their societies. The commonalities between religious and non-religious political activists become more pronounced whenever issues of women's rights leave the public sphere and touch upon private relationships between men and women and the personal liberties of women. Fatima Mernissi's remarks about her feelings on going to left meetings is a case in point. She wrote, the experience was similar to being in a masque.[42] Nawal El-Saadawi testified to the existence of the same general pattern in Egypt, where women's political organizations face opposition not only from the state, but also left groups who argue 'we should struggle against the system of oppression and exploitation in total uniformity'. Saadawi finds it sad that the left's voices and criticism against women's movements is louder and stronger than against any other issue.[43] These testimonies reveal the dominance of male values, male supremacy and the sexual division of labour in revolutionary activities. They demonstrate that the instrumentalist approach to women's political activities conforms to a more general pattern.

The study of the politics and practices of the OIPF and the NUW provides a dramatic example of the seemingly unresolvable conflict between women's liberation and national political struggle. The damaging impact of not having organizational and ideological autonomy and the disintegrating

consequences for the women's movement resulting from its involvement in the confusion, hostility, division and power struggle of political parties has not been lost to the observers of women's rights movements in Iran. Insafpoor, for example, sees the association of the women's movement with various political parties in the 1940s as a negative turning point for the movement.[44] Sanasarian has pointed to the fact of increased division and hostility among women as a result of their identification with political parties. These women, she wrote, went beyond giving higher priority to their male colleagues' general causes but attacked and accused one another, following their party lines.[45]

The submergence of women's cause in male-focused political struggle and political activities, however, dates back to 1935, when some pioneers of the women's movement chose formal politics and the patronage of the state to achieve their goals. These women stripped themselves of the autonomy to voice any ideas, concerns and interests that were not fully endorsed by the state. This experience was repeated in the 1960s. Lack of knowledge about past experiences, the absence of gender-consciousness, and lack of familiarity with feminist theoretical arguments and practical experiences were crucial here for they led women activists, in the post-revolutionary period, to repeat these experiences.

Conclusion: Finding a Space, Reclaiming Politics

Dreams always fall from the height
of their naiveté, and die.
I am smelling a four-leafed clover
that has grown on top of the grave of ancient concepts

Forugh Farrokhzad

The study of any failed revolutionary movement invariably raises new questions. One particularly important question arising from this study is how the revolutionary experiences affected women's views of themselves and their place in Iranian society and politics. Post-revolutionary Iran has seen the emergence of women as a strong political force. Women are posing a democratic challenge to the patriarchal family and the tyrannical socio-cultural structures, amidst a continuous malicious campaign by the Islamic regime against secular, educated women, hoping to recapture a long-past moment in history with its clearly-defined sex roles and sex-segregated relations. Women's refusal to succumb to the cultural expectations of the clerics is observable in every sphere of social life. The emergence of several women filmmakers, the success and jealously won fame of new female writers, and the impressive academic success of female high-school students in the university entrance exams compared to males, demonstrate women's quest for identity, self-determined subjectivity and space in social and cultural life.

To the simple-minded and uninformed observers or the apologists of the regime these developments may represent the opening of the gates to women under the Islamic regime. They, however, signify only one thing: women's determination and their enormous efforts to escape the prisons of the femininity and sex-roles defined and guarded by the guardians of Sharia. The Islamic regime has not opened the gates. Women are jumping over the fences. They are moved by the irresistible forces of social change, something the Islamic regime has no

power to control. Neither can it counterbalance its impact through ideological indoctrination, propaganda and suppression.

Women's lives and their resistance under the Islamic government and their quiet struggle for change expose the weakest point of the Islamic regime. Probably the most important illustration of women's resistance is the Islamic dress code, *Hejab.* As the symbol of reasserting Islamic identity and purification of society from Western culture, *Hejab* is the focal point of the state propaganda and gender politics. Not surprisingly, the most obvious sign of women's challenge to the Islamic state and its policies is also centred on defying the *Hejab* code. Despite its strict enforcement by means of persuasion and ideological indoctrination, as well as arrests, torture and public lashings of the subversive women, *Hejab* still has to be forced on women through the coercive power of morality police and various special Islamic squads.[1] As recently as July 1993, vice squads detained 802 women and men in Tehran for violating Islamic dress code.[2] Iranian officials lamented the fact that 80 per cent of those detained were under the age of 20 – the generation who have grown under the Islamic regime but obviously not influenced by its vast propaganda machinery. Clearly the *Hejab* and women's non-compliance is as much a preoccupation of the fundamentalists today as it was in the first year of the revolution.

The failure of the Islamic regime to overcome the resistance of women has been acknowledged by some of its supporters. An important member of the regime's Muslim female elite, Zahra Rahnavard, for example, has admitted that 'the Islamic government has lost the war on hejab...The Islamic values have failed to protect women and to win their support'.[3] Moreover, the voices of dissatisfaction and protest to sex-based values, practices and policies of the clerical state can be heard occasionally from other Muslim women, mobilized by the state to reframe the images of Muslim women in the minds of the people and to present a female role model to the young generation of the female population. An increasing number of these women are becoming critical of the discrimination against women in family laws, education and employment, and vocal against the restrictive fanaticism of their male counterparts. Women are contesting men's power in defining the conditions of their lives. This explains why the issues of women's

rights and status have occupied the central place in the country's politics, as illustrated in the formation of several state-sponsored or state-endorsed women's organizations; numerous women-focused committees, bureaus and offices; non-stop organization of seminars, conferences and congresses and continuous official statements and speeches addressing issues of women's rights and duties. The resistance of women from within the regime against the gender-based discrimination or even Islamization methods indicates a reawakening of women and their will to change their conditions. Women's resistance and protest, in any form, is reason to rejoice for all Iranian feminists.

As for the socialist feminists, many of whom no longer live in Iran, the experience of participating in a male-defined anti-imperialist movement which subordinated and muted women's cause for the broader goals of national liberation, radicalized many of them on issues of gender relations. Judging by various intellectual activities and published materials abroad, women are now at the forefront of the socio-cultural and religious critique that has long been overdue in Iranian intellectual life. The focus on personal autonomy and independence in political struggle now occupies a relatively large space in the intellectual life of these women. There is also a great deal of talk over inadequacies of the socialist organizations, and the impoverishment of traditional socialist vision of women's emancipation. What is important to note though is that many of these women are no longer active in the organized socialist movement and are now independent left intellectuals. Some have retreated from political and organizational work in general.

Most socialist women who have chosen to remain in political organizations have so far failed to recognize and struggle against the dominant hierarchical and undemocratic relations of their organizations and their own subordinate position in personal and political lives. For them, the theoretical perspective that gender hierarchy is a derivative effect of property relations prevails. Women's emancipation takes place once they overcome class exploitation and national oppression. In such a vision of social change, there is no need or space for a feminism that refuses to wait until a socialist revolution liberates women. These women identify with their organizations'

masculine and gendered interpretations of revolution and social change.

Moreover, the patriarchal cultural value, beliefs and practices that shape women's perceptions of themselves as persons of lesser value affect the personal and political behaviour of women activists in the socialist movement. The acceptance of men's superiority and a belief in the inevitability of men's power that are produced in the Iranian family have prepared these women to comply with patriarchal relations and institutions in public and political life. So they hold onto the idea of women's organizations as appendages of left organizations. As a woman left activist has written:

> In addition to recognizing and supporting women's democratic organizations, the left organizations should release an active part of the time and the energy of their female cadres to assist the formation of such organizations. Nonetheless, to preserve the independence and democratic character of women's organizations, these [communist] women should avoid sectarian party politics.[4]

A preoccupation with the left's approval and endorsement of women's organizations dominates this statement. This recalls, once again, the position that determined the direction and the final elimination of NUW in the aftermath of the revolution. It indicates that the author of this statement and her organization have not become more ingenuous in their attitudes towards the women's movement or any more critical of the personal and political power relations dominant in the Iranian socialist movement. Nor have the post-revolutionary experiences cast any doubt on their project of using the women's movement to enhance and strengthen the anti-imperialist and socialist movement.

What does this say about the possibility of the cohabitation of feminists and the Iranian left in the future? What needs to be emphasized is that the defeat of the Iranian democratic revolution, on the one hand, and the collapse of the Soviet Union and Soviet-type regimes on the other, have influenced the Iranian left movement and the process of its transformation. A good part of the organized left persistently refuses to recognize the need for revisiting many of its revolutionary strategies and tactics. This is true also in their attitudes towards

the 'women's question'. It is true that a great deal of talk about the plight of women under the Islamic regime comes from traditional left groups. They are now discussing the need for women's independent organizations. But there are also more systematic critiques of women's 'individualistic' and sectarian approaches to their liberation and hostility towards feminism and feminist ideas, and Iranian women in the West, who no longer give authority to the left men and their discourses. In a statement co-signed by two left political organizations, published in March 1991 on the occasion of International Women's Day, dogmatic and out-dated views could once again be heard. *Rah-e Kargar* (Workers Path) and the Fedaii Organization (former Work Emancipation Organization) declared that 'the goals of the freedom seeking women's movement are linked with the goal of overthrowing the medieval regime of the Islamic Republic'. Women's struggle for liberation and equal rights, they said, has turned into one of the major bases of the general struggle of the people for democracy. The statement urges women who live in exile to benefit from the experiences of women in Western countries and form their own 'independent' organizations. But they try to instruct women as to what principles should guide their movements, and these are not feminist principles:

> The Iranian women's movement in exile suffers from dispersion, passivity, and the penetration of feminist influences. We should struggle for the formation of independent women's movements geared towards concrete goals and programs, devoid of feminist tendencies.[5]

The authors of this statement do not clarify what exactly these harmful feminist influences are that have infected Iranian women. Most probably feminist thought and practices are as foreign and inaccessible to them now as they were ten years ago. Their unspecific, ambiguous and uninformed reference to feminism indicates the lack of a sincere intellectual or political attempt to understand feminist ideas and demands. This statement is not an isolated case but symbolizes the continuing dominance of patriarchal populist tendencies within organized socialist forces. Yet women see in them what they themselves fail to see, that is their paternalistic, non-democratic and sexist values. The prospect not only for a joint struggle but for

a workable relationship, open dialogue and a meaningful communication between feminists and socialists from this camp is very dim.

The future relationship and cooperation between feminists and a section of the left movement that is undergoing substantial ideological transformation also depends on the extent of the left's development. Particularly it depends on their sincere efforts to recognize and revisit the sexist beliefs and values that inform their revolutionary strategy, including their hostility towards feminist ideas. No matter how impressive the theoretical transformation of this section of the socialist movement, they should recognize the fact that a great deal of their hostility towards feminist ideas springs out of men's fear of women's empowerment and the impact of such empowerment on their personal lives. In other words, feminism is rejected not because women's personal and political autonomy is dangerous for the cause of socialist revolution, but because it endangers men's power and privileges over women. For many socialist men, recognizing feminism as a revolutionary ideology for social change is not only to relinquish their monopoly and control over ideas and movements but to voluntarily give up their power and privileges in everyday life and in sexual relations.

Nonetheless, I still believe that a cohabitation and cooperation between feminists and socialists is possible in both the realms of theory and of practice. For I believe firmly in the viability of a democratic socialist project for humanization of the relations between the sexes and democratization of social, economic and political structures in Iran. The plight of women in Iran is tightly linked with the general problems of material, cultural and political underdevelopment. Every case is a particular case, but I do believe that women's subjugation in Iran has the same roots that it has had in other societies. Positive developments in women's legal rights, their personal and social independence and freedoms have been closely liked with general socio-economic and political developments in all known societies. These developments are preconditions for women's ideological consciousness and struggle against oppressive patriarchal relations and institutions and sexist norms, values and language. It is true that we can no longer present any case as an 'ideal model' and as the irrefutable proof that such changes are possible. Yet following Gramsci, I believe through

'optimism of the will, and pessimism of the intelligence', we can promote our vision of the world, a vision which is more humane, more democratic, more egalitarian and less hierarchical. A vision that refuses to accept the time-honoured Persian expression that promotes the acceptance of the status quo: 'the world has always been' (*Ta Boodeh Hamin Boodeh*), implying that 'it will always be.'

I would like to think of the best strategy for socialist transformation as a feminist democratic socialist project rather than a socialist-feminist project. As Hartmann has emphasized:

> We must insist that the society we want to create is a society in which recognition of interdependence is liberation rather than shame, nurturance is a universal, not an oppressive practice, and in which women do not continue to support the false as well as the concrete freedoms of men.[6]

The defeat of the women's movement in post-revolutionary Iran clearly demonstrated the need for women's political movement to make connections between gender hierarchy, class exploitation and national oppression. As a political movement, we cannot afford not to connect all forms, social structures and ideologies of domination and oppression. This is because women are put down, oppressed, exploited and often denigrated by many institutions and relations that create our identity not only as women, but also as members of certain classes, ethnic and religious groups, and nations. Yet women must unlearn male-centred and male-defined values and counter-values in personal and political lives. We can make our voices heard in a political movement only by having a grasp of our specific interests and by preserving our personal and political identities. Political identity and autonomy are tightly linked with personal autonomy. This means being aware of and alert to our particular interests and desires as women. It also means having a distinct face and distinct voice, rather than simply being a face in a faceless crowd and a coded name in an organization's list of members or supporters. It means being led by one's own mind rather than by one's ideology. This often would mean separating oneself from the movement, looking at its stated goals and unstated intentions and practices as an outsider and critically assessing them, doubting them, and debating them as an insider. It also means

questioning those goals and practices for their often overtly gendered values. This is when the personal becomes political, when women are able to articulate their own interests and demands, using a gender-conscious conceptual framework, without being intimidated by accusations of the sectarianism and self-interest which have long been used to herd women into male-dominated political movements. The principles that Lynne Segal suggests as guiding principles for socialist feminists for the future, I believe, can also guide Iranian feminists:

> The first [principle] is the cognition of the personal power and confidence which comes from women's engagement in political struggle, when it is women collectively who direct and control it. The second is the recognition that women's subordination is not a result of conscious conspiracy by men, or at least not *ONLY* of a conscious conspiracy by men, but is rather embedded in all social institutions and ideologies of our society. The third is the recognition that the lives of women and men can be as much determined by class, ethnic, regional and national issues as by their sex.[7]

The Iranian feminist-socialist movement will have the autonomy and flexibility to define its own goals, set its own priorities, formulate its own strategies and tactics and independently make or break alliances. This autonomy is subversion. We revolt to survive, and our defiance and insubordination will shake up the entire society to eventually come face to face with reality and recognize the need to reconsider and transform the hierarchical, undemocratic and patriarchal values, presuppositions and relations that so fully inform this society.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

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2. On North American Populism see N. Pollack, *The Populist Response to Industrial America: Midwestern Populist Thought* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962).
3. See P. Worsley, 'The Concept of Populism' in, G. Ionescu and E. Gellner (eds), *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969) pp. 229–35.
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6. M. Barrett, in Barrett, M. and A. Phillips (eds) *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992) pp. 6 and 9.
7. M. Yamada, 'Asian Pacific American Women and Feminism' in C. Moraga and G. Anzaldua (eds) *This Bridge Called My Back* (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press) pp. 72–3.
8. A. Lorde, 'An Open Letter to Mary Daly', in C. Moraga and G. Anzaldua *This Bridge...* pp. 94–7.
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12. L. Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992) pp. 154–5.
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15. E. Said, 'Orientalism Reconsidered' in S. K. Farsoun, *Arab Society: Continuity and Change* (London: Croom Helm 1985) p. 107.

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17. J. Minces, *The House of Obedience* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1982) p. 25.
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19. E. Accad, *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1990) p. ix.
20. K. Mumtaz and F. Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1987) p. 2.
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28. D. Kandiyoti, 'Emancipated but Unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish Case' *Feminist Studies*, 13, 2 (Summer 1987) pp. 317–18.
29. See R. Ridd and H. Callaway (eds), *Women and Political Conflict: Portraits of Struggle in Times of Crisis* (New York: New York University Press, 1987) pp. 3–4.
30. M. Ghoussoub, 'A Reply to Hammami and Rieker' *New Left Review*, 170 (July/August 1988) p. 109.
31 E. Accad, *Sexuality and War*... pp. 12 and 31–2.
32. See K. Dwyer, *Arab Voices: The human rights debate in the Middle East*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1991) pp. 182–3.
33. See M. Raha, *Haqiqat-e Sadeh* (Simple Truth: Memoirs from Women Prisons in the Islamic Republic of Iran), (Hanover: Iranian Women's Independent Democratic Association, 1992/1371) pp. 89 and 158–9.
34. Iran *Times*, (17 Azar 1369/December 1990).
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37. M. Khawar and F. Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*..., p. 3
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CHAPTER 1 THE EMERGING WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

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2. See H. Nateq, 'Negahi Beh Barkhi Neveshteha Va Mobarezat-e Zanan Dar Doureh Mashrotiat' ('A Brief Look at Some Writings and Struggles of Women During Constitutional Revolution') *Ketab-e Jome,* 30 (23 Esfand 1358/February 1980) pp. 45–53.
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4. Letter from the British Embassy in Tehran to Foreign Office, cited in F. Adamiat, *Amir Kabir va Iran* (Amir Kabir and Iran), (Tehran: Kharazmi Publishers, 1348/1969), pp. 420–1.
5. F. Adamiat, *Ideologiy-e Jonbesh-e Mashrouteh* (The Ideology of the Constitutional Movement), (Tehran: Payam Publisher, 1355/1976) p. 21.
6. H. Nateq and F. Adamiat, *Afkar-e Ejtemaii, Siasi va Eqtesadi Dar Asar-e Montasher Nashodeh Dowran Ghajar* (Social, Political and Economic Thoughts in the Unpublished Works of the Qajar Period), W. Germany: Navid Publishers, 1368/1989) pp. 22–6.
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8. A. H. Nahid, *Zanan-e Iran dar Jonbesh-e Mashroutiat* (Iranian Women in the Constitutional Movement), (Tabriz: Ehia Publishers, 1360/1981) pp. 85–6.
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13. B. Bamdad, *From Darkness into Light: Woman's Emancipation in Iran,* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1977) pp. 30–1.
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16. Bamdad, *From Darkness...,* p. 76.
17. *Nimeye Digar,* 3 & 4 Winter (1364/1986), p. 171.
18. See M. Afkhami, 'Iran: A Future in the Past; The 'Pre-revolutionary' Women's Movement' in R. Morgan (ed.), *Sisterhood is Global,* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984) p. 330.

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21. Ibid., p. 64. See also Sanasarian, E., op. cit. p. 36.
22. Kambakhsh, *Nazari Beh...*, p. 31.
23. Ibid. pp. 30–1.

CHAPTER 2 WOMEN AND SOCIAL REFORMS

1. Bamdad, *From Darkness...* p. 85.
2. F. Ostadmalek, *Hejab va Kashf-e Hejab dar Iran* (Veil and Unveiling in Iran), (Tehran: Ataii Publishing, 1988) p. 128.
3. K. Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1986) p. 39.
4. M. Hedayat, Mokhber-ol-saltaneh, *Khaterat va Khataraat* (Memoirs) (Tehran: Zavvar Publishers, 1363/1984) p. 408.
5. See Dr Taghi Arrani's Defence in the Trial of the Group of Fifty Three in *Asnad-e Jonbesh-e Kargari, Social Demokracy va Kommunisti-ye Iran* (Historical Documents: The Workers', Social Democratic and Communist Movement in Iran), (Florence, Edition Mazdak, 1970) p. 154.
6. Nahid, *Zanan-e Iran Dar...*, p. 113.
7. Ostadmalek, *Hejab va Kashf-e...*, 112–24.
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9. Bamdad, *From Darkness...*, pp. 93–4.
10. In this letter, Dowlatabadi complains that a speaker, Mohit Tabataba'i, in his talk about women and literature in Iran, had criticized the Women's Centre for not having organized a commemoration for the female poet, Parvin Etesami. Dowlatabadi explains that this failure was because the Minister had, on previous occasions, refused to grant permission with the excuse that 'the Centre has been designated for national celebrations, happy events and for hosting the Royal princesses'. See *Majmoueh-ye Maghalat va Ashaar Beh Yad bood-e Avalin Salrooz Marg-e Parvin Etesami* (The Collection of Articles and Poems in Commemoration of First Anniversary of Parvin Etesami's Death (Tehran: Abolfath Etesami, Seventh Edition, 2535/1977) pp. 60–1.
11. Sanasarian, *The Women's Right...*, p. 68.
12. B. Bamdad, *From Darkness...*, pp. 106–7.
13. A. Chapman Smock, 'Conclusion: Determinants of Women's Role and Status' in J. Z. Giele and A. Chapman Smock (eds), *Women's Roles and Status in Eight Countries*, (New York, London, Toronto: John Wiley, 1984) p. 419.
14. M. Manouchehrian, *Vaz'e Huquqi Zan: va Tarh-e Ghanoon-e Khanevadeh* (Legal Status of Married Women; With a Draft on Family Law, (Tehran: The Association of Women Lawyers of Iran, 1342/1961).
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Bosworth, (ed.) *Iran and Islam: in Memory of the Late Vladimir Minorsky*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971), and D. Hinchcliffe, 'The Iranian Family Protection Act', in *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 17, April 1968). See also B. Pakizegi, 'Legal and Social Position of Iranian Women', in L. Beck and N. R. Keddie (eds), *Women in the Muslim....*

16. M. Afkhami, 'Iran: A Future in the Past...,' p. 331.
17. *Mut'a* is a pre-Islamic custom, sanctioned by the Prophet. It is a contract between a man and a woman who is hired for a fixed pay and a fixed period. The man and woman part when the contract is expired, or the man wishes, without divorce procedures. *Mut'a* was forbidden after Muhammad's death by the Caliph Omar. The practice, however, has been carried on through the centuries in Shiite Iran. Shiite jurists support the institution of *Mut'a* because 'it minimizes the evils resulting from the passion of men'. They argue that *Mut'a* prevents adultery and fornication. See S. H. Nasr, *Allamah Tabataba'i: Shi'ite Islam*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1975) pp. 227–30. See also S. Haeri, *Law of Desire; The Temporary Marriage in Shii Iran*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1989).
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22. D. A. Momeni, 'The Difficulties of Changing the Age of Marriage in Iran', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 34, 3, August, (1972), 545–51.
23. For a concise discussion of why official statistics tend to exclude women from labour force figures, see L. Beneria, 'Conceptualizing the Labour Force: The Underestimation of Women's Economic Activities', *The Journal of Developing Studies*, 7, 3, April (1981). See also A. Dallalfar's discussion of systematic under-reporting of women's economic activities and contribution in rural Iran in 'Jaye-Khali-e Zanan Dar Mohasebat-e Amari', *Nimeye Digar*, Winter (1987) 16–23.
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26. Industrial Management Institute, *The Statistical Survey of the Industries of IDRO*, (Tehran: IMI, 1980) pp. 23–4.
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'Mamasani Women: Changes in the Division of Labour Among Sedentarized Pastoral People of Iran', in E. Leacock, H. I. Safa and contributors, *Women's Work Development and Division of Labour by Gender*, (Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1986). See also A. A. Nikkholgh, 'The Role of Rural Iranian Women in Production', and M. McDonald Safai, 'A Redefinition of Women's Contribution to Agricultural production in Amlash, Iran', in M. Singh Das (ed.), *Roles of Women in Muslim Countries*, (New Delhi: M. D. Publication, 1991).

28. *Zan-e Rooz*, (24 Mordad 1365/August 1986).
29. B. Bamdad, *From Darkness...*, p. 112.
30. E. Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights...*, p. 85.
31. Eco of Iran, *Iran Almanac*, (1970), p. 529.
32. S. Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1987) p. 92.

CHAPTER 3 ISLAMISTS AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

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2. W. Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970) p. 144. See also pp. 34–75 and 104–70. While Reich's causal explanations of fascist behaviour are debatable, the description of syndromes and patterns of such behaviours is extremely illuminating.
3. See for example, L. Cakdwekk, 'Reproducers of the Nation: Women and the Family in Fascist Policy', in D. Forgacs (ed.), *Rethinking Italian Fascism, Capitalism, Populism and Culture*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986).
4. Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, *Sima-ye Zan*...p. 46.
5. Ibid. pp. 20, 25, and 44.
6. Ayatollah Khomeini's views , as expressed in this book, shows an unmistakable contempt for women's intelligence and judgement. For example, he gives a detailed accounts of menstruation, false menstruation, post-natal blood, etc., which he described for men's benefit. During menstruation men should avoid intercourse with them and women should refrain from praying and fasting and other religious duties. Haleh Afshar is quite right in arguing that these details clearly demonstrate that Khomeini did not trust women's judgement even to recognize their vaginal discharges. How important such views are in institutionalizing women's inferiority is hard to specify. Yet if women are not capable of and cannot be trusted to recognize – at least better than their husbands – their own bodily functions, on what other matters could women's judgement and competence possibly be trusted? For a comprehensive analysis of Ayatollah Khomeini's *Touzih-al Masail*, see H. Afshar, 'Khomeini's Teachings and their Implications for Women', *Feminist Review*, 12 (October 1982).
7. See G. Thaiss, 'The Conceptualization of Social Change Through Metaphor', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, XIII, 1–2 (1978) p. 12.

8. W. Reich, *The Mass Psychology* ..., p. 57.
9. M. Motahari, *Nezam-e Huquq-e Zan dar Islam* (The System of Women's Rights in Islam, (Qum: Sadra Publishers, 1357/1979) p. 121.
10. Ibid. pp. 173–5 and 182.
11. M. Motahari, *Massaleh-ye Hejab* (The Question of Hejab), (Qum: Islami Publishers, n.d.) p. 103.
12. Ibid, pp. 51–7 and 69–79.
13. Ibid, p. 91–3.
14. Ibid.
15. Motahari, *Nezam-e Huquq-e*....p. 113.
16. Ibid. pp. 22–3.
17. Mojahedeen supporters provided the bulk of the anti-Shah demonstrations of 1978–9 and were instrumental in Ayatollah Khomeini's ascent to power. After the revolution, Mojahedeen became a major oppositional force against the new regime and waged an unsuccessful war against the regime in 1981, losing thousands of Mojahedeen rank-and-file. As a result of continuous suppression as well as severe internal organizational strife, the Mojahedeen have lost their mass-based support in Iran. For a comprehensive account of Mojahedeen's history see E. Abrahamian, *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedeen*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 1986).
18. On the importance of the character of Fatima for Twelver Shiism, see J. A. Bill and J. A. Williams, 'Shi'i Islam and Roman Catholicism; An Ecclesial and Political Analysis', in K. C. Ellis (ed.), *The Vatican, Islam, and the Middle East*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press,1987).
19. A. Shariati, *Fatima is Fatima* (Fatemeh Fatemeh Ast), translated by L. Bakhtiar (Tehran: The Shariati Foundation, n.d.) p. 58.
20. Ibid. pp. 60 and 69.
21. Ibid. p. 117.
22. Ibid. p. 119.
23. Ibid., p. 225.
24. F. Sabbah, *Women in the Muslim Unconscious*, (New York, Oxford, and Toronto: Pergamon Press, 1988) p. 118.
25. Shariati, Fatima is Fatima ..., pp. 111–12.
26. For Shariati's arguments in favour of an Islamic Protestantism which would awaken the revolutionary spirit of Islam see A. Shariati, 'Where Shall we Begin?', in F. Rajaee, (ed.), *What is to be Done: The Enlightened Thinkers and an Islamic Renaissance*, (Houston: The Institute for Research in Islamic Studies, 1986).

CHAPTER 4 SECULAR INTELLECTUALS

1. Iranian historians have traced the political influence and importance of the clerics to the mass movements of the late 1800s. See, among others, H. Nateq, *Saraghaz-e Ghodrat-e syiasi va Eghtesadi-e Mollayon* The Beginning of Economic-Political Power of Clerics, *Alefba*, Second period, 2, (Spring 1984) 1.22, p. 40; and F. Adamiat, *Ideologiy-e* .... pp.35–50.

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3. The statement of Bazargan's group, cited in *Iran Times,* 918, (3 Tir 1369/June 23, 1989).
4. On Sassanid Iran see C. Huart, *Ancient Persia and Iranian Civilization,* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1927) p. 161. The Persian sources provide valuable information on different forms of marriage in Zoroastrian Iran and the legal rights and status of wives within them. See M. A. Azargoshasb, *Magham-e Zan dar Iran-e Bastan,* (Women's Status in Ancient Iran), (Tehran: n.d.), and N. Saheb-ol Zamani, *Zan dar Huquq-e Sasani,* (Women in Sassanid Law), (Tehran: 1982), reprinted by Women's Independent Movement Outside Iran.
5. See G. Tillion, *The Republic of Cousins: Women's Oppression in Mediterranean Society,* translated by Q. Hoar (London: Al Saqi Books, 1983) p. 30.
6. F. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics In Modern Muslim Society,* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987) p. 32.
7. F. Sabbah, *Women in the Muslim ...,* pp. 50 and 97.
8. F. Mernissi, 'Virginity and Patriarchy', in A. Al-Hibri, (ed.), *Women and Islam,* (Oxford, New York, Toronto: Pergamon Press, 1982) p. 183.
9. P. Vielle, 'Iranian Women in Family Alliance and Sexual Politics', in Beck and Keddie (eds), *Women in the Muslim...,* pp. 461–2.
10. M. F. Akhundzadeh, *Maktubat* (Writings), (Tehran: Mard-e Emroz Publishers, 1985) pp. 119–35.
11. F. Adamiat, *Andisheh-haye Mirza Aghakhan-e Kermani* (The Thoughts of Mirza Aghakhan-e Kermani), (Tehran: Tahouri Publishers, 1967) p. 157.
12. Ibid. pp. 194–5.
13. A. Kasravi, *Khaharan va Dokhtaran-e Ma* (Our Sisters and Daughters), second edition (Bethesda, Md: Iranbooks, 1992) pp. 13–31.
14. Ibid. pp. 34–6 and 45.
15. Ibid. p. 48.
16. As Abrahamian has rightly points out, Iranian writers have kept generally silent about this conservative and sexist side of Kasravi, highlighting only his progressive side. See E. Abrahamian, 'Ahmad Kasravi: Nasyonalyst-e Modafe Yekparchegi-ye Iran' (Ahmad Kasravi: Nationalist Advocate of Iran's Integrity), in *Kankash,* 1, 2 and 3, (Spring 1988), pp. 214–15.
17. M. E. Bastani-Parizi, *Siasat va Eghtesad dar asr-e Safavi* (Politics and Economy in Safavid Era), (Tehran: Safi Alishah Publishers, 1970) pp. 276–95.
18. N. Tohidi, 'Masaleh Zanan va Rowshanfekran' (Women's Question and Intellectuals), *Nimeh Digar,* 10, (Winter 1368/1990) pp. 74–5.
19. The Third Force was an organization formed by Khalil Maleki, a Marxist intellectual in 1952. The Third Force fully supported Mossadegh's government and denounced the interference of the clergy in politics. It praised Marxism as an analytical tool but denounced the Tudeh Party's blind following of Soviet politics. This

was the reason Maleki left the Tudeh Party in 1947. The Third Force called for social reforms including land distribution and women's suffrage. After the 1953 coup the Third Force changed its name to Society of Iranian Socialists and was politically active until the early 1960s. For more information on Khalil Maleki and his Third Force see H. Katouzian, *Khaterat-e Khalil Maleki* (Khalil Maleki's Memoirs), (London: Jebhe Publishers, 1981).

20. J. Al-i Ahmad, *Occidentosis: A Plague From the West*, Translated by R. Campbell, (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1984) p. 70.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid. pp. 95–6.
23. J. Al-i Ahmad, *Dar Khedmat va Khianat-e Rowshanfekran* (On the Services and Disservice of Intellectuals), (Tehran, n.d.) p. 125.
24. Ibid. pp. 136–9.
25. R. Baraheni, *The Crowned Cannibals: Writings of Repression in Iran*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1977) p. 47.
26. Ibid. p. 46.
27. R. Baraheni, *Tarikh-e Mozakar*, (The Masculine History), cited in N. Tohidi, 'Masaleh Zanan...' p. 72.
28. F. Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992) pp. 137–40.
29. H. C. Hillmann, *A Lonely Woman: Forugh Farrokhzad and Her Poetry*, (Washington DC: Mage Publishers, 1987) pp. 24 and 144.
30. Ibid., p. 31.

CHAPTER 5 SEXUAL POLITICS OF THE LEFT

1. L. Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983) p. 96.
2. B. Brodsky Farnsworth, 'Communist Feminism: Its Synthesis and Demise', in C. R. Berkin and C. M. Lovett, *Women, War & Revolution*, (New York and London: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980), p. 147.
3. L. Vogel, *Marxism and...*, p. 122.
4. V. I. Lenin, *Emancipation of Women: From the Writings of V. I. Lenin*, (New York: International Publishers, 1973) pp. 68–9.
5. C. Zetkin, cited in P. Foner (ed.), *Clara Zetkin's Selected Writings* (New York: International Publishers, 1984) p. 77.
6. A. Holt, translation and commentaries, *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*, (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1977) p. 142.
7. Ibid. p. 118–19.
8. Ibid. p. 51.
9. See Foner, *Clara Zetkin...*, pp. 20–3.
10. Ibid. p. 25.
11. Holt, op. cit. p. 30.
12. A. Kollontai, 'Towards a History of the Working Women's Movement in Russia', in Holt, *Selected Writings of...*, pp 45–51.
13. See Foner, *Clara Zetkin...*, p. 116.

14. Ibid. p. 79.
15. Vogel, *Marxism and...*, p. 110.
16. Brodsky Farnsworth, 'Communist Feminism...', p. 148.
17. A. Adler, (ed.) *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, (London: Ink Links & Humanities Press, 1980) pp. 211–17.
18. Ibid. pp. 211–14.
19. Ibid., pp. 215–16.
20. The Tudeh Party was formed in 1941 by a group of Iranian communists, mostly from the group of 'Fifty Three' Marxists imprisoned under Reza Shah. It was the typical communist party established under the guidance of the Comintern, and following a pro-Soviet policies in Iran. Despite several splits within the party and its brutal suppression after the CIA coup of 1953, the party continued its activities outside Iran, and resumed its activities inside the country after the revolution of 1979.
21. A. Ghassemi, 'Maramnameh-e Hezb-e Tudeh Iran' (The Tudeh Party's Manifesto). in *The Workers' Social-democratic and* ... pp. 249–51 and 260–5.
22. Kambakhsh, *Nazari Beh...*, pp. 82–3.
23. *Bidari-ye Ma* (Our Awakening) 1, 2 (1323/1944).
24. *Bidari-ye Ma* 1, 6, (1323/1944).
25. *Bidari-ye Ma...*, 1, 3, (1323/1944).
26. F. P. Azad, 'Naghsh-e Zanan dar Enghelab-e Iran' (Women's Role in the Iranian Revolution), *Donya*, 5, (Tehran: 1359/1980).
27. V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1975).
28. B. Warren, *Imperialism Pioneer of Capitalism*, (London: Verso, 1980) p. 48.
29. J. Degras, J. (ed.), *The Communist International 1919–1943 Documents*, Vol. 1, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922) p. 109.
30. Ibid. pp. 382–9.
31. Ibid. p. 382.
32. R. Ulyanovsky, *National Liberation*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978) pp. 40–6.
33. See J. Beinin, 'The Communist Movement and Nationalist Political Discourse in Nasserist Egypt', *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 4, Autumn 1987.
34. G. Kitching, *Development and Underdevelopment in Historical Perspective*, (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), pp. 2 and 175.
35. See M. Canovan, *Populism*, (London and New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981) pp. 253–5 and 291–2.
36. A. Rahnema and F. Nomani, *The Secular Miracle*, (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1990) pp. 4–5.
37. For an analysis of class bases of the Iranian left see E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 328–82 and 480–1. Abrahamian's analysis however, is primarily focused on the social background of the Tudeh Party.
38. *Haqiqat*, 'Women, Hejab and Anti-Imperialist Struggle' (Tehran: no. 18, Tir 1359/July 1980), cited in Ettehadieh-e Kommunistha, *Ba Selah-e Naghd*, (Winter 1365/1986).

39. Rahe-Kargar (15, 20 Esfand 1358/March 1980).
40. The Peykar organization came to existence when, in late 1970s, the leadership of the Mojahedeen outside prison discarded their Islamic ideology and adopted Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. They dropped the name Mojahedeen after the revolution, when the religious leaders of the Mojahedeen were released from prison and resumed their activities.
41. *Peykar,* 'On Revolutionary Movement of the Toiling Women', (24, 27 Bahman 1359/February 1981).
42. M. Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, (California: The Crossing Press, 1983) p. 9.
43. R. Hamilton, 'The Collusion with Patriarchy: A Psychoanalytic Account' in R. Hamilton and M. Barrett (eds), *The Politics of Diversity: Feminism, Marxism and Nationalism,* (Montreal: Book Centre, 1986) 385–97.

CHAPTER 6 THE FEDAYEEN

1. *Nabard-e Khalgh.* No. 7, May 1976, cited in B. Jazani, *Capitalism and Revolution in Iran: Selected Writings of Bizhan Jazani,* (London: Zed Press, 1980) p. iv.
2. V. Moghadam, 'Socialism or Anti-Imperialism? The Left and Revolution in Iran' *New Left Review* 166, (1987) pp. 5–57.
3. *Kar,* 'About the Class Character of the State' (Tehran, no. 61, 13 Khordad 1359/June 1980).
4. Unless otherwise stated, all references to Fedayeen or Fedaii Organization in this and following chapter are to Fedayeen Aksariat.
5. *Keyhan,* (26 Dey 1357/January 1979).
6. *Middle East Report,* Nos 75/76 (March/April 1979) p. 32.
7. Ibid.
8. A. Rahnema & F. Nomani, *The Secular Miracle...* p. 171.
9. Abrahamian, *Iran Between...* p. 480.
10. *Ketab-e Jom'eh,* 'Goftego Ba Yek Zan-e Enghelabi' (Interview with a Revolutionary Woman), (no. 30, Esfand 1358/1980), pp. 100–5. See also Pouran Bazargan's 'Khatereh-e Man As Mosharekat-e Zanan Dar Bakhshi As Jonbesh-e Mosalahaneh Du Daheh 40–50' (My Memories of Women's Participation in Two Decades of Armed Struggle), *Arash* (Nos 25 & 26, Paris, March/April 1993).
11. My conversation with Mihan Jazani (Ghoreishi), July 1990.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. A. Dehghani, *Cherik-e Fadaii-ye Khalgh Rafigh Ashraf-e Dehghani Sokhan Migooyad* (The People's Fedaii, Comrade Ashraf Dehghani Speaks) (Iran's National Front Publication outside the Country, 1971/1352) pp. 32–34.
15. Ibid.
16. 'Interview with a...', p. 101.
17. My conversation with Heybat Ghafari, a member of the Central Committee and Political Bureau of OIPF, June 1990.

18. *Kar* (2, 24 Esfand 1357/March 1979).
19. *Kar,* 'In Honour of International Women's Day', (50, 22 Esfand 1358/ March 1980).
20. Keyhan, (22 Mordad 1358/1979).
21. On workplace councils after the revolution in Iran, see S. Rahnema, 'Work Councils in Iran: The Illusions of Workers' Control', *Industrial and Economic Democracy: An International Journal,* 13, (February 1991), and A. Bayat, *Workers' Councils in Iran,* (London: Zed Press, 1987).
22. *Kankash,* (Spring 1367/1989). Nos. 2/3, pp. 82–3.
23. E. Abrahamian, (1989) op. cit., pp. 155–6.
24. *Ettelaat* (20 Tir 1358/July 1979).
25. *Mardom,* (96, 28 Aban 1358/November 1980).
26. *Mardom,* (65, 22 Mehr 1358/September 1980).
27. *Kar,* (16, Khordad 1358/June 1979).
28. Ibid.
29. *Kar,* 'Speeches of the OIPFG candidates', (25, 15 Mordad 1358/July 1979).
30. Ibid.
31. My conversation with Samad Rahaii, a former Fedaii cadre, June 1990.
32. My conversation with Ali Keshtgar, member of the Political Bureau of the Fedaii Organization, June 1990.
33. My conversation with Samad Rahaii.
34. My conversation with Faranak, a former Fedaii sympathizer, August 1990.
35. My conversation with A. Keshtgar.
36. *Kar* (Aghaliat), (67, 24 Tir 1359/July 1980).
37. Ibid. The translation of this article from A. Tabari and N. Yeganeh, *In the Shadow of Islam: The Women's Movement in Iran,* (London: Zed Press, 1982) pp. 127–9.
38. *Kar,* (Aksariat), (66, 18 Tir 1359/July 1980), translation from Tabari and Yeganeh.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. In 1981, when the majority of the Central Committee of the Fedaii Aksariat decided to dissolve the Organization and merge with the Tudeh Party, a part of the leadership objecting to this merger, along with many of the members of the specialized Commissions of the Central Committee and a part of the organization, split and formed a new Fedaii Organization, retaining the name OIPF and dropping the title Aksariat. With the publicity of the Tudeh Party and the Fedayii Aksariat this split came to be known as the Keshtgar Group.
42. My conversation with Haleh (pseudonym), a founder of the NUW, and member of the organization's first Executive Committee and Editorial Board, July 1990.
43. My conversation with H. Ghafari.
44. See, for example, *Kar,* 38, 39, 40, 41, 43 and 44 (Tehran, 1358/1979).
45. A. P. Mendel, *Dilemmas of Progress in Tsarist Russia,* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1961) p. 12.

46. B. Parham (pseudonym), interview with Saeed Rahnema, 'Rebirth of Social Democracy in the Iranian Left Movement', paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Middle East Studies Association, San Antonio, November 1990.

CHAPTER 7 THE NATIONAL UNION OF WOMEN

1. S. Rowbatham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).
2. *Keyhan*, (16 Esfand 1357/February 1979).
3. *Ayandegan*, (7 Esfand 1357/March 1979).
4. See, for example, *Ayandegan*, (13 Esfand 1357/March 1979).
5. *Keyhan*, (17 Esfand 1357/March 1979).
6. Details of the demands were published in *Keyhan*, (19 Esfand 1357/March 1979).
7. *Keyhan*, (17 Esfand 1357/March 1979).
8. Ibid.
9. K. Millett, *Going to Iran*, (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan 1982) p. 163.
10. See, for example, H. Nateq and G. Ghazinoor's articles in *Keyhan*, (21 Esfand 1357/March 1979).
11. My conversation with Mihan Jazani.
12. An ex-political prisoner and wife of Khosrow Golsorkhi, a celebrated and widely known Marxist martyr executed by the Shah's regime after his televised trial in 1971–2. Atefeh's collaboration with the NUW, however was short-lived.
13. *Keyhan*, (9 Farvardin 1358/March 1979).
14. My conversation with Haleh.
15. On the 17th of Shahrivar (August 1978) the Shah's police opened fire on a demonstration in Jaleh Square in Tehran. The true number of casualties is still unknown. The clerics, however, claimed inflammatory figures and used the event to mobilize forces around the slogan that demanded the Shah's downfall.
16. Ayatollah Khomeini's speech on the occasion of [Islamic] Woman's day, 26 Ordibehesht 1358/May 1979, cited in Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, *Image of Women...*, p. 97.
17. Ayatollah Khomeini addressing Radio and Television employees, Shahrivar 1358/September 1979, cited in Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, *Image of Women ...*, p. 66.
18. My conversation with Minoo (pseudonym), one of the cadres of the National Union of Women. The same story was mentioned by Haleh.
19. Ibid.
20. My conversation with Haleh.
21. *Keyhan*, (1 Bahman 1357/January 1979).
22. My conversation with Zohreh, a founder of NUW, member of the organization's first Executive Committee, and Editorial Board, summer 1989.

23. My conversation with H. Nateq, prominent historian and activist, a founder of the NUW and member of its first Executive Committee, July 1990.
24. S. Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance ...*, p. 11.
25. *Barabari* (Equality), n.d. This was the first issue of the NUW's central organ, published for the first May Day celebration after the Shah's downfall.
26. Ibid.
27. My conversation with Ali Keshtgar.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. S. Evans, *Personal Politics*, (New York: Vantage Books, 1980) p. 114.

CHAPTER 8 FAILED SOCIALIST-FEMINIST EXPERIENCE

1. This was my translation of Karen Sacks, 'Engels Revisited: Women, the Organization and Production and Private Property', in R. R. Reiter (ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, (London: Monthly Review Press, 1975).
2. *Ferdowsi*, 29 (8 Khordad 1358/May 1979).
3. Ibid.
4. S. Evans, Personal Politics..., pp. 116–19.
5. My conversation with Mihan Jazani.
6. My conversation with Maryam (pseudonym), April 1990.
7. As will be described later, after the Aghaliat split one or two more issues of the journal was published in the United States (in English) by the Fedaii Aghaliat sympathizers.
8. *Barabari*, 1, 1, n.d.
9. *Zanan Dar Mobarezeh*, 3 ('Dey 1358/January 1980').
10. Ibid.
11. I have taken the translation of this essay from Tabari and Yeganeh, *In the Shadow of...*, pp. 143–53.
12. My conversation with Zohreh.
13. N. Yeganeh, 'Women's Struggles in the Islamic Republic of Iran', In Tabari and Yeganeh *In the Shadow of ...*, p. 68.
14. Ibid.
15. Details of these demands appeared in *Ayandegan*, (11 June 1358/May 1979).
16. My conversation with Haleh.
17. Besides the Society of Muslim Women, the Mojahedeen had other organizations for mobilization of their female sympathizers. These were Society of Muslim Mothers (Anjoman-e Madaran-e Musalman) and Society of Muslim Sisters (Anjoman-e Khaharan-e Muslman). For more information on women's status in the Mojahedeen organization see E. Abrahamian, *Radical Islam* ... pp. 232–4 and 181–2.
18. My conversation with Haleh.
19. Ibid. This event was also recalled by Mihan and Zohreh.

20. *Ayandegan*, (5 Khordad 1358/May 1979).
21. *Ettelaat*, (21 Khordad 1358/June 1979).
22. The National Democratic Front of Iran (NDFI) had announced its formation on 5 March 1979 (15 Esfand 1357) in a large assembly organized by secular political forces in a commemoration ceremony for Dr Mossadegh. The NDFI hoped to create an organization, encompassing all progressive forces and major anti-imperialist political organizations. While the Fedaii, the Mojahedeen and the Tudeh Party had representation in the ceremony and initially supported the NDFI, they subsequently did not join NDFI in its campaign in defence of democracy and democratic freedoms which they believed were peripheral to the goals of anti-imperialist struggle. This greatly assisted the fundamentalists' attack against the NDFI. The NDFI was the first political organization banned by the new regime. Some of the leaders of the NDFI were later arrested or forced into exile and some, like Shokrolah Paknezhad, were executed by the regime. For more details about NDFI, see H. Showkat, *Negahi as Daroon Beh Jonbesh-e Chap: Goftehgou ba Mehdi Khanbaba Tehrani*: (A Look from within the Iranian Left Movement: Interview with Mehdi Khanbaba Tehrani), (Saarbrucken: Baztab, 1989).
23. *Ayandegan*, (4 Khordad 1358/May 1979).
24. *Keyhan*, (5 Khordad 1358/May 1979).
25. The NDFI 'Call For a Protest March', 21 Mordad 1358/August 1979, cited in *Daftarhay-e Azadi* (Azadi Notebooks), Book 2, (Paris: Bahman 1364/1985).
26. F. Halliday, 'The Iranian Revolution and its Implications', *New Left Review*, 166, (1987) p. 37.
27. My conversation with Haleh...
28. Ibid.
29. Iran Bureau of Statistics, *A Report on the Characteristics of Marriage in Iran* (*Vizhegiha-ye Ezdevaj Dar Iran*), (Tehran: Plan and Budget Organization, 1985) p. 2.
30. *Ettelaat*, (20 Tir 1358/July 1979).
31. Sohrab (pseudonym), a veteran Fedaii and member of the OIPF Central Committee, in *Dar Rah-e Kongrek*, second period, (1 Shahrivar 1368/August 1989).
32. For example, in No. 3, an article and a statement dealt with the dependent character of the Tudeh party and the opportunism and reactionary nature of its support for the Islamic regime's policies on women.
33. Faranak also recalled one of her major problems being the endless match-making of these women who wanted to 'fix her a good husband from among the God-seeking men' of the neighbourhood. My conversation with Faranak, May 1991.
34. My conversation with H. Nateq.
35. Ibid.
36. My conversation with Haleh.
37. Ibid.
38. My conversation with M. Jazani.

39. My conversation with Zohreh.
40. S. Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance...*, p. 12.
41. L. Sargent, 'New Left Women and Men: The Honeymoon is Over', in L. Sargent (ed.) *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* (Boston, Mass.: South End Press, 1981) p. xviii.
42. D. Kevin, *Arab Voices ....* p. 186.
43. H. Shadi, 'Conversation with Nawal-El-Saadawi', *Nimeye Digar* 3 & 4 (Winter 1364/1986) pp. 37–42.
44. G. R. Insafpoor, Ghodrat va Magham-e..., p. 445.
45. E. Sanasarian, *Women's Rights Movements...* p. 73.

CONCLUSION

1. According to a statement issued by the European Parliament, between August 1991 and August 1992, more than 113 000 women have been arrested in Iran, on charges of improper veiling and 'corruption'. See *Iran Times* (4 Mehr 1371/September 1992).
2. *Iran Times* (11 Tir, 1372/July 1993).
3. Z. Rahnavard, *Zan-e Rooz*, (21 Bahman 1368/1989).
4. Mohajer, Leila 'Women's Movement, Revolutionary Movement and the Draft Program' *Dar Rah-e Kongereh,* The Organ of the First Fedaii Congress, Paris: No. 6, Bahman 1367/1989.
5. *Payam-e Kargar*, 81 (Esfand 1369/ March 1991).
6. H. Hartmann, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union', in L. Sargent (ed.) *Women and Revolution...*, p. 33.
7. L. Segal. *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism*, (London: Virago Press, 1988) p. 231.

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