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Iran

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IRAN

Mary Hegland

PROFILE OF IRAN

Iran lies between Iraq and, further north, Turkey to the west and Afghanistan and Pakistan to the east. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and the Caspian Sea border Iran to the north, and the Persian Gulf to the south. Iran covers 636,293 square miles.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, many people lived by herding animals. Some of the Kurds and the Shahsevan in the northwest, Qashqai, Bakhtiary, Lurs, and Kamseh in the southwest, Baluch in the southeast, and Turkmen in the northeast lived in nomadic camps, traveling with their animals in search of water and pastures. Beginning in the 1920s, the two Pahlavi shahs, Reza Shah and his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, worked to pacify tribespeople and bring them under the control of the central government. Now, nomads have largely been settled and live in villages or migrate to urban areas.

In addition to tribal groups, Iranians are ethnically diverse. A large number of Turks or Azaris live in the northwest province of Azerbaijan, which lies on the border of Turkey and Azerbaijan and Armenia, newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. To the south of this Turkish area,



also in Azerbaijan and then in villages and towns of provinces further south along the Iraqi border, live Kurds. Kurds have a centuries-long history of settled agriculture and urban living in addition to transhumance (nomadism). Kurds also live in contiguous areas across borders in Iraq and Turkey. In the southwest near the Persian Gulf and the Iraqi border live some people of Arab background who speak Arabic. About 85 percent of Iranians accept Shi'a Islam, but some adhere to Sunni Islam, including most Kurds and some Arabs. Christian Armenians and Assyrians live in western areas of Azerbaijan, for example, around Urmiyeh (Rezayeh). A large group of Armenians were settled in Julfa, next to Isfahan, and practiced handicrafts. Some Christians, and also Jews and Baha'is, left Iran in the years after the 1979 revolution and subsequent formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, although many remain. Some Zoroastrians, descendants of people who managed to hold on to their religion after the Islamic conquest in the seventh century, still live in Iran.

As much of Iranian territory is desert or semidesert, agriculturalists commonly practice irrigation. Production depends to a large degree on access to water. As an exception, the Caspian Sea coastal areas receive a great deal of rain and produce rice, tea, and citrus fruits as well as many other crops. Until the 1960s, Iranians primarily worked in agriculture, trading, or handwork. Since the oil boom of the 1960s and even more the 1970s, the economy has relied primarily on the sale of oil and less on exported Persian carpets and fruits and nuts. Construction, factories, government service, education, health services, and businesses and services have expanded due to the oil money. In recent years, many agricultural products and manufactured goods have been imported.

Prior to the 1979 revolution, shahs (monarchs) ruled the country, largely through balancing and playing off against each other regional and tribal leaders. The last two shahs were able to take power away from such leaders and centralize power. With the help of concessions and then oil sales, the Pahlavi shahs strengthened the armed forces, police, rural gendarmerie, and secret police. Although they instituted modern services, improved infrastructure, education, and health services, and the economy boomed, they did not bring about political liberalization. In the 1970s, Iranians became increasingly dissatisfied with the government. People lacked political freedoms. Less well-off people resented their inequitable access to improved standards of living and financial gain. The clergy and traditional classes begrudged their lack of power and U.S. political and cultural influence.

On February 11, 1979, Iranians rose in massive marches, demonstrations, and strikes and overthrew the Pahlavi regime. No political groups, religious or secular, had been allowed to operate under the shah's regime. The clergy, though, had used religious spaces, gatherings, and organizations in the political struggle against the shah. They were thus well placed to take over leadership after the fall of the Pahlavi government. They held an elec-

tion for the formation of an Islamic Republic. Since then, Iran has had a Shi'a Muslim government, largely manned by Shi'a clerics.

The leader of the revolutionary movement, Ayatollah Khomeini, became the first supreme leader. Upon his death in 1989, President Ali Khamene'i became his successor. Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was elected president in July 1989. Following him, Mohammad Khatami was elected in 1997 and reelected in 2001. Iranians elect their president, representatives to Parliament, and other officials from a roster of candidates approved by the government. The Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, appoints six clerics to the twelve-member Guardian Council. The parliament (Majlis) elects the other six from candidates presented by the Supreme Judicial Council. The Guardian Council can veto bills passed by the Parliament. The Supreme Leader controls the army forces and the judiciary. Basically, conservative Shi'a Muslim clerics run the country. Reformists clerics and more liberal and secular-minded Iranians are struggling to put people into office who will bring about more political freedom and democracy and less control by the governmental Shi'a clerics over all aspects of life.

Out of a total population of about 68 million, males predominate, with some 105 males for each 100 females. Iranian men can expect to live for 66 years and women for 69 years. According to government reports, both infant mortality and maternal mortality have declined to 33 per 1,000 births. Fertility has been declining precipitously since the mid-1980s, down from 6.8 children per woman in 1984 to 6.3 in 1986, 5.5 in 1988, 2.8 in 1996, and 2.1 in 2000.

OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S ISSUES

Iranian women are facing tremendous challenges. Despite barriers and disadvantages, they are finding ways to struggle for more influence in society and government and improved lives. Since the 1979 revolution, women have devised many subversive ways of resisting conservative clerics' definition of them and restrictions on their behavior. They have succeeded in bringing about many positive changes. Through their determination and untiring efforts, they have been able to erode restrictions. Faced with this mass of unwieldy disobedience, clerics have tired of constantly trying to police women, and their efforts have flagged. Iranian women stand at stage center of political dynamics and seem determined to go after economic success as well.

During the reign of the two Pahlavi shahs, government policies sought to bring women out of the anonymity of home and family life into the world of educated, working women. The shahs wanted to modernize women to become symbols and means of Westernizing Iranian society. Although Iranian women were largely targets of government policy rather than participants in policy formation, they enjoyed more access to education, and many joined the workforce during the Pahlavi era. Legal changes

gave women improved rights and status in marriage and the family, at least on paper, and women were able to come out into public space. Then came the Iranian Revolution of 1978 and 1979 and the subsequent Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran became a theocracy. The Shi'a Islamic clerics in power saw Westernized Iranian women as symbols of moral corruption, Western control, and the decline of Islam. Although women had participated in the revolution in marches, demonstrations, strikes, and communication, clerics saw their political involvement as necessitated by the critical situation. Once the Islamic Revolution was successful, conservative clerics believed, women should go back to their rightful, God-ordained place as wives and mothers protected at home. God created women as emotional, compassionate creatures, fit to bear and raise children and to provide comfort for men, who, as rational, active people, were fit to work outside of the home. The physical differences between the sexes and their related natures fit them for different activities. This attitude toward women colored clerics' beliefs about women's rightful place in the family and in society. Islamic Republic officials attempted to change laws and policies to channel women's activities in what they saw as the right direction and to protect them from corruption. Men, too, should be protected from the irresistible temptation of women's sexuality out in the open, which could disrupt families and society.

In attempting to craft Iranian women to serve as symbols and means for an Islamic society, clerics faced several challenges. Religious figures in control of the government had benefited from women's heavy revolutionary participation. Women's involvement had swelled the numbers of demonstrators and had demonstrated the seriousness and determination of revolutionary activists. Leaders continued to enjoy women's support through allowing them to vote in the initial election to establish the Islamic Republic of Iran and in elections thereafter. To benefit from their support, they defined women as participants in political life and then found it difficult to openly deny women's political influence. Women, seeing themselves defined as political actors and given religious blessing for political participation, were encouraged and enabled to act politically. Once clerics had proclaimed women's duty to participate in politics and support the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic Republic, they could hardly deny the legitimacy of women's political pressure, even when they called for more rights for women and a more moderate political system. Most dramatically, women took advantage of their political rights to vote disproportionately for the liberal president, Mohammad Khatami, in the 1997 and 2001 elections, posing a threat to the conservative clergy.

Clerics in political power attempted to mold women into private persons, stationed in homes and under the control of male family figures. Women were to be defined by marriage and family relationships, and their primary roles were to be wife and mother. However, clerics were dealing with many women who had benefited from the shah's modernization and

Westernization program to become educated, working, more autonomous and individualized women. Such women did not readily accept the pronouncement that they were not able to deal with the public world, that their acquiescent and easily aroused natures would leave them susceptible to sexual advances, and that their emotional, compassionate natures made them incompetent to deal with the hard, rational requirements of the public world. Because of their work experiences, women knew that they could handle careers. Women resented the characterization of their natures as irrational and emotionally weak. They resented harassment and discrimination in their jobs and the efforts to push them back into dependent home life.

When political leaders ruled that the sexes must be segregated in order to maintain women's modesty and prevent the threat of their uncontrolled sexuality to society, ironically, they needed educated, trained females to work with women in order to accomplish sex segregation. Female doctors, nurses, teachers, and other service personnel had to be available to deal with women. Women therefore had to be provided with education and job opportunities. Such initiatives then cast doubt on the proclamation that women were fit only for homemaking and child rearing and that their compassionate, emotional, susceptible, and irrational natures should be guarded by seclusion at home.

Iranian women today face a struggle. The tremendous forces for change in the country—the press for modernization under the Pahlavi shahs along with their failure to institute political freedoms, the oil-boom economy, the Iranian Revolution of 1978–1979 and the subsequent formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and pressures against the clerical rule for political liberalization and improved women's rights—have produced a situation in flux. The conservative clerics and traditional, religious classes are battling to maintain control of Iranian society and the future against the moderate clergy and people who want more freedom, democracy, and equality between the sexes. Contention over gender and what it means to be an Iranian Muslim woman is taking place in many arenas: families, kin networks, communities, workplaces, religious gatherings and organizations, and politics. Wives are pushing husbands for change, and daughters are asserting themselves against fathers. As villagers migrate or commute to urban areas, and communication, transportation, media, and literacy reach previously remote villages, even rural women and lower-class urban females are acquiring new ideas and finding ways to try to improve their situations.

However, transgressions sometimes bring punishment. Many Iranian women realize this and do not risk open confrontation. Those women who do resist authoritarian men and Islamic policy sometimes find themselves more on their own rather than benefiting from the protection and support that other females hope to receive in return for submission. Today's women, though, have far more resources and opportunities than their mothers. At present, Iranian females can more often resist restrictions

openly, rather than subtly attempting to manipulate and influence the men controlling their lives. Many women have become entrepreneurial and run their own businesses, sometimes fronted by a male relative. Many feisty, educated young females are carving out more independence and access to economic rewards for themselves. They are willing to do whatever it takes to earn their own money, especially since they see many young men as undirected and unsuccessful.¹

EDUCATION

Opportunities

Before the establishment of public education, very few females could learn to read. While some boys could attend traditional religious schools (*maktabs*), girls could not. A few fathers might bring a tutor into the home to teach reading the Qur'an to a daughter under close supervision. Even those few girls who learned to read the Qur'an usually would not understand what they were reading, as the language was Arabic. When a girl did have the opportunity to learn to read Farsi, the modern Persian language, rarely was she taught to write. Girls might use the skill to write notes to boys, people feared, bringing scandal to the family. In the early twentieth century, several Tehran women began to open classes for girls in their homes. The shah's government established a public schooling system, although girls' attendance lagged far behind that of boys. The school system provided segregated schools for boys and girls. In order to cut down on improper interaction between the sexes, superintendents usually modified school schedules so that girls would reach home before the boys emerged on the streets. Because urban children had better access to schools than rural children, in 1964 the Pahlavi government formed the Literacy Corps. Thousands upon thousands of high-school graduates went out to villages to teach, greatly improving rural children's access to education.

After the revolution, the government produced new schoolbooks, featuring a more traditional sex division of labor and Islamically dressed females. The government continues to promote education, and girls' school attendance has risen, as has boys'. Because of the Islamic nature of the government and schools, traditionally conservative people feel more comfortable about girls' education. Before the revolution, most girls did not wear veils or scarves over their school uniforms. The Islamic Republic requires females, both teachers and students, to wear Islamic dress. Recently, education officials have announced that schoolbooks will be modified to show the diversity of women's roles in society, rather than presenting females as mothers and housewives only. In 2002, a pilot project in several girls' schools in the Tehran area allowed both students and teachers to attend class without scarves, although they were carefully hidden from outsider view.

Given the Islamization of the environment, dress, and universities, in recent years even conservative families have felt much less hesitant to send their girls to schools and universities. Families who during the shah period considered entrance to university an initiation into prostitution now feel comfortable letting their daughters attend universities. In addition to the transformation of institutions of higher learning into religious spaces, university education for girls has become physically easier. Many new university branches have opened throughout the country. Daughters can attend university while continuing to live under careful guard in their own family homes. Public transportation has improved and become segregated, also making parents more at ease about letting their daughters go out.² Even for the lower classes and rural females, attending undergraduate education has become the thing to do for females. Along with literacy, education, and women's journals, modernist ideas about women and their liberation are spreading to all sectors of the population. "Education for women is seen as the only road to later employment and an income without which a 'good life' cannot be had, either by the woman or by her family. It is now seen as an economic and liberating necessity, women themselves say."³

During the last shah's reign, some girls attended mixed-gender universities, although their attendance lagged behind that of males. In addition to the public universities, private institutions opened, increasing the relatively small number of slots. For the public universities, students took entrance exams (the *concur*). Relatively few could pass the exam. In the 1960s and 1970s, because of oil revenues, better-off parents could send their children abroad for university educations. By the 1970s, Iranians formed the largest foreign student population in the United States.

After the revolution, in April 1980 the government closed Iranian universities in order to restructure them into Islamic institutions. When they reopened, only professors with proper Islamic credentials and attitudes could teach. In addition to passing a religion test, students had to bring documentation about their piety and correct Islamic attitudes from neighborhood mosque organizations. Females had to wear a veil and modest dress, the proper Islamic covering, and avoid obvious interaction with male students. Although males and females sometimes attended the same classes, they sat in separate sections. Moreover, not all fields of education were open to women. The Islamic Republic did not allow unmarried females to go abroad for education, although this law has recently been rescinded. Married females had to be accompanied by their husbands. During both the Pahlavi period and the Islamic Republic, women have not been able to leave the country without the written permission of their husbands.

Sometimes sex-segregation rules result in lower-quality education for females. In 2000, students at a women's medical school in Qom went on strike to protest lower-quality education because of sex segregation; following segregation rules, officials had fired all male employees. More recently, the government has dropped restrictions for women in some fields

of study. Although some decades ago males outnumbered females in universities, for several years now more females than males have been attending universities.

Literacy

Literacy rates have been climbing in the last several decades. The Iranian government claims that 65.8 percent of women are literate, although the UN Statistics Division reports 43 percent literacy for women compared with 70–78 percent of men.

EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMICS

Job/Career Opportunities

During the Pahlavi era, more males than females gained education in the rapidly expanding public school system. Many more males than females found positions in government services, such as education, health, and the bureaucracy. However, boys and girls went to separate schools, and many positions therefore opened for female teachers. Other early career opportunities for women included midwifery and nursing. Sometimes, especially along the Caspian Sea coastal areas, females worked in agriculture on their family-owned land or as day laborers, harvesting and processing some crops. Girls and women did most of the tedious work knotting the famous Persian carpets and weaving gelims. Females from poorer families commonly worked as servants in households. In the earlier years of modernization and Westernization, men held secretarial and typist positions. Because traditional males' honor rested on supporting their wives and daughters so that they need not be exposed to unrelated men through work, even positions commonly held by women in Western countries, such as restaurant server and telephone operator, were not open to women.

In the 1960s and 1970s, more and more females attended universities, both inside Iran and abroad, and thus were able to take professional positions in government and private sectors. Iranians did not share the American view that females do not excel in such fields as math and engineering, and females did not feel constrained to avoid these areas of study and work. After the revolution and formation of the Islamic Republic, however, conservative clerics pushed for women's veiling. Feeling pressured about their dress and interaction style, many women chose to stay at home rather than undergo the rough scrutiny of lower-class females hired to guard entrances from inadequately covered females.

Conservative clerical leaders struggled to put women back at home where they belonged, caring for husbands and children and safe from potentially bringing temptation to males, thus disrupting society. Governmental clerics placed restrictions on women's employment, but because

many Iranian men went to war with Iraq, and the economy had weakened, women were needed. Further, in order to segregate females from unrelated males, women were needed in education, medicine, and other services. In the face of inflation, families needed women's salaries to supplement men's. The government employed females to evaluate women's covering at the entrance of public buildings and in other relatively menial positions in female areas. Government clerics and religious leaders pointed to Islam as providing the best conditions for females. Iranian women used this clerical stance to struggle for improved women's rights and employment opportunities.⁴

Defending their perspective with the Qur'anic stipulation that two female witnesses are equal to one male, clerics barred women from working as judges. Eventually, pressured by women, the government appointed some women lawyers to work in the court system and then to become family-court judges. Now women have entered virtually every line of work, including taxicab drivers and airline pilots, although in small minorities in many fields. Men still dominate in construction, factory management, manufacturing, the modern employment sector, and business, although many women are opening their own businesses. Many women are becoming doctors, and women remain overrepresented in the nurturing professions, especially caring for other females. However, drawing on the tradition of elite women's imperious behavior toward both male and female underlings, Iranian professional women in supervisory positions do not shy from stern and straightforward behavior with employees. Apparently quite secure in their sexual identity, they do not anguish over trying to balance gentle and compassionate behavior to demonstrate their femininity with the need to be demanding and brusque to maintain hierarchical command.

Pay

In general, women receive the same pay as men in the same positions. Women employees complain, however, that through overtime and other means of getting extras, men manage to take home much more money than women in the same position.⁵ Under both the Pahlavi government and the Islamic Republic, overt salary discrimination against women has not been much of a problem. Partly because education was scarce and valued, people tended to view the education and qualifications of females as more significant than their sex.

Working Conditions

Working conditions for females, as well as for males, have been quite abysmal in Iran. Girls, often from a very young age, as well as women who worked as servants, had to be ready at all times to work, received very

little pay—and even that likely went to family males—often did not enjoy adequate nutrition, and could be mistreated and abused. Household males, a father or his sons, might well require sexual services of them. Girls and women who labored in carpet workshops or knotted carpets at home likewise worked very long hours for little pay, hunched in the same position, usually with inadequate light. Agricultural workers likewise worked hard for little pay. Like males, females did not earn any social security, enjoy legal protection over working conditions and environments, or receive workers' compensation if they were injured on the job. At present, the Social Security Organization and the State Welfare Organization provide insurance and many types of benefits for state employees and also reach out to private companies and individuals in need.

Sexual Harassment

During the Pahlavi period, males commonly bothered females on the streets, calling out improper comments or invitations and pinching or touching them. Males, although very sensitive about men insulting their honor by improper attention to their own wives, sisters, or daughters, did not feel constrained from bothering unrelated females themselves. Males particularly targeted professional or Westernized women and girls on their way to school who did not wear a veil, but also might handle veiled females. During the revolutionary period, men placed importance on respecting their "Muslim sisters." People made efforts to provide separate spaces for females in public areas, roping off aisles, for example. Harassment of women and girls on the streets declined dramatically for a period.

The Islamic Republic prides itself on fostering a society where pious Muslim women are protected and respected. To this end and to avoid arousing men's lust through the sight of females, females are required to wear clothing covering their body shape and hair. Such dress should signal to men that they are proper and pious Muslim women. They should thus be treated with respect rather than being viewed as immodest and thus susceptible to male attention. After the Islamic Republic government took over firm control, fear of sanctions and punishment made males hesitant to call out sexual comments or touch females on the street. Modesty requirements have eased somewhat in recent years. Now some girls and women may go without stockings under sandals, wear tunics that cover only to the knee or even higher, show some hair under a head covering, and wear makeup and nail polish outside of the home. However, young women still often fear sexual harassment or robbery on the streets and try to avoid going out.⁶

In spite of such public molestation of females during and after the Pahlavi period when more urban women began venturing outside of the home, Iranians did not hold a concept of sexual harassment. As in the West, where "sexual harassment" is a new term for a long-standing social problem, in Iran, if a girl or woman received unwanted attention, it was because she

encouraged it or put herself in a position where this might happen. Both-ering girls on the street was just something that boys did, and nothing could be done about it. Therefore, little is known about sexual harassment in the workplace at that time. Given the more formal interaction between unrelated males and females put together in the workplace, likely most women did not suffer much sexual harassment. If they did, fearing dishonor, they would not publicize it. Upon meeting a female and working with her, males would not feel as free to intrude on them as they might toward unknown women in the streets. Girls and women who worked as servants in other people's homes, however, might face employers' or their sons' sexual predation.

Because of much greater efforts to segregate males and females and the focus on proper behavior between unrelated males and females, overt sexual harassment on the job does not constitute a problem for most women in the Islamic Republic. During the earlier years of the Islamic Republic, however, women were in danger of harassment by relatively uncontrolled Revolutionary Guards as a punishment for improper covering or behavior. Men shopkeepers and women employed to check women's covering (*hijab*) at the entrances of government buildings scolded and turned away inadequately covered women. Males and females felt free to criticize inadequate covering of females and to order them to shape up. Under the Islamic Republic, people feel responsible for even unrelated females' dress and behavior and do not hesitate to exert pressure or force.

Support for Mothers/Caretakers

Iranians consider caring for children to be the mother's job in Iran. She may sometimes solicit assistance from her mother or other female relatives. In middle- and upper-class households, servants commonly took over care for children, although the mother retained final responsibility and was accountable for bad behavior. In better-off households, sometimes a maid was assigned to each child. Now that household servants are not as common as they were several decades ago, mothers do not as often have live-in women to help them out. The Islamic Republic emphasizes the traditional sexual division of labor and the mother's responsibility for children. Although in some cases, Iranian men have begun to spend time with children, in most families fathers still do not play much part in child care. The government's Social Security Organization and State Welfare Organization provide assistance for mothers and children and also supply grants to private organizations aimed at assisting mothers and children.

Maternal Leave

Iranian mothers may have ninety days of maternal leave. For childbirth and maternity leave, they can receive 66.7 percent of their pay for sixteen weeks from the Social Security Organization for up to three children.

Daycare

Daycare is a relatively new phenomenon in Iran. In past decades, men who could afford it supported their wives, enabling them to stay at home. For teachers and other professional women, grandparents, other female relatives, or maids could care for children until they began to attend schools. In recent decades, fewer couples have lived with parents. Middle- and upper-class households are smaller and employ fewer servants than several decades ago.

The government has opened some daycare facilities. Many large organizations, public and private, offer on-site daycare facilities. Iranians do not like to leave children with strangers or in a public daycare facility, however, if they can help it. Frightening stories about how badly children are treated by caretakers abound. Whether they are true or not, working mothers' greatest area of concern is child care. Sometimes women turn to the grandparents for assistance if they do not live far away and are willing to take on this responsibility. Some women care for children in their homes as a means of making an income, and working mothers may take advantage of such opportunities.

Family and Medical Leave

The government's Social Security Organization and State Welfare Organization provide assistance for employees needing family and medical leave assistance.

Inheritance and Property Rights

Females may own property. Female offspring inherit half the share of males. Typically, brothers expected or even took for granted that sisters turn over their share to the brothers. Through the 1970s, when most females had little or no education, they felt dependent on brothers should their husbands die or divorce them. They therefore wished to stay in the good graces of brothers. More recently, sisters have felt less reticence about going after their rights. It has been reported that "the courts are besieged by women who claim that their brothers cheated them in inheritance of the father's property."⁷

Social/Government Programs

Traditionally, private philanthropy provided such assistance to the needy as was available. People brought food and other resources to mosques and shrines for distribution and gave to the needy on a personal, individual basis. Giving alms is one of the five pillars of Islam. Ideally, a tenth of a person's income should be given to charity. Traditional bazaar merchants

tended to give their required alms (*zakat*) to their chosen spiritual leader (*imam* or *ayatollah*) for him to distribute to followers. As Shi'a Muslims now run the government, people are all the more aware of this requirement. In addition to private donations and distributions at Shi'a sites, many people have joined philanthropic organizations either of the traditional charity type or newer, more modernly organized semi-government-connected nongovernmental organizations. The government's Social Security Organization and State Welfare Organization provide many types of support to people and also give grants to private philanthropic organizations. People may relatively easily take out bank loans to support their standard of living.⁸ The government has developed a number of organizations and programs to assist women, such as the Office of Women's Affairs, Women's Social and Cultural Council, Department of Women and International Social Affairs, Women Villagers' Cooperatives, Women's Sports Organizations, and Women's Affairs Committee.

Sustainable Development

Due to the revolution, war with Iraq, political conflict and turmoil, inflation and a troubled economy, regional political instability, and large out-migration and brain drain to Western nations, among other problems, the government and Iranians in general have not yet focused on sustainable development. There is an environment section in the government, and some attention has been given to reforestation, relocating industry outside of cities, and developing alternative sources of energy. Some people have joined an Iranian Green Group, but governmental attention largely lies elsewhere.

Welfare

As mentioned, Shi'a Muslims are required to give alms as one of the five pillars of Islam. They may give coins to people on the street or discreetly provide for destitute families. Many people distribute food, particularly in conjunction with vows or pleas to the saints. Philanthropic organizations give assistance to special groups of people. Private organizations and the government run orphanages and more recently have opened old-people's homes. People receive pensions upon retiring from government employment, generally at the same salary as when they worked. Many government agencies, more modern nongovernmental organizations, and traditional charity groups provide assistance to the needy. The Imam Khomeini Relief Committee most actively extends assistance to economically deprived persons. The government has provided many benefits, such as housing, education, food, and jobs, to survivors of "martyrs" in the Iran-Iraq War.

FAMILY AND SEXUALITY

Gender Roles

Among nomads who guided their flocks on migration routes toward food and pasture, women carried heavy work loads. They packed and unpacked tents and other materials, milked animals and processed milk and wool into usable products, gathered and dried vegetables, cared for children, and prepared and distributed food.⁹ In some areas, rural women did agricultural work. Otherwise, Iranian men preferred to have their wives and daughters at home, attesting to the men's honor through their seclusion and separation from unrelated men. Village women might milk and care for animals around the home and also might go out in groups to gather and then dry wild vegetables and fruit.

Islamic gender constructs view men as suited for the rough-and-tumble outside world of work and women's emotional, compassionate, and nurturing qualities as better suiting them for home life, caring for children and serving their husbands. Men held authority in the family and neighborhood, and women might attempt to manipulate and influence through subtle and subversive interpersonal strategies.¹⁰ Women generally took on administrative and family relations duties in the home as they matured from young brides to mothers and then into midlife. Women from more comfortable households generally carried heavy social responsibilities. They handled hospitality; maintained social networks among relatives, neighbors, and associates through visiting; attended segregated life-cycle and religious rituals in homes and sometimes mosques or other religious spaces; and provided advice and guidance for other women.¹¹ Women were held responsible for children's behavior and training.

Although female roles supposedly are different but equally valued and important in the Muslim perspective, often this ideal did not translate into reality. From birth, people generally gave males more attention, resources, and leeway in behavior. Males grew up expecting to be favored and catered to and could often be self-centered and dismissive toward females. Males' parental roles and assistance to wives consisted of financial support. For many husbands and fathers, their perceived obligations to the rest of the family did not go much further than

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that. In turn, they expected women and children to give them deference, obedience, loyalty, and service. Such attitudes varied among families according to class, location, education, and family culture. They have changed over time as females have gained exposure to other possibilities and opportunities. With Iran's move toward modernization and women's increasing presence in the economic arena and social life, male authoritarianism has declined somewhat, at least among the educated.

After the 1979 Iranian Revolution, clerics wanted women to be under the control of their fathers and husbands in order to maintain social purity and stability. They succeeded in enforcing more measures to maintain women's modesty, control by family males, and economic dependence. However, pressure from women as well as economic necessity and the need for women workers have pushed them into reversing some of these measures. Women face the challenge of revising gender roles and ideas to allow them more rights and opportunities. They must find ways to do this without overt reference to Western feminism, but rather must appear to be operating within an Islamic framework.

Marriage

In Islam, marriage is considered to be a contract rather than a religious sacrament or vow of love, loyalty, and fidelity. Traditionally, parents arranged the marriages of their children. The prospective bridegroom's parents looked for a pretty, modest, obedient, and hardworking girl from a good family. The prospective bride's parents hoped for a young man with good financial prospects from a good family who could support their daughter and the children as well as possible. Parents negotiated the terms of the contract, with the fathers and often other male relatives of each side meeting to work out the details. The groom's family had to bring gifts to the girl and members of her family during the time leading up to the ceremony and had to provide a bride price (*mahr*). A stipulated part of this sum, in some areas called milk money (*shir baha*), should change hands at the time of the marriage. With the money given to him by the groom's family, the bride's father purchased the household furnishings that his daughter had to bring to the new union. Depending on the families' resources and the father's level of devotion to his daughter, these household furnishings could be quite ostentatious.

The rest of the negotiated amount of money, usually the larger part, was supposed to be given to the wife in the case of divorce. Often, however, a husband found ways of evading this obligation, perhaps making the wife's life so miserable that she became willing to give up her *mahr* to obtain her freedom. After marriage, a wife was supposed to obey her husband. Wives might have certain conditions put into the marriage contract, such as being provided with a separate home from the groom's family or the right to education and a career, but sometimes these conditions would

not be upheld. Iranians saw marriage as a household partnership, a means of producing children, and a legitimate way to satisfy male and female sexuality more than as the way to structure companionship and love between husband and wife.

Men and women generally lived rather separate lives, with men busy at work in fields, shops, or businesses and women interacting with other women at home and in the neighborhood. Often women formed their most emotionally meaningful relationships with other women. Mothers generally formed deep bonds with children, and both males and females continued close connection with their mothers throughout adulthood. Sons expected mothers to cater to them and adore them and in turn often showed lasting devotion to their mothers. Mothers generally looked to daughters as companions and assistants, and daughters turned to mothers for support and deep friendship.

Women might feel quite unhappy in marriages, but usually tolerated the situation, given social pressure and the lack of alternatives. They might turn to their children to share their unhappiness and complaints against the husband. In the last twenty years, this has begun to change for some couples. With more women becoming educated and working in the modern public sector rather than staying at home and in the neighborhood, people often have chosen their own spouses. Husband-wife relationships in many families have become more companionate, and they have developed some common activities and interests. However, for many families in the lower classes, and even some middle- and upper-class ones, much has stayed the same.

In Islam, males are allowed up to four wives. There is no limit on the number of temporary wives (*sighbeh*) they may take at one time. Although they should not marry multiple permanent wives if they cannot treat them all equally, this stipulation may be ignored. Fear of their husbands divorcing them or marrying another wife makes wives feel insecure and more willing to appease their husbands and tolerate their situations. Again, these attitudes have changed somewhat over time. Divorce does not bring as much scandal and loss of reputation to a woman and her family as it used to do, and women do not feel the same level of constraint against contemplating divorce. Although women are attempting to bring about change, men are still able to divorce their wives more easily than women can divorce husbands: they need not provide a reason for divorce. Women are allowed to divorce for such reasons as nonsupport, insanity, and impotence. Women and reformers in the Parliament have recently been working to grant women improved rights to divorce.

With the rising divorce rate, job migration, and war dead, single motherhood unfortunately is on the rise. Many single mothers struggle to provide for their children, perhaps seeking assistance from relatives in addition to working.¹² When men divorce their wives, they are supposed to return their marriage payment. Men often find ways of evading this financial ob-

ligation. Recently, a new law has decreed that when giving the marriage payment to divorced wives, men must adjust it for inflation since the agreement at the time of the marriage. Upon divorce for any reason, men are granted custody of boys at age two and girls at age seven. In May 2002, the Parliament passed a bill allowing mothers to keep custody of both boys and girls until age seven, at which time the courts would make a decision about custody. In order to put this bill into effect, which should give women improved custody rights, the Guardian Council must grant approval. In actuality, generally a father can get custody of his children if he really wants it. He can also withhold child support, causing the wife financial distress. As elsewhere, unless a single mother has a well-paying job, she and the children live in relative deprivation.¹³

Reproduction

Sex Education

Sex education basically has not existed in Iran. Traditionally, married women attempted to cull obvious sexual references from their talk when unmarried females were present. Mothers did not feel obligated to inform their daughters about sex or even about menstruation. Daughters remained unprepared for menarche and for abrupt sexual initiation on their wedding night. Sometimes an older woman might be stationed within or near the bridal bower to assist the marital act. Traditionally she carried a white cloth, or the bride was provided with one, to gather blood, documenting the bride's virginity and the groom's virility, to be displayed to visitors.

Most parents still shy away from discussions about sex with their teens. In 1996, two out of five girls had not received any information prior to their first menstruation, a government study found. Government education likewise has not provided sex education. Sex is supposed to be contained within the husband-wife relationship. Knowledge about sex therefore has no relevance to the unmarried. Upon marriage, the husband is expected to initiate sex and a woman to receive his sexual attention. Muslims see sexual activity and bearing children within marriage to be part of a well-lived and pious life, but they expect that married couples will go about this naturally, without guidance from outsiders. Classes about contraception now required for marrying couples may include some sex education. In the fall of 2002, government officials announced, AIDS education will become part of secondary-school education.

Contraception and Abortion

Traditionally, in-laws and husbands expected brides to become pregnant as soon as possible, hopefully with a boy. If a wife did not become pregnant, in-laws and the husband generally complained and tried to find so-

lutions. People blamed the wife for infertility. The husband of a barren woman might divorce her or possibly bring in an additional wife. Both courses of action brought trouble and loss of status to a wife. In August 2002, Parliament passed a law authorizing in vitro fertilization for couples unable to have children. Several decades ago, although becoming pregnant when too old caused embarrassment, women continued to have children well into middle age, often bearing eight, ten, or more. High child mortality took about half of children born, although this has been improving during the last several decades.

As late as the 1970s, older women and traditional midwives tried to use herbs, magical practices, or attempts to harm the fetus to prevent conception and induce abortion for women who did not want children. Such home methods did not effectively or safely prevent pregnancy and induce miscarriage. During the 1960s and even more in the 1970s, modern contraceptives became more readily available. Males usually did not like to use condoms, and high-dosage birth-control pills sometimes caused discomfort and health problems for women. Birth rates did fall somewhat until Islamic Republic officials encouraged reproduction to increase population during the Iran-Iraq War.

In December 1989, recognizing the serious overpopulation problem and the swelling proportion of children and youth to the rest of the population, the government launched an ambitious family-planning program. Islamic clerics have energetically championed family planning, pointing to the higher standard of living and better provision for children that a smaller family allows. Fertility rates have dropped dramatically. More than half of childbearing-age women now use contraceptives, and the rates are as high as 80 percent in some urban areas. Birth control is provided free of cost. Maternity leave and other benefits are not available to women after their third child. Also, females are marrying later; young couples now often postpone pregnancy for a period after marriage; and older women are bearing fewer children. Fewer children are dying, which has lowered pressures to have more children. Parents also are developing higher aspirations for their children. Female education is climbing, and girls entertain higher expectations for themselves. For the last several years, more girls than boys have passed the entrance exams and have been admitted to the government universities.¹⁴ All of these factors contribute to the dramatically lowered birth rates.

Although according to law, abortion may be performed for mothers whose doctors will testify danger to their lives, fearing problems with the authorities, doctors are hesitant to perform this operation. In general, women do not have access to legal abortions. In August 2002, several reform-minded members of Parliament introduced for debate a bill to allow abortions in cases where three doctors testify to a severely deformed fetus. Many articles have appeared in Iranian newspapers on the merits of vasectomy, and the government has encouraged it. Couples must have

blood tests before marriage. Couples must also take a course in contraception that is supposed to include discussion about AIDS.

Teen Pregnancy

Because virginity is highly valued and protected, teen pregnancy outside of marriage has been much rarer in Iran than in the United States or European countries. However, as under Shi'a Muslim law, young girls can marry, teens very frequently became pregnant within marriage. During the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, the Family Protect Laws of 1967 raised the legal age of marriage for girls to sixteen. Although the Islamic Republic clerics lowered it again to age nine, recently they have yielded to pressure and raised it again to fifteen. However, because of economic and educational reasons, because many men were killed in war or migrated abroad, and because there is less pressure on many girls to marry early, the average age of female marriage has risen above twenty-two. Teen pregnancy has declined.

Because of girls' increased mobility for schooling and some opportunities to interact with males in parks, hiking areas, or even homes, a small percentage of girls do become pregnant outside of marriage. Sometimes this pregnancy is the result of incest. It is difficult to learn much about this because of family shame. During the war with Iraq (1980–1988), government clerics successfully encouraged procreation, raising rates of teen pregnancy within marriage. Aware of the negative effects of overpopulation, especially in a shaky economy, since then, government officials have advertised and supported family planning, lowering teen birth rates dramatically.

HEALTH

Health Care Access

Access to health care has increased: urban people and 85 percent or more of rural residents have access to primary health care. The decentralized health network of Urban and Rural Health Centers and Health Houses serve people locally, and mobile units go out into more remote areas. University-affiliated hospitals in provincial capitals offer specialized care. The Social Security Organization of Iran, affiliated with the Health Ministry, provides health coverage for some 40 percent of the population: for government employees, employees of many private companies, and retired persons. Benefits include medical treatment, survivor's pension plans, subsidies to large families, disability pensions, unemployment compensation, subsidies for pregnancy periods, subsidies for marriage costs, retirement pensions, sick leave, and coupons for food. The expand-

ing universal health insurance system and the growing number of doctors, some 108 per 100,000 people in 1997, also bring about better access to medical care.

Diseases and Disorders

AIDS

Numbers of AIDS and HIV-positive cases have been relatively low in Iran. However, since 2002, government health officials have warned about the rapidly increasing incidence of AIDS cases. Until recently, officials estimated the number of HIV-positive patients to be about 2,000. Recently, the disease control division estimated it to be much higher, about 19,000. Apparently more than 350 out of the more than 400 AIDS patients have died. Polygamy, prostitution, labor migration, and the Shi'a Muslim practice of taking temporary wives contribute to the AIDS problem, as does the use of dirty needles among drug addicts in the country, whose number is dramatically increasing. Officials have recently started a national AIDS awareness campaign that is especially active in the province of Sistan Baluchistan, on the Pakistani and Afghan borders. Beginning in the fall of 2002, the government has announced, AIDS education will be added to the secondary-school curriculum.

Eating Disorders

In recent decades, Iranian females have become increasingly concerned about body image. Although people formerly appreciated plumpness in girls and women, now more often females want a slender body. Some urban women go to gyms for aerobics and working out. Through videos, television, the Internet, and traveling, Western ideals of beauty have spread in Iran. Plastic surgery for smaller noses and other face and body modifications has become relatively common. Although females must cover their bodies in public and in front of nonrelated men, research in 2001 found that young females living in Iran are just as obsessed with losing weight as Iranian American young women living in the United States. They are just as likely to develop eating disorders.¹⁵

Cancer

Little research about cancer in Iranian women has been published. For the first time, a 1994–1995 preliminary study in Shiraz presented an estimate on breast cancer prevalence among women thirty-five years old and older. The research found about 6.6 breast cancer tumors per 1,000 women.

Depression

Young Iranian women suffer from depression due to lack of opportunities to get out of the house, restrictions, pressures to marry young, forced or unhappy marriages, or the threat of divorce or facing a second wife. Females suffer from depression four times more often than males, although for both sexes, depression has become almost an epidemic. A 1999 government study showed that females in Qom, the stronghold of Shi'a clergy, where rules about women's dress and behavior are applied more strictly, suffer depression more often than those in Tehran. In situations where females feel that they do not have the ability to refuse an unwelcome marriage or to try to change an unhappy situation, they may become depressed or attempt suicide.

Most suicides are committed by people between fifteen and twenty-four years of age. Young women are the most vulnerable to suicide and commit suicide at higher rates than young men. Since 1989, suicide rates for young women have been climbing. Rates of suicide for married women are higher than for married men, but rates of suicide for single men are higher than for single women. Having children mitigates rates of suicide for females to an extent. Most often, family and marriage issues influence women to attempt suicide. Early marriage, significant age difference with spouse, polygamy, spouse's addiction, problematic relationship with spouse, male domination, forced marriage, lack of children, mistreatment, and divorce issues may lead to young women's suicide. The most common female means of committing suicide is burning oneself.¹⁶

POLITICS AND LAW**Suffrage**

Women as well as men were able to vote during Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's reign, although this held little meaning. Only one political party, the shah's Rastakheez Party, was allowed to exist. The shah's government approved all candidates put on ballots. No dissent against the shah's government was allowed. People opposed to the shah's government could not become candidates, and if their attitudes became known, they were imprisoned.

Islam supposedly relegates women to the household and care of the family. Some clerics and religious groups had opposed women's suffrage when the shah initiated it. However, clerics included women in the voting for the establishment of an Islamic Republic and in subsequent elections. Under the Islamic Republic as well, only candidates approved by the government can stand for election.

Political Participation

Although men have held public leadership positions in Iran and have played roles in public political participation, women have exerted influence behind the scenes and during some periods have taken publicly recognized steps and crucial roles in political competition and conflict. In the 1905–1911 Constitutional Revolution, women demonstrated, wrote letters, influenced men, and became crucial political symbols.¹⁷ In general, Iranian women seem to be aware of and interested in political conditions, events, and conflict that affect their lives. Even illiterate village women informally and sporadically participate in politics.¹⁸ Some women excelled in gathering information from a variety of sources and developing political analyses concerning village-level politics as well as national trends and incidents during the 1978–1979 revolutionary period. Women could gather and spread information and perspectives, form and maintain political alliances, pressure their men, condemn violence and outrageous behavior, help to swing majority support, and rouse people to action through emotional displays and haranguing. Through their visiting, distribution of food, and talk, women developed and maintained political networks.

Women gathering at scenes of violence, wailing and beating themselves in mourning or distress, focused attention on the event and the seriousness of the political situation. Women could deny involvement in a current conflict, maintaining at least formal relations with women in hostile groups. They could try to pick up information this way or be in a position to mend relationships should a rapprochement be attempted.¹⁹ As connections between families through marriage, women served to strengthen political alliances.²⁰ Although women had participated in politics in less publicly obvious ways, and a few had taken publicly recognized political action, the 1978–1979 revolutionary period marked the dramatic entrance of masses of Iranian women into political conflict. Ironically, the clerics who had earlier opposed women's voting rights now sanctioned women's participation in the movement against the shah as a religious duty. Although males usually served as leaders of the movement, women joined marches, demonstrations, strikes, and religiopolitical gatherings in mosques. Women listened to tapes and foreign radio broadcasts, such as BBC news, learned about and distributed information about events, read leaflets, and memorized revolutionary chants. Even professional women donned the veil (*chador*) as a symbol of support for the revolutionary movement and dissent against the shah's government.²¹ After the February 11, 1979 revolution, capitalizing on women's activism and support during the revolution, clerics gave them recognition and praise.

During the last shah's reign, two women reached the position of minister: Farrokhroo Parsa, minister of education, and Mahnaz Afkhami, minister of women's affairs. Since the revolution, some women have been elected to the Parliament. Daughters and wives of high-ranking govern-

ment clerics have sometimes become politically influential, winning seats in the Parliament and speaking out for women's advancement and other causes. Many women ran for office during the 2000 elections for local councils. Several women have gained important governmental positions. However, the Islamic Republic of Iran, like the shah's government before it, remains under male control.

Women's Rights

Since early in the twentieth century, a few women and their male supporters have been working toward improving rights and opportunities for Iranian women. They have faced social pressure, religious leaders' condemnation, and even legal and police action. During Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's reign, the government promoted female education and Western dress and gave women better legal rights. After the 1979 revolution and the subsequent formation of the Islamic Republic, governmental clerics enforced women's "Islamic" dress, cut back on their legal rights and protections, and attempted to place them into home-based family roles. Since that time, women have struggled against great odds to bring about better rights for women.²²

Feminist Movements

Women living in Iran have faced barriers in attempting to mobilize a women's movement or even to work for women's rights. In the early decades of the twentieth century, males saw even attempting to teach females to read as subversive. Nevertheless, women organized home-based schools for females, wrote newsletters, and founded journals.²³ Although such efforts reached only a tiny minority of females, some women began to be aware of potential alternatives to illiteracy and seclusion. During the Pahlavi era, the shahs wanted to present Iranian females as educated and Westernized to demonstrate how Iran was modernizing. Education for women was seen as enabling them to be good mothers and good citizens who could help their country, rather than assisting them in personal development for their own sakes. Mohammad Reza Shah appointed a minister of women's affairs and had women's groups organized. Many women worked hard to educate females and bring about improved considerations and opportunities for women. However, women could not form independent feminist organizations.

The government instituted improvements for women with national, political, and self-presentational aims in mind.²⁴ Although many women who are implementing policies and developing programs value women's contributions and wish to improve their conditions,²⁵ on the whole, the government-instigated and managed changes cannot be seen as a women's movement.²⁶ Even among the antishah activities in Iran and the antishah

movement among Iranian students abroad, leaders discouraged women from attention to specifically female issues. Leaders both religious and secular assured women that when the government fell and democracy was instituted, women would automatically receive their rights. Working specifically for women's rights detracted from the main aim of overthrowing the shah's regime and would be divisive, they warned.²⁷ During the revolutionary period, clerics condemned "naked" and immodest Western women, who through their corrupt and promiscuous behavior had brought about the downfall of the Western family and the dissolution of society. They saw Western feminists as selfish, self-centered enemies of the family, community, and nation. Pious, modest Muslim women, in contrast, upheld the family and society and through their religiosity and dedicated service strengthened Islamic society.²⁸ Because of this attitude, women living in Iran do not feel it wise to overtly promote feminism or women's movements. Rather, they try to work within an Islamic framework, defending better rights and opportunities for women through application of Islamic traditional law and sources.²⁹

Scholars debate the existence of a feminist movement in Iran and whether or not women working for improved women's rights within the Islamic Republic framework can be called "feminists."³⁰ As a patriarchal religion, Islam provides no space for women's rights, some scholars and activists argue. Trying to bring about improvements for women within an Islamic framework constitutes accommodation, they believe, and can have no permanent positive effects. Whether or not Muslim activists call themselves feminists—and they usually do not—others argue that if they work for women's improved conditions, they are in fact feminists and thus can be called "Islamic feminists." Clearly, many women have developed sensitivity toward gender issues; even what Iranian women are writing and reading testifies to growing awareness of feminist concerns.³¹ Women's magazines and journals not only focus on fashion and interests traditional to women, but also publish materials about women's legal rights, political participation, and difficulties in patriarchal society and families. They pressure Islamic Republic officials for improvements. Women in Iran communicate with feminists outside the country.³²

Many women and men in Iran are struggling in many different arenas to improve conditions for women. Women have organized minor protests, such as the march to protest enforced *hijab* shortly after the revolution. Many women are working in subtle and small ways to protest gender restrictions. Even some women from conservative Islamist families have become disillusioned about conditions for women under the Islamic Republic and have joined reformist Muslim women and secular women in strategies of different types to improve women's rights.³³ Outraged women from different points of the religious/political spectrum joined forces in 2002 to defeat a proposal for a government-run prostitution organization.

Although it was to be framed in the Shi'a tradition of temporary marriage (*sighbeh*), women saw this possibility as humiliating and harmful to women.

Women's efforts are often sporadic, subtle, nebulous, subversive, informal, individual, and scattered.³⁴ Nevertheless, women and their supporters, through the Parliament, the media, elections, the educational system, and women of elite clerical families as well as through informal communicating and networking, have succeeded in forcing the conservative clerics to reinstate some rights and opportunities for women.

Lesbian Rights

In Iran, homosexuality is illegal and can be severely punished. Gays and lesbians do not have rights and are fortunate if they can avoid detection. Iranian tradition does, however, contain male homosexual eroticism and poetry. During the decades before the 1979 revolution, people looked the other way in the case of discreet male homosexuality as a premarital phase and expected it to end upon marriage. Although sex segregation likely served to encourage even heterosexually oriented men toward other males, sometimes sexual attraction for other males did not end upon marriage. Males sometimes married in order to camouflage their homosexual orientation and activity. Such a man's wife would be subject to lack of sexual attention and companionship from her husband and, since the 1980s, to the danger of AIDS. Sometimes men accustomed to anal sex with other males forced this type of sexual activity on their wives.

Other than close relationships between female relatives and intimate, apparently platonic friendships and open physical affection among females, Iranian culture does not recognize lesbians. Some females might take shelter in acceptable platonic friendships to hide their sexual attraction or activities. Very little research has been conducted on homosexuality in Iran, and even less is known about lesbian orientation and activity. Some of the Iranian females living abroad have come out as lesbians, but such a move would be socially reprehensible and dangerous in Iran. At least two Iranian lesbians have received political asylum in the United States because of their sexual orientation.

Military Service

During the Pahlavi era, women were not drafted and did not volunteer for the armed forces. They could become members of the Literacy Corps or Health Corps and be stationed as teachers or medical workers in villages. After the revolution, when Iraq attacked Iran in 1980, some women were recruited into the war effort and became trained to use weapons.³⁵ However, the government did not send women to the war front as soldiers. Since the war, males but not females have been subject to the draft.

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Although Sunni Muslims, Christians, Zoroastrians, Jews, and Baha'is also live in Iran, Shi'a Muslims form some 85 percent of the population. This section will therefore focus on women in Shi'a Islam.

Women's Roles

Women have played significant roles in Shi'a Islamic history, mythology, sainthood, and ritual. In 680 A.D., the reigning caliph's forces killed Imam Husein, grandson of the prophet Muhammad (the founder of Islam), and his small band of men on the plains of Karbala, in present-day Iraq. Imam Husein's sister Zaynab then supported the womenfolk as the victors marched them into captivity at Damascus.

Imam Husein and his followers differed from the caliph's supporters in that they believed that Muslim leadership should go to the Prophet's descendants. As the Prophet had no surviving son, all of the twelve Shi'a imams or leaders were descendants of the Prophet through his daughter, Fatimah Zahra. These women and also the bereft young daughters of Imam Husein, Sakineh and Roqayeh, are featured in mythology and mourning rituals commemorating the Karbala story. As Shi'a Muslims accept intercession between God and believers, women can talk to these female saints and beseech them for assistance. Women served as followers and supporters and then as mourners who wept and told the Karbala story, so that it lived on in believers' hearts and became the means of intercession and redemption. People often believe that the female saints are more emotional and compassionate and thus are more susceptible to pleas for assistance. Often women go to saints' shrines and commemorative gatherings to seek help from the saints on behalf of their menfolk.³⁶

All of the twelve imams, leaders of the Shi'a, were men. The ayatollahs who serve as leaders in the absence of imams are also almost always men. Very few women have attained the religious knowledge to qualify them for the position of ayatollah. Shi'a clerics, ritual specialists and preachers (*mullahs* and *akbunds*), are male. Professors and students at the seminary in the city of Qom and other institutions of higher religious learning were also male until after the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. Generally, males attended mosques and went on the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), required of all Muslims who can afford it, more than women did. As more women now have their own and/or sufficient income and are thus eligible for the *hajj*, this is changing.

In religious spaces and organizations, generally women either stayed in separate areas, behind or out of sight of the men, or did not come at all. Often, less advantaged rural women, kept out of mosques and other public places, also did not enjoy the social networks of women's segregated religious rituals and seemed rather to receive only hurtful misogynous teach-

ings.³⁷ Urban women, in spite of their lack of presence in mosques, seminaries, and public leadership positions, might participate actively and even hold leadership positions in women's segregated rituals.

Since the 1979 revolution, religion has become an increasingly significant arena and source of status for Iranians. Clerical leaders give political legitimacy to themselves because of their Islamic knowledge and practices. They require Islamic knowledge and certification of conforming behavior from Muslim figures or groups to anyone seeking a political position, university education, or government job. They provide models for women's behavior based on historical Muslim females.³⁸ In order to inform women about Islam and their place in religion and society, religious leaders encourage their religious education. They wish to inform women about the behavior required of them, encourage women's continued support of the Islamic Republic government, and demonstrate how Islam provides the best situation for women.

Together with women's crucial role in the 1978–1979 revolution, women's greater access to valued Islamic education and qualifications has given them more voice and status in the now central arena of Islam. Women attend seminaries and religious schools. Many women enjoy positions as teachers and preachers of Islam.³⁹ Sometimes women speak about religion even in front of men. As they are studying Islamic sources such as the Qur'an and the Hadith, traditions of the Prophet passed down through chains of authority, some women are beginning to give new interpretations of Islamic teachings about women and gender. Through women's neighborhood religious gatherings, female preachers are leading discussions that subtly question male religious authority.⁴⁰ However, male religious clerics and scholars still hold most Islamic power and authority, and women face great challenges in resisting their control over religious power. Given the existence of the Islamic Republic of Iran, one crucial route for improving women's rights, other than exerting political pressure and popular opinion, lies in finding ways to defend their rights and opportunities within the Islamic framework.

Rituals and Religious Practices

The five pillars of Islam include testifying belief in God and his prophet Muhammad, giving alms, fasting during the month of Moharram, offering five sets of prayer each day, and making the pilgrimage to Mecca if financially possible. Women are disadvantaged in performing these requirements. When women menstruate, deal with children's urine and feces, or engage in sexual intercourse, they are considered religiously impure. After these activities, and for forty days after giving birth, until they have washed in rituals of purification, women cannot touch the Qur'an, attend the mosque, fast, or pray. As they usually have less discretionary money than

men, giving alms and making the pilgrimage to Mecca pose difficulty for them.

Although women have had more access to public religious spaces since the revolution and institution of the Islamic Republic, before that they were almost entirely limited to more informal, sex-segregated rituals. Women gathered in homes for meals donated to one of the saints (*sofreh*) and rituals (*rozehs*) including a story about one of the Karbala saints with mourning, perhaps some religious exhortation, and, finally, refreshments and chatter.⁴¹ Women made pilgrimages to local shrines to ask for help from the saints.⁴² In urban areas, some women might go to shrines as individuals, but often groups of women sought refuge in shrines. They might even stay overnight to form a closer relationship with the saint and thus hope for more compassion from her or him. Women attended mourning gatherings as a religious obligation, sitting in separate rooms or buildings from men. Generally, women did not accompany the body of the deceased and the grieving men to the cemetery. However, they actively attended mourning gatherings in homes or segregated public spaces on the third, seventh, and fortieth days after the death and on the one-year anniversary. Women also commonly went to the local cemetery on Thursday afternoons, the day before Friday. They used Thursday as the day of the week reserved for religion, to weep, talk to the deceased, and ask for intercession for them. At this time, they often distributed food or drink on behalf of the deceased and found opportunities to talk with other women. During Ramadan, the month of fasting, women cooked and served special foods before daylight and then to break the fast when darkness fell. Women prepared and distributed foods in honor of the saints at different times of the year.

In the years since the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, opportunities for women's participation in some types of rituals have increased. Although previously women, especially younger ones, generally did not attend mosques, now officials are more welcoming of their presence. Sometimes they take steps to allow even menstruating women or women otherwise in a state of impurity to attend by arranging for balconies or other separate areas not considered a part of the mosque and thus not in danger of pollution. At times, women may speak before mixed congregations, with the understanding that the message's significance can make an exception to the rule that women's voices should not be heard by unrelated men.

Government officials hold large gatherings for women as part of their policy of inviting women's support and participation in Islamic Republic activities. The government and government-connected companies organize in-country pilgrimages as well as trips to saints' shrines in Iraq and Syria. These religious-oriented tours have become very popular forms of recreation. Men and women travel in the same buses.⁴³ Generally, more females than males purchase these tours. These opportunities draw older women

especially, who may travel without a male relative chaperone if they wish. Many older widows whose children have grown up and moved away now live by themselves. For such elderly ladies, these pilgrimages offer social and spiritual rewards.

In addition to participating in formerly popular rituals such as *sofrehs*, *rozehs*, and visiting saints' shrines to request assistance and intercession (*ziarat*), many women attend a newer form of women's religious ritual, the *majles*. Most often, a female preacher and teacher leads these community home-based gatherings, where women discuss holy sources and aspects of Islam, listening to and questioning their female leader. These sessions can be dynamic and thought-provoking. Through such discourse, women are involved in developing and reconstructing some interpretations of Islam and women's place in Islam.⁴⁴

Although Islamic Republic officials have emphasized the importance of prayer and Islamic attitudes, behaviors, and rituals, many people, particularly the young, have become rather disinterested in Islamic attitudes and concerns and rather lax in fulfilling their prayer obligations, according to official commentary. Many females as well as males resist pressures to discipline their thoughts and activities into Islamic channels. Rather, they develop interests in secular orientations and areas of life.

Religious Law

Laws in Iran are supposed to be based on the religious law (*shari'a*). Government clerics say that requirements of modest dress for women are taken from the Qur'an. Marriage, divorce, inheritance, and custody laws all come from shari'a tradition, according to government clerics.

VIOLENCE

Domestic Violence

Religious conservatives defend domestic violence by pointing to men's obligation, as stated in the Qur'an, to guide disobedient wives. If they do not listen to admonishment or improve when they are denied access to the marital bed, husbands may physically punish them, but must not be so severe that they leave any mark on the body. Many husbands beat their wives for disobedience, in frustration, or because of family dynamics. To some extent, a woman's safety from battering depends on her own family's relative status and power.⁴⁵ Her own male relatives may offer her refuge or express their distress if a woman is beaten by her husband, but often her own family encourages her to return to her husband and tolerate the situation. Men may practice emotional and mental abuse as well as physical.

Rape/Sexual Assault

In Iran, those families that can do so pay much attention to protecting women and girls against potential sexual predation or activity. A girl who has lost her virginity will face great disadvantage in courtship. The pre-occupation with virginity and a woman's chastity and loyalty to her husband after marriage serves to protect women from exposure to potential sexual aggressors. However, under certain circumstances, men have forced or pressured girls and women into unwanted sexual activity. Most commonly, because of the traditionally low age of girls' marriage, lack of contact between the couple, and sexual ignorance, the required consummation of marriage on the wedding night typically took the form of rape,⁴⁶ although women did not put it in such terms. Typically, sexual activity for the first period of marriage brought distress and discomfort to females.

No concept of marital rape exists in Iran; a wife does not have protection from unwanted sexual activity from her husband. Indeed, Iranian Muslim women are supposed to be available at all times for any type of sexual attention from their husbands. Males of the household may well force or pressure sexual attentions on girls and women brought into middle- and upper-class homes to work as maids.

During the political repression of Mohammad Reza Shah's regime, guards and interrogators sometimes raped female political prisoners. After the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, fanatic Muslim males apparently used rape as a political tool against raped females accused of plotting against the Islamic Republic before their execution in order to influence their afterlives.

Incest does take place at times between brother and sister, daughter and father, or with a father-in-law or other male relatives. However, shame prevents females and families from disclosing such incidents.

Girls run away from home, often from beatings or fear of beatings, early marriage, sexual abuse, and their father's use of them as prostitutes to take in money for themselves. Most runaways end up as prostitutes. The increase in men's drug addiction brings trouble to wives and daughters due to the men's tendency to abusiveness and need for cash. The 1999 opening of Rayhaneh House, a shelter for runaway girls, has brought this previously shrouded issue into the open to be addressed as a social problem. By 2000, twenty-two such temporary shelters had been established in Iran, most of them by the Social Services Organization.⁴⁷

Trafficking in Women and Children

At times during Persian/Iranian history, especially if economically pressed, a relatively few fathers or other male guardians have sold females. In one infamous case, poor harvests and impossibly high fees required by landlords in the area of Quchan in northeastern Iran prompted fathers to

sell daughters to Turkmen tribal people who then took most across the border into Russia for sale.⁴⁸ More often, fathers or male relatives from a village or poor urban neighborhood arranged to send a young girl for employment as a maid in a town or city home, where she might be subject to sexual predation. When females did not have much education or job opportunities, a divorced wife, if her own family would not take her in, frequently had few options other than becoming a prostitute.

During Mohammad Reza Shah's reign, prostitutes operated in a specific section of a settlement, such as Shahr-e No or the New City in Tehran. After the formation of the Islamic Republic, especially during and after the war with Iraq, clerics encouraged men to take females as temporary wives as a way of supporting war widows and as a means of channeling sexual desires of young people not yet in a position to commit to marriage. Shi'a Islam allows temporary wives (*muta'a* or *sigheb*). Under this arrangement, a woman agrees to become a man's sexual partner for a stipulated period of time and for a stipulated amount of money. Although this is allowed by Shi'a law, if a female becomes a man's temporary wife, she suffers a severe loss of status and will not be an acceptable wife in a good marriage.

In the last ten years, with the movement of girls and young women into public places for schooling and jobs, a few of them have apparently begun casual prostitution work as a way of picking up cash to buy clothes and other items. Temporary marriage makes it relatively worry free to engage in such activity. A couple or a female, if apprehended in the company of a nonrelated man, could hope to defend themselves by saying that they had made a *muta'a* contract and thus had temporarily become husband and wife.

Prostitution is illegal in the Islamic Republic and can bring women floggings or even execution. Nevertheless, prostitution has been increasing dramatically. It is no longer limited to a set-aside section of a city. Even government officials estimate that the number of prostitutes in Tehran has risen to more than 300,000. Recently, the government has begun cracking down on prostitution. Police have broken up several prostitution rings, some with international networks sending young Iranian girls to Arab countries in the Persian Gulf, Turkey, East Asia, and Europe. In the fall of 2002, police broke up some seventy brothels in the holy city of Qom. The press continued to publish reports of police raids on prostitution rings, many run by women, almost weekly. In order to cut down on sexual corruption, several clerics suggested the establishment of "chastity houses" where the government would channel access to women's sexuality through the permitted temporary marriage arrangements. Women and other groups reacted so violently against this possibility that it seems to have been defeated for the time being.

Parents arranged their children's marriages. Although a female is supposed to agree to a marriage, often fathers ignored this rule in reality. In Iran, Muslim law allowed marriage of girls at age nine. Fathers might

arrange the marriages of girls even younger than this, although ideally, husbands were to wait until a young bride's menarche before consummating the marriage. Because such arrangements were legal, marriage actually constituted the main means of trafficking in women and children. Fathers might also arrange for daughters to become temporary wives of men in return for financial benefit. As females now have more educational opportunities, and the average age of first marriage has apparently risen above twenty-two, such marriages of young girls have declined, but still take place. Sometimes drug addiction prompts men to basically sell a daughter to support their habit.

War and Military Repression

In 1936, Reza Shah ordered Iranian women to remove their veils. Females had to wear Western clothing outside the house, stay at home, or attempt to sneak out in a veil. When police apprehended females wearing veils or scarves, they shouted at them and tore off their covering. Reza Shah later rescinded this order. Reza Shah abdicated in 1941, and his son Mohammad Reza Shah became ruler. Mohammad Reza Shah did not force women to leave veiling, but encouraged women to wear Western clothing.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Iranians actively participated in politics. People supported nationalization of oil and Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq, and the shah was forced to leave the country. The United States and England supported a coup d'état to overthrow popular Prime Minister Mosaddeq and reinstated the shah. Iranians saw the shah's return to power as illegitimate, reigniting the opposition. To gain control, the shah resorted to maximum forms of repression to curb opposition. Drawing on the anti-Communist rhetoric of the West, he arrested, imprisoned, and executed members of the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party and other political organizations. With increasing repression, the opposition either left the country or went underground. During the revolution, all of these forces reemerged and united to overthrow the government.

Mohammad Reza Shah continued the process of centralizing power that his father had begun and attempted to prevent any competing centers of power or any political activity outside his own organizations. The shah's government prevented women as well as men from expressing political dissent. Women became political prisoners along with men, although in fewer numbers, and suffered from torture, sometimes of a sexual nature, and death. During the antishah movement of the late 1970s, soldiers sometimes killed females among the marchers and demonstrators. Shortly after the revolution, some of the tribal/ethnic groups revolted—for example, the Kurds in the northwest and the Qashqai in the southwest—and then suffered the consequences of government attack and executions.

After the 1979 revolution, the new government imprisoned and executed female shah supporters—for example, the former minister of education,

Farrokhroo Parsa—and leftists. Females became members of the dissident Muslim group the Mojahedin and fought battles with Iranian forces, at times based within Iraq. The Islamic Republic government imprisoned, tortured, raped, and executed many female Mojahedin as well as males. Females also suffered during the Pahlavi regime, the revolutionary period, and the Islamic Republic because of imprisonment, torture, house arrest, or execution of male family members and relatives. The new Islamic government's strict policy about women's modesty, separation from unrelated men, and nature suited to the family and home rather than the outside world reduced women's freedoms and opportunities. Women could be harassed, fired, arrested, tortured, or executed for refusal to conform to Islamic modesty regulations. Governmental clerics saw women as important symbols of the purity of Muslim society, in contrast to the corrupt and promiscuous West; therefore, they required strict conformity from women. Many women were arrested and flogged or imprisoned for inadequate covering. In the years following the revolution, even a strand of hair peeking out from a scarf, lipstick, nail polish, or insufficiently opaque stockings showing beneath a veil could cause a woman serious trouble. Vigilante groups took it upon themselves to reprimand and punish improperly dressed females, as their motto *Ya rusari, ya tu sari* (Either the scarf or a blow on your head) indicates.

In 1980, neighboring Iraq attacked Iran. The revolutionary turmoil had weakened Iran and made it less able to defend its territories, Iraqi leaders believed. The subsequent devastating eight-year war brought destruction, death, and hardship. Iranian women suffered from bombing and missiles, loss of homes and dislocation, economic deprivation, fear and insecurity, and death or disability of male relatives fighting at the front. Some cities suffered great damage, such as Abadan in the southwest. Refugees from areas near the border with Iraq inundated some cities, such as Shiraz in the southwest. The war left thousands upon thousands of widows and their fatherless children to struggle for a livelihood in the postwar inflation and poor economy. During the years of political turmoil and war in Afghanistan, thousands of Afghan refugees, mainly males, entered Iran from the east. Many married Iranian women. When the United States overthrew the Taliban regime in 2002, many of these men left their Iranian wives to return to Afghanistan.

Iranians face political instability and possible war in the region. Internally, although repression has been mitigated by the 1997 election of moderate cleric President Mohammad Khatami, the Islamic Republic government continues to limit political freedoms. Elections are held, but the Council of Experts must approve candidates in order for them to be listed on ballots. As the government is a Shi'a Muslim theocracy, run by Shi'a Muslim clerics and supposed to be guided by Shi'a Muslim religious law, Sunni, Armenian, Assyrian, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and more secular women do not feel that the government is supportive of their interests. As

Shi'a Muslims consider Baha'is to be apostates, they have suffered brutal repression. Vigilante groups killed many Baha'is and burned their homes and shops not long after the revolution, and the government executed some Baha'i leaders. In the years since the revolution, several women have been stoned for sexual impropriety. Security has declined, leaving women to fear robbery, burglary, and attacks upon their persons.

Because of the formation of the Islamic Republic, the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq War, and political repression under the Islamic Republic, thousands upon thousands of Iranians left Iran. Some of them were forced to flee clandestinely, paying high prices to smugglers to lead them across borders to Turkey or to Afghanistan and then Pakistan. Iranian immigrants, many of them from the middle or upper classes who held government and military positions under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's regime or prospered during the oil boom of that time, are now scattered throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, and elsewhere in the world. So many Iranians found homes in the Los Angeles area after the revolution that they call it "Irangelos" or "Tehrangeles." These Iranian immigrants in the United States and elsewhere suffer from being forced to leave their own country and culture and often family members and relatives.

Although many Iranians in the United States and elsewhere have prospered because of bringing money from Iran, becoming successful in business, or entering professional careers for which their often high levels of education qualify them, many Iranian women must take less prestigious work in order to help support their families. Their degrees are not recognized by American institutions. Additionally, their limited English may prevent them from working in their own fields. They have also suffered from the American public's hostility and discrimination, especially during some periods, such as when radical Muslim students took Americans at the embassy in Tehran hostage in December 1979 and held them for more than a year. Iranian women living in the United States and elsewhere abroad also face cultural dissonance with their children who have grown up in the new culture.⁴⁹

Since the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, Iranians have faced regional insecurity and possible war. To the east, the new Afghan government under President Hamid Karzai does not fully control the entire country, and violence breaks out periodically. The recent war in Iraq has caused anxiety in the West about the role of the U.S. in the region. Further, American President Bush has included Iran in his "axis of evil," and Iranians fear that they may be next on the U.S. agenda. As the Shi'a Muslim Hizbollah active in threatening Israel from southern Lebanon is suspected of receiving assistance from Iran, Iranians' fears of being an eventual U.S. target are exacerbated. Regional political turmoil brings to Iranian women as well as men a sense of fear about the future and the possible effects of war for them.

OUTLOOK FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Conservative clerics consider proper Muslim Iranian women to be an important marker of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Women's modest covering (*hijab*), separation from nonrelated men, and presence in the home as nurturing mother and obedient, supportive wife demonstrate Muslim society's superiority and smooth functioning. In their view, such women symbolize difference from the corrupt, dissolute West where women's promiscuity has harmed both family and society. As important symbols of Islamic identity, Iranian women face great pressures to conform to ideals. They are making great efforts to resist clerical definition and develop equality and self-determination. Their situation in the twenty-first century depends in large part on the outcome of the struggle between conservative Islamic Republic clerics, on the one hand, and reformist clerics, liberals, and secularists, on the other. More education and entrance into religious arenas provide women with employment and opportunities to exercise influence. However, the economic situation and females' greater access to the world outside the family also bring to some divorce, economic necessity of women working, and even additional chances for sexual aggression, premarital sex, physical and emotional assaults from threatened male family members, and prostitution. Since the 1979 revolution and the subsequent formation of the Islamic Republic, women have undergone war and severe restrictions on their dress and behavior, mobility, and opportunities. They are making headway in struggling for improved rights and opportunities for women. Economic and political conditions inside the country, the moderate versus conservative trends of the Islamic Republic, and regional stability or war will all influence developing rights and opportunities for women and the level of protection for women from violence and privation.

NOTES

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Videos/Films

- The Circle*. 2000. Directed by Jafar Panahi. Iranian Movies.com.
- The Day I Became a Woman*. 2000. Directed by Marziyeh Meshkini. Iranian Movies.com
- Divorce Iranian Style*. 1998. Directed by Kim Longinotto and Ziba Mir-Hosseini. Women Make Movies.
- The Hidden Half*. 2001. Directed by Tahmineh Milani. Iranian Movies.com
- Runaway*. 2001. Directed by Kim Longinotto and Ziba Mir-Hosseini. Women Make Movies.

Web Sites and Organizations

American Iranian Council, www.American-Iranian.org.
 An educational organization that aims at “providing for a sustained dialogue and a more comprehensive understanding of US-Iranian relations.” Among its many programs, this organization examines “the complex issues of Iranian women’s role in the contemporary Iranian society.” Email: aic@american-iranian.org.

Association of Iranian Women, www.aiwusa.org.
 This association’s objective is “to educate and empower Iranian women throughout the United States. It works toward building a network committed to the idea of advocating women’s rights.” Email: BehjatDehghan@aiwusa.org.

Bad Jens, www.badjens.com.

An online feminist magazine that aims “to improve links between activists of academics inside and outside Iran” and to enhance intellectual and cultural exchange between Iranians and non-Iranians. The site provides links to many organizations, including a list of nongovernmental organizations. Email: badjensletters@yahoo.com.

A Brief History of Women’s Movement in Iran, www.payvand.com/women.

Offers a historical and analytical essay that examines the structural and ideological transformation in Iran and traces women’s quest for rights and political participation. Email: massoume@mailandnews.com.

Forugh Farrokhzad, www.forughfarrokhzad.org.

This web site’s aim “is to offer an international open forum for all those who have been touched by Forugh’s poetry, life, and liberation.” Email: info@forughfarrokhzad.org.

Homan, www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Heights/3470.

Homan’s vision “is to promote the creation of a safe community where Iranian lesbians, gays, and bisexuals can come together in celebration of both their cultural and sexual identities without hatred or prejudice.” Email: homan-la@geocities.com.

Iranian Women Poets, www.art-arena.com/women.

Introduces many famous Iranian poets and provides a brief description of their lives. The introduction also includes a poem by each poet. Email: Katy@art-arena.com.

Iranian Women’s Studies Foundation, www.iwsf.org.

The mission of this foundation is “to provide a forum for exchange of ideas on issues related to Iranian women, to disseminate information on Iranian women’s achievements, and to establish a network of connection among communities of Iranian women the world over.” Email: Iranianwsf@aol.com.

Karamah, www.karamah.org.

The organization of Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights. It is committed “to advancing an Islamic perspective on issues of human rights.” The site provides articles on issues pertaining to women. Email: karamah@karamah.org.

National Committee of Women for a Democratic Iran, <http://ncwdi.igc.org/index.html>.

Devoted to “monitoring women’s rights in Iran,” the committee’s objective is to “advocate observance and implementation of internationally accepted standards of human rights, in particular those pertaining to women.” Email: ncwdi@igc.org.

Salam Iran, www.Salamiran.org.

Web site created by the Islamic Republic of Iran (Iranian embassy in Ottawa, Canada). The site is comprehensive and covers a wide range of topics including women. The section on women provides insights on organizations and committees that address different aspects of women’s affairs in Iran. It contains reports and statistics on women as well as a list of nongovernmental organizations operating in Iran.

Women Living under Muslim Laws, www.wluml.org.

An “international Network that provides information, solidarity and support for all women whose lives are shaped or governed by laws and customs said to derive from

Islam.” It aims at increasing women’s autonomy and empowerment and has extensive links. Email: run@gn.apc.org.

Women’s Voice (*Avaye Zan*), www.tvs.se/womensvoice/.

Covers a host of issues concerning women and has links to a number of informative sites. Email: Sholeh.irani@mailbox.swipnet.se.

Women, the Visual Arts, and Islam, www.skidmore.edu/academics/arhistory/ah369/Iranianfilm.htm.

Informs users about the role of women in the Iranian cinema. It provides an overview of internationally acclaimed Iranian films and has links to many informative sites.

Zan, www.zan.org.

An interactive directory with links to other organizations addressing women’s issues. Its mission is “to break down negative stereotypes around Iranian women, as well as being a network channel connecting them globally.” Email: Roya@zan.org.

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