

## Iranian Women: Assessing Achievements and Challenges

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Iranian society is a shifting society with unpredictable features. What appears predictable, however, is that Iranian women have achieved a degree of self-consciousness and self-expression that is unprecedented in our modern times. Moreover, Iranian women's ability to fight for their rights and rightful place in society has placed the state under enormous pressure to respond positively to such demands. The dramatic growth of educational and professional capacities of Iranian women has become a social problem in a country torn by a festering conflict between traditional and modern structures. Apart from the need for women to participate in the political processes, tensions remain over the system's lack of capacity to generate equilibrium

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between women's demands and their satisfaction. This imbalance has increased the potential for a huge social problem in a society in which females constitute 64% of university graduates. Women have become a major presence in sports and social activities. The number of female laborers is growing steadily. More and more women are demanding full equality in pay and job opportunity and benefits. The increasing gap between women's expectations and the state's capabilities is becoming intolerable, with far-reaching implications and complications on the horizon. Increasingly, it has become very difficult for Iranian women to find a suitable match (marriage partner) given a custom for women to marry at their status or higher. With no social institutions to translate this frustration into an organized resistance, the likelihood of a social upheaval is weak. But this discontent is growing and is bound to be a source of concern in the near future.

In recent years, women's struggles have spilled over from political-cultural domains into sport arenas. Laleh Seddiq, who a few years ago became the first Iranian woman allowed to compete against men in sports since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, won the national automobile racing championship in March 2005. In June 2005, two Iranians became the first Muslim women to have ever climbed Mount Everest.<sup>1</sup> This paper demonstrates how women's struggle compelled the Islamic Republic of Iran to reconcile Islamic laws with modernity and civil society. The Iranian women have become highly critical of such core issues as wage disparities and gender inequality. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad faces an irreversible trend, one in which Iranian women's new identities cannot be ignored. The progress toward achieving further women's

rights depends on the extent to which the Ahmadinejad administration comes to terms with new realities.

### **Educational Attainment and Participation**

During 1956-1966, the female literacy rate in Iran increased from 8 percent to 17.9 percent. In 1971, some 25.5 percent of women were literate.<sup>2</sup> Before the revolution, 35 percent of them were literate; by the late twentieth century the rate had reached 74 percent.<sup>3</sup> Today, Iranian women are among the most educated and accomplished in the Muslim world. The relative share of females in total primary-level enrollment increased from 38.4 percent in 1976/77 to 47.2 percent in 1993/94.<sup>4</sup>

In the same period, the junior secondary-level enrollment increased from 36 percent to 43.5 percent female, and the senior secondary-level soared from 39.6 percent to 45.4 percent.<sup>5</sup> Iranian women still lag behind their male counterparts. The UN data suggests, however, that educational enrollments, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels, continue to be in favor of males, and that the illiteracy rate is considerably higher among females than males.<sup>6</sup>

Under the Shah's regime, about a third of university students were female; by 1999 women had made up fully half of new admissions. Educational opportunities in the 1980s and 1990s have surely paid professional dividends for women. In 1999, one in three Iranian physicians was a woman. In the post-revolutionary era, many women gained access to higher education, making it possible for them to enter public domains. This "coming-out-of-the-kitchen" phenomenon has resulted in the emergence of women as social and economic agents in



public life. No longer can they be oppressed.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, there are still areas of Iranian society that do not recognize women's participation as strongly as, perhaps, they should. Although an increasing number of women have been nominated as political candidates and an increasing percentage of eligible women have participated in elections, women are still noticeably underrepresented in the national legislative bodies. While women constitute about a third of all public sector employees, they hold less than 5 percent of decision-making and managerial positions. The number of women parliamentarians increased from four in the first parliament to nine in the fourth parliament, but women constitute only 3.3 percent of the total number (277) of parliamentarians. Several occupations still restrict the employment of women—they cannot be appointed as judges or recruited into the armed forces.

Under pressure from women's political lobbying, the restrictions facing women becoming civil engineers were lifted, despite the fact that quotas for women medical doctors remained.<sup>8</sup> The rise in participation of females in the labor force, increased political participation, and educational attainment has become possible through the gradual change in the status of women. In 2000, the Majlis passed a bill proposed by its Committee on Education and Research to allow single women to apply for the Ministry of Higher Education scholarship to study abroad. The future of the bill continues to be uncertain at this point.<sup>9</sup>

In December 2002, 11 of the female parliamentarians submitted a bill to the Majles that imposed a moratorium on executions by stoning of women accused of engaging in extra-marital or premarital sex. Initially,

the bill was not approved. Under the pressure from the European Union, however, the state was spurred into action. As a result, Hojjatoleslam Mohsen Gharavian, a leading figure in the conservative-controlled judiciary, announced that “stoning has been provisionally suspended due to its negative effects.”<sup>10</sup>

The reformist era surely provided a space for women to organize, promote gender equality, and show resistance to unfair and arcane laws. But they faced many difficulties, as the Guardian Council blocked or eviscerated more and more of the many other legislative measures introduced by women deputies.<sup>11</sup>

In 1988, one expert writes, seven women stood for elections to the Council of Experts, a body composed almost exclusively of clerics and charged with selecting the Supreme Leader. All of these women were rejected on the grounds that they lacked the proper credentials. In the following year, however, many women stood as candidates for local council elections. Some five thousand women were given a chance to run for 220,000 local councils seats in cities, towns, and villages across the country. Nearly three hundred women were elected to the local city councils. In some cities, women gained the majority of votes. Among the 15 members of the Tehran city council were three women, including Jameileh Kadivar.<sup>12</sup> In the legal sphere, in 1998, seven women were given licenses to open and head notary offices, a job devoted exclusively to men and clerics previously.<sup>13</sup>

## Labor Force

Since the late 1980s, Iran has adopted free market policies, including privatization, deregulation, and further devaluation of the riyal (Iranian currency). This liberal policy approach has increased Iranian women's participation, albeit not for the reasons advocated by neoliberal policies. Labor force participation by women has soared since the beginning of the 1990s. This acceleration in female labor force, however, is attributed largely to increased poverty and income disparity that has been accentuated by the market economy. As was the case during the Iran-Iraq War, the deteriorating economic conditions made it imperative for many women with families to take up work outside of their homes in order to survive.<sup>14</sup>

On balance, employment rose from 8.8 million in 1976 to 14.6 million in 1996. There was a modest increase in agriculture employment (13.3 percent) and larger increase in manufacturing employment (50 percent rise), which was followed by a modest increase in construction (38.8 percent) and rapid expansion of employment in the service sector (137 percent).<sup>15</sup> Women's share of the total economically active population by 1996 had reached 12.7 percent; of the urban economically active population, 11.7 percent; of the urban employed population 11.2 percent; of the total public-sector wage earners, 16.4 percent.<sup>16</sup> Of the 271,565 unemployed women, 53 percent were urban and 47 percent rural.<sup>17</sup>

The females in the field of education make up 44 percent for the total country, but it was much higher in the urban areas. Women's share of health services was 39.3 percent of the total country, though it was

higher in urban areas (40.4 percent) than in the rural areas (33 percent).<sup>10</sup> Ministries with relatively low female involvement included Culture and Higher Education (20 percent female), Labor and Social Security (11.3 percent), Agriculture (7.2 percent), Development and Housing (13.7 percent), and Culture and Islamic Guidance (17.8 percent).<sup>19</sup>

Iran has one million and four hundred thousand women breadwinners, according to a Ministry of Welfare and Social Security, half of those have no regular paid work or source of income. Mohammad Reza Vaez-Mahdavi, deputy minister for planning affairs, told ISNA that the ministry has plans to provide insurance cover for 700, 000 women breadwinners. Under the Fourth Economic Development Plan (2005-2010), according to one source, the government is obliged to render insurance services to retirees. The programs to empower women will be fully enforced.<sup>20</sup> Women breadwinners, Vaez-Mahdavi noted, will be provided with employment opportunities to improve the quality of life and boost their social welfare status.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Rise of Feminism**

Throughout the Muslim world, the struggle for women's rights has become trendy. Female Muslim scholars of different ideological orientations now argue that rights and responsibilities, as expressed in the Qur'an, at both moral and contextual levels, lie with the individual. Inheritance rights and property ownership are assigned to the individual. Likewise, marriage is a contract between two individuals. Women participate in the legal process as autonomous individuals. They can take legal actions against others, be sued, serve as witnesses in

legal cases, and be parties to contracts. Even performing religious duties must be treated as an individual responsibility.<sup>22</sup>

Iranian secular and Islamic women alike have begun to reject their confinement to the home and have managed to occupy the public sphere through their economic activities. By doing so, they have significantly contributed to the development of civil society in Iran. Some women assert that veiling has come to stand for oppression. Refuting hijab as a way of women gaining empowerment, Haideh Moghissi argues that hijab is the symbol of a patriarchal cultural practice that cannot be legitimated under such rubrics as "protected space" and "cultural authenticity."<sup>23</sup> Others note that Islamic dress signifies liberation, resistance, and identity in the postcolonial period. Internally, they insist, Islamic dress also provides women with security, protection, success and prosperity. The adoption of dress does not confine women's place to home, but, on the contrary, legitimizes their place outside it.<sup>24</sup> Still others argue that face veiling is not mandated by the religious text and should therefore be abandoned in favor of wearing a modest dress today.<sup>25</sup>

Some Islamist women have argued that "the ideals of the revolution cannot be attained, unless women are present in the public sphere."<sup>26</sup> Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have actively promoted women's rights in both rural and urban areas. The Iranian Islamic Women's Institute, headed by Azam Taleghani, is one such NGO. Its aim is to improve women's status by providing literacy classes, informing women of their rights, offering them free legal advice, and bolstering their financial independence with training in diverse activities, including carpet weaving, pottery works, and sewing.<sup>27</sup>

Secular women have created solidarity networks for mutual assistance. Lawyers and jurists provide legal advice. In their informal groups, they organize debates on such topics as hijab, motherhood, employment, feminism, and activism. Women's press, including Zanan, Farzaneh, Payam-e-Hajar, Zan-e Ruz, Huquq-e Zanan, Zan, Zan-e Emruz, to which secular women have regularly contributed, have provided women a valuable forum for social and political protest.<sup>28</sup> Together, the Islamic women's associations, women's religious seminaries, and secular women's informal groups have come to provide a fertile ground for civic practices, reinforcing gender solidarity and enhancing collective consciousness.<sup>29</sup>

The increasing number of third-generation feminists—that is, those who emphasize rationality over textual reinterpretations and dynamic jurisprudence—is bound to expand the ranks of opposition. The potential costs for expressing and pushing for their emerging demands have reduced. There are some risks when the new and old collide, but the rift among feminists (first, second and third generations) is unlikely to contain this crisis from spreading.

Gender equality, Ziba Mir-Hosseini regretfully notes, is a notion to which male intellectuals, religious as well as secular, still do not subscribe. They seem to concur with the gender model embedded in Shari'a legal rules. For them, gender is only part of a larger problem that will go away when their political vision is realized.<sup>30</sup> Some Iranian intellectuals argue that there is no such thing as a women's movement in the classic sense of the term, in large part because women have not created a movement that is capable of generating a political conflict

with the government. There is no active institution that pursues gender equality or fights discrimination against women. There is certainly a phenomenon called "feminism," notes Hamid Jaleepour, a sociologist at Tehran University, but no such thing as a "women's movement" capable of fighting the state. There clearly is, Jaleepour notes, a "women problem" in that there is discrimination against women in society and it is widely felt among women throughout the society. Since the Iranian society is far more developed than the Iranian state, some form of social crisis may be inevitable.

It is unclear whether the state will be able to deal/cope with this crisis or whether this problem will reach a crisis of huge proportion beyond the state's control. Some Iranian women within government circles, such as Representative Elaheh Koolae, predict this emerging social crisis and warn about its consequences.<sup>31</sup> One journalist, Mostafa Tajzadeh argues, that while adopting the wrong approach toward women's social demands will radicalize such dynamics, a right attitude could have a moderating influence on feminism in Iran.<sup>32</sup>

Feminists in Iran have generally cast their grievances and demands in Islamic terms and have relied on cultural assets to press for women's rights and equality. For example, Valentine Moghadam writes, a group of women parliamentarians petitioned Islamic clerics in October 2002 to demand that compensation paid to the family of a woman victim in a murder case be the same as that paid for a man. They justified the proposed change on the grounds that women were now working and supporting their families.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, women have increasingly relied on Islamic arguments to limit polygamy strictly.<sup>34</sup>

## Khatami's Legacy

President Mohammad Khatami's legacy was often overshadowed by the intense power struggles between those who demanded change and those who defended the status quo-loosely, Iran's reformists and hard-line conservatives. Nowhere were such power struggles more obvious than over cultural politics-that is, the real struggle over whose vision of an Islamic society should prevail. The central conflict that characterized Khatami's years was the perceived incompatibility between global and local paradigms.

Moreover, Khatami's reluctance to challenge the theocratic constitution of the Islamic Republic undermined his support for civil society and the rule of law. Because of this, Khatami's rhetoric, as one expert notes, "went no further than advocating better management of the government."<sup>35</sup> This style of leadership severely limited Khatami's ability to spearhead the popular demand for democracy and the promotion of civil society that his own election has unleashed.<sup>36</sup> The voices of change, in contrast, mainly came from the press, women's organizations, student organizations, and ethnic minorities.

Khatami galvanized voters by conducting an electoral campaign sensitive to the issues of importance to women, youth, and the underprivileged. The large majority of women across the political, social, and age spectrum voted for Khatami. These included, among others, middle-class and working-class women, Westernized as well as traditional women, and women in both large cities and small towns and villages.<sup>37</sup> Khatami's effort to foster political activity and give the press

greater freedoms energized the mass of ordinary Iranians to challenge the stagnant ideology of previous decades.<sup>38</sup>

Following his election in 1997, President Khatami created an environment conducive to women's participation. Khatami was acutely aware of women's roles in his campaign to become the country's president. He appointed a woman, Masumeh Ebtekar, as his vice president for environmental protection and appointed Zahra Shojai as his women's affairs adviser. In his second administration, he chose Zahra Rahnavard as his senior adviser on cultural affairs. Ms. Rahnavard, who later was appointed as chancellor of Al-Zahra University, a women's institution, was in fact the first woman in the Islamic Republic to head a university.<sup>39</sup> Rahnavard noted that the moral guidance of Islam can be presented through democratic methods. As an Islamic reformer, she emphasized a more dynamic interpretation of Shari'a—that is, *fiqh-e pouya*.<sup>40</sup> Khatami appointed Jameileh Kadivar, the wife of the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Ataollah Mohajerani, as his special adviser on press affairs.

Marzieh Mortazi-Langarudi, a reformist women's rights activist, argued that female activism rose during the Khatami presidency. As a result, Mortazi-Langarudi noted, "women have more self-confidence in seeking their rights.... during [the reign of] Khatami, there was no stagnation. Stagnation was before Khatami, when no one could challenge the laws that appeared holy."<sup>41</sup>

In the first two years of Khatami's presidency, the Majles enacted several laws significant to women, including a provision for readjusting the value of the *mahr* (monetary sum the husband pledges to his wife

in the marriage contract, which is payable when divorce occurs) in keeping with inflation. A law was also passed that permitted women civil servants to retire after 20 years' service.<sup>42</sup>

Women's participation in sports has become a dramatic area of successful women's struggles, involving more women and girls than in the pre-revolutionary period. Barred from being spectators at men's soccer matches, women broke through a stadium in a politically significant 1997 event. Likewise, in 2003, one soccer club announced it would admit female spectators. Women embraced such social openings.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Nobel Peace Prize and Its Implications**

The open social climate of the Khatami years, including a strengthening of civil society and expansion of freedom of expression, allowed secular feminists to participate in the women's issues. Shirin Ebadi, the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize winner, operated in a far less restrictive environment than women in the earlier years of the revolution. Views differ over the implications of the Nobel Peace Prize for Iran's internal political dynamics. Some observers reject the argument that the Islamic Republic faces serious gender problems and that drastic action must be taken to avoid a gender crisis. Others argue that Iranian society faces severe gender problems that, if not addressed properly, will adversely affect its public policy.<sup>44</sup>

The skeptics insist that this award will hold insignificant implications. It is only natural, they note, that the leaders of the declining reform movement have, after poor performance, turned to

the women's struggle for restoring their legitimacy and terminating the stalemate in which the nation finds itself. Many reformist newspapers and journals have been shut down since President Khatami's first term (1997) and many journalists have been put behind bars. Skeptics also see a disconnect between the agenda of Islamic feminists in the Majlis-who try to institutionalize legal protection of certain women's rights-and the aspirations of a younger generation that is eager to enjoy more social rights and basic freedoms.<sup>45</sup>

The persistence of signs of Islamist dominance such as buses segregated by sex and the wearing of veils has not precluded Iran's younger generation from becoming "de-Islamized" in their attitudes and thoughts. Born after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, this generation sees the "Revolution supported by their parents mainly as having failed to provide them with meaningful freedom and economic security."<sup>46</sup>

Today, Iranian women's support for international norms and regimes, as well as their wish to change archaic Islamic laws, will most likely push the country along the path of globalization. Women's struggles in Iran could arguably revitalize Iranian society, even as they face a huge task in their attempts to reduce democratic deficits and enhance gender equality. It remains to be seen whether this dynamic will pose serious challenges to the control of the theological state and the conservative religio-political establishment.

The concerns about Iran's growing gender problems seem logical, but the prediction that such problems will have a debilitating impact on the longevity of the theocratic state is overstated. Women's struggles have yet to reach a level of a formidable opposition, one that is capable of

posing a major challenge to the government. The legitimacy of internal change is even further emboldened if the ruling clerical regime has no excuse to hide behind the threat of a U.S. military intervention. This is a realistic view given the rising discontent of youth and women—once among the major supporters of President Khatami—who have become disillusioned with reformists' pledges and continue to openly question the Islamic Republic's credibility. They represent a human capital absolutely crucial to the struggle for democratic reform in Iran, and one on which democratic and social forces could count.

It is important to realize, however, that as the struggle for women's rights takes on a new, more challenging turn, the conservatives' project is not about to fade into history. Perhaps, under these circumstances, generating gender-sensitive governance is the best that can be hoped for. Iran is under increasing pressure, both regionally and internationally, to join the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), albeit with certain reservations, in part due to Iranian women's struggle, and partly in response to the global consensus and the mounting international pressure on Iran.<sup>47</sup> Many Iranian women see opportunities in playing a greater role in global civil society; they consider global institutions and conventions, such as CEDAW, a major avenue to protect and promote their rights.

### **New and Emerging Identities**

The creation of the Islamic Republic has had many unintended consequences. One such consequence was that religious authorities increasingly came to rely on popular support—particularly that of

women-for maintaining their political ascendancy.<sup>48</sup> As noted above, Iranian feminists, secular as well as Islamic, have formed a new identity for themselves that confronts traditions. They have increasingly defined themselves as women/individuals rather than exclusively as mothers and wives. In fact, experts remind us, that "a new self-consciousness and a desire to exist as an individual have emerged among them."<sup>49</sup> These women, who question traditional gender roles and identities, construct their own religious models by acquiring autonomy vis-à-vis male religious authorities. Islam, they contend, recognizes women as individuals and grants them both rights and duties. Moreover, the Qur'an describes biblical women as free agents who are expected to submit to God and are praised or chastised by God in accordance with their piety.<sup>50</sup> As such, they struggle to redefine authenticity, modernity, and rationality in such a way that they can open religion to modernity.<sup>51</sup>

Decades of ideological and political mobilization by the Islamic Republic to forge a collectivist identity on Iranian women have proved counterproductive. Many Iranian women attempt to strike a balance between the extremes of Western individualism and Islamic collectivism. Increasingly, women have become less concerned with political power, revolution, and ideology. They are more concerned with the control of their own lives within political, social, and economic institutions, whatever the ideological configurations of those institutions.<sup>52</sup> Islamic laws, one expert writes, clearly affect women's lives, their educational opportunities, family life, and career opportunities, and even their choice of dress style and color. Nevertheless, "women live their lives

both within and beyond the laws enacted by the government in power.”<sup>53</sup>

The complex nature of everyday life in Iran demonstrates that women’s reality transcends what the Islamic government does or does not do.<sup>54</sup>

All of the 89 women who sought approval from the Guardian Council to run for 2005 Presidential elections were rejected. The Ahmadinejad’s administration, which includes mostly ex-members of the Revolutionary Guard and the Ministry of Intelligence, is likely to create a lax attitude toward the international community and its legitimate concerns about Iran’s human rights situation. Some observers argue that the Ahmadinejad administration will slow the women’s struggles for improving their rights, unraveling those identities that women have constructed under Khatami presidency. But even women who have voted for Ahmadinejad argue that they are determined to safeguard their hard-won gains.<sup>55</sup>

During his tenure as Tehran’s mayor, Ahmadinejad reversed many of the changes transpired by previous moderate and reformist mayors, putting serious religious emphasis on the activities of the cultural centers founded by previous mayors. It is also said that Ahmadinejad separated elevators for men and women in the municipality offices. Hardliners under President Ahmadinejad have insisted on enforcing Iran’s strict Islamic dress code, which obliges Iranian women to wear proper hijab. There have been some reports of imposing a single university dress code on women, while not allowing perfumes and cosmetics to be used on university campuses. Ahmadinejad and his Minister of Justice have vowed that “improperly veiled women” will be treated as in un-Islamic dress. “Those who violate the Islamic dress code ... should be strongly

confronted," Morteza Bakhtiyari, the head of justice department in Khorasan-e Razavi has emphasized. Offenders face fines, lashes, or even imprisonment.<sup>56</sup>

President Ahmadinejad, however, has appointed a woman as a Vice-President. Fatemeh Javadi was appointed as Vice-President and Head of the Environment Protection Organization. Javadi's appointment indicated that President Ahmadinejad is following the footsteps of his predecessor. Javadi who holds a doctorate in geology, is expected to be the only female in the Iranian cabinet and will replace Massoumeh Ebtekar, who was the only female in the cabinet of President Khatami.

President Ahmadinejad has banned Western music from Iran's Radio and Television stations. As the head of Iran's Supreme Cultural Revolutionary Council, Ahmadinejad has promised to confront the Western cultural invasion and to promote Islamic values. Ahmadinejad's ban on media has also included censorship of the content of films. A ban on foreign movies could be the harbinger of many cultural restrictions to come. The banning of Western music is the beginning of yet another wave of cultural war at a time when Western music and films are widely available on DVDs on the black market. There are more than 3 million homes that have satellite televisions. Many Iranians listen to Voice of America, watch CNN and BBC world news. There are between 3 to 5 million internet users in Iran. An underground culture continues to dominate Iran's social and cultural life in the face of government-imposed restrictions. Modernization and technology have radically altered the cultural life of many Iranians. Closing the borders in the name of reverting to the cultural revolution of the early years of the

revolution is untenable. The social, political, and cultural evolutionary trends in Iran point in a different direction.

## Conclusion

The discourse on women's rights has drastically changed, in part due to the efforts of the former President Mohammad Khatami who placed sexual justice on his presidency's agenda, but in part because the image of women has changed and the change has been brought about chiefly by women themselves.<sup>57</sup> Looking back at the Khatami era, one can conclude that Iranian women have achieved considerable success. Yet today no-one would deny that Iranian women face many setbacks in their attempts to achieve gender equality. The fact remains that they have gained many rights in their battle against the conservatives since the early years of the Islamic Revolution. The newly educated and self-assured women have increasingly become aware of their role in society. While using different techniques, Iranian women have improved their lot noticeably and have converged along the lines of putting their legal claims into laws. A review of women's experience since the establishment of the Islamic Republic illustrates that contrary to widely held beliefs that women have lost their rights under its Islamization programs, women's educational attainment, employment opportunities, and political participation have increased.<sup>58</sup>

President Ahmadinejad faces several gender-related questions at the dawn of his presidency, but perhaps none more important than the following: (1) can women's role in the public sphere more particularly and in society more generally be curtailed? And (2) will the legitimacy

of women's rights as universally recognized human rights be denied? President Ahmadinejad is unlikely to undo social reforms and roll back gains women have made in recent years. But he is supported by conservative clerical rulers who oppose globalizing dynamics surrounding Iranian society and favor a degree of cultural conformity. Fearing that their Islamic interests and values would be compromised or undermined, the Islamic Republic's leaders, such as Ahmadinejad, will most likely tighten their grips over society.

The ruling religio-political establishment is likely to increase its control over the levers of power, including those of the parliament, presidency, and judiciary. Their combative members have routinely resorted to violence to maintain cultural conformity and the political status quo. It is hard to see how they could disrupt the unprecedented gender solidarity that has taken shape between Islamic and secular feminists. Iranian women have become deeply aware of socioeconomic disparities and gender injustices in their society. No regime can impose legal and behavioral restrictions on Iranian women, while hoping to win their trust and political support in years to come. □

## NOTES

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32. I interviewed Mostafa Tajzadeh in Tehran, summer 2003.
33. Moghadam, op. cit., p. 219.
34. Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 293.
35. Vali Nasr, "Iran," in Jeffrey Kopstein and Mark Lichback, eds., *Comparative Politics: Interests, Identities, and Institutions in a Changing Global Order*, Second ed., New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 394-430; see 423.
36. Ibid.
37. Haleh Esfandiari, "The Politics of the 'Women's Question' in the Islamic Republic, 1979-1999," in John L. Esposito and R. K. Ramazani, eds., *Iran at the Crossroads*, NY: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 75-92; see pp. 86-87.
38. Jane Howard, *Inside Iran: Women's Lives*, Washington, D.C.: Mage Publishers, 2002, p. 123.
39. Haleh Esfandiari, op. cit., p. 87.
40. She is paraphrased in Sussan Siavoshi, "Islamic Women Activists: Allies or Enemies?"

in Ramin Jahanbegloo, ed., *Iran: Between Tradition and Modernity*, Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2004, pp. 169-184; see p. 181.

41. See Iran Report, Vol. 8, No. 31, August 9, 2005, available at <<http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2005/08/31-090805.asp>>. Last visited on September 29, 2005.

42. Haleh Esfandiari, op. cit., p. 88.

43. Nikki R. Keddie, op. cit., p. 296.

44. For more information on this topic, see Mahmood Monshipouri, "The Road to Globalization Runs through Women's Struggle: Iran and the Impact of the Nobel Peace Prize," *World Affairs*, Vol. 167, No. 1, Summer 2004, pp. 3-14.

45. I am grateful to Minoos Aghaee, a Ph.D. student at Tehran University, who is completing her doctoral dissertation on global human rights, for sharing her thoughts with me on this subject.

46. Ramin Jahanbegloo, "The Deadlock in Iran: Pressures From Below," in Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Daniel Brumberg, eds., *Islam and Democracy in the Middle East*, Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003, pp. 151-156; see especially p. 153.

47. Ms. Shirin Ebadi made this point abundantly clear in a meeting that I and Mr. Alireza Taheri, the Director of the Organization for Defending the Victims of Violence, a Tehran-based NGO, had with her in the early January 2004 in Tehran, Iran.

48. Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Islam, Women and Civil Rights: The Religious Debate in the Iran of the 1990s," in Sarah Ansari and Vanessa Martin, eds., *Women, Religion and Culture in Iran*, UK: Richmond, Curzon Press, 2002, pp. 169-188; see especially p. 187.

49. Azadeh Kian-Thiebaut, "From Islamization to the Individualization of Women in Post-revolutionary Iran," in Sarah Ansari and Vanessa Martin, eds., *Women, Religion and Culture in Iran*, UK: Richmond, Curzon Press, 2002, pp. 127-142; see especially p. 141.

50. Zehra F. Arat, op. cit., p. 87.

51. Azadeh Kian-Thiebaut, op. cit., p. 141.

52. Ali Akbar Mahdi, "Iranian Women: Between Islamicization and Globalization," in Ali Mohammadi, ed., *Iran Encountering Globalization: Problems and Prospects*, New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003, pp. 47-72; see p. 67.

53. Mahnaz Kousha, *Voices From Iran: The Changing Lives of Iranian Women*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002, p. 9.

54. Ibid.

55. Charles A. Radin, "With Quiet Effect, Iranian Women Advance," *Persian Journal*, September 26, 2005. Available at <[http://www.iranian.ws/iran\\_news/publish/article\\_9100shtml](http://www.iranian.ws/iran_news/publish/article_9100shtml)>. Last visited on September 28, 2005.

56. *Persian Journal*, "Mullahs to step up crack down on women's dress in Iran," September 18, 2005, available at <[http://www.iranian.ws/iran\\_news/publish/](http://www.iranian.ws/iran_news/publish/)>

article\_9698.shtml>. Last visited on September 27, 2005.

57. Jane Howard, op. cit., p. 156.

58. Rokhsana Bahramitash, "Women's Employment in Iran: Modernization and Islamization," op. cit., p. 167.