

## THE SEXUAL ECONOMY OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC: BIRTH CONTROL, FEMALE SEXUAL AWAKENING, AND THE GAY LIFESTYLE<sup>1</sup>

*Janet Afary*

*(University of California, Santa Barbara, USA)*

In *The History of Sexuality* Michel Foucault argues that beneath a variety of sexual prohibitions of seventeenth-century European societies a “veritable discursive explosion” around sexuality could be discerned. At the end of the eighteenth century, sexual regulations had become ingrained in legislative discourse, and state intervention addressed numerous issues concerning sexual conduct, among them the legal age of marriage, the birth rate, fertility, and the frequency of sexual relations. Through its economic, legal, medical, and health policies, the modern state influenced the sexual conduct of its populations in new ways, resulting in dramatic demographic changes. By the nineteenth century, a broader discourse on sexuality was taking shape beneath the blanket of Victorian morality. It was nothing less than “an apparatus for producing an ever greater quantity of discourse about sex, capable of functioning and taking effect in its very economy.” Foucault’s interpretation of course contradicted the common assumption of an absence of discussion of sexuality in the nineteenth century, followed by greater sexual freedom in the twentieth century.

Considered alongside trends concerning gender and sexuality in post-revolutionary Iran, Foucault’s portrait of sexuality in the Victorian era offers valuable insights into the contemporary situation in Iran. Foucault can shed light on the repercussions of the new sexual austerities that were imposed after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. In the 1980s the Islamist government instituted a dramatic reversal in human rights, especially regarding women’s rights. The state revived pre-modern social conventions (repudiation, veiling, flogging) but enforced them through modern means and institutions, which meant a wider application. In its system of distributive justice, Muslims and non-Muslims, men and women received different treatment before the law. Defunct and repressive Shi’i rituals of purity and penance were brought back, while polygamy and sex with underage girls were newly sanctioned. Openly gay men were severely punished, and a few were even executed.

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However, the popular notion that Islamism has enforced an inclusive form of sexual repression on the Iranian people does not explain the complexity of what has taken place. There have been significant improvements in women's education and health along with a remarkable drop in birth rates. How can such important reforms, which have many positive implications for women, coexist with harshly misogynistic laws and policies? Part of the answer is that before the revolution Iranian women had already made significant advances in these areas. But the other part is that the policies of the Islamist government cannot easily be categorized as "puritanical" or "moralistic." Rather, using Foucault's framework, we can argue that various factions within the state actively deployed a new "sexual economy" for the population. Sometimes, the Islamist state privileged patriarchal interpretations of gender norms over more modern ones. At times, it adopted modern projects alongside a discourse that presented them as practices indigenous to traditional Islam. In all cases, the state used modern institutions to disseminate these various discourses.

Studies of birth control and family planning in the United States provide us with yet another vantage point from which to examine the unintended results of family planning in Iran. As a result of industrialization, urbanization, and the adoption of contraceptive technologies, American society by the mid-twentieth century had experienced a profound change in its sexual mores. As people began to live longer and fertility rates dropped, marriage became more than an institution for procreation. Women's demands for emotional and sexual intimacy increased. The emphasis on romantic, (hetero)sexual love led to new forms of normative heterosexuality. Good sex in marriage became important, and romantic love seemed necessary to a good marriage. After Margaret Sanger and the Planned Parenthood Federation initiated the birth-control movement in the United States, many sectors of society gradually set aside their opposition and embraced such ideas. Most Protestant churches and Jewish organizations (and many individual Catholics) approved of contraception, hoping thereby to strengthen the bonds of marriage. Attitudes toward premarital sex also changed, with sex outside marriage becoming more acceptable. Widespread use of contraceptives helped make marriage a more companionate union. While this type of marriage involved a division of labor between breadwinner and homemaker, it was in some respects a more egalitarian and less patriarchal relationship than before. In addition, as Jennifer Bell points out, by separating sexual activity from procreation, "birth control proponents opened the door for non-reproductive relationships ranging from childless marriages to casual encounters to non-heterosexual relationships." As women became more sexually assertive, they also became less tolerant of men's extramarital affairs, both heterosexual and homosexual.

By the 1960s and 1970s, the United States had moved further toward what could be called “individualistic marriages.” In this third phase in the evolution of Western marriage, romantic love retained its importance, but the partners had also to fulfill each others’ psychological, and often occupational, needs. Occupational compatibility became a central aspect of psychological and emotional compatibility in an advanced capitalist order in which a majority of women not only had to but wanted to work. According to Stephanie Coontz, the author of *Marriage, A History* (2005), the increase in women's economic independence in the 1970s and 1980s initially led to rise in divorce rates, not because women's work and education created more bad marriages, but because they encouraged women to raise their expectations of fairness in marriage and gave them more resources to leave bad marriages. But as men and women adjusted to women's new bargaining power in and out of marriage, husbands and wives began to communicate better, spend more quality time together, and develop deeper friendships, leading to more satisfying marriages and sex lives for both partners. This helps explain why divorce rates have declined significantly for college-educated couples since the late 1980s (much more significantly than for less educated or lower-income couples). The right to divorce also led to lower rates of female suicide and domestic violence and contributed to more compatible unions among those who remained married.

In the US, better heterosexual sex altered perceptions about other types of relationships. Many came to believe that women had a right to enjoy sex, whether inside or outside marriage, whether in heterosexual or homosexual relationships, and neither should be covert any longer. A more vocal gay movement soon followed, one that fought against the hetero-normative social and legal institutions of American society and gained new rights for gays and lesbians. Although it suffered some setbacks during the early years of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, by the early twenty-first century, it was achieving numerous political victories.

In Iran too, as the birth rate dropped, life expectancy increased, and changing gender norms saturated society through the international media, women’s expectations of marriage shifted as well. Iranians had practiced arranged marriages for centuries, with less normative weight given to romantic love. During the Pahlavi era, companionate marriages gradually gained ground among the elite and the new urban middle classes. Nonetheless, parents still played a key role in introducing prospective couples, approving marriages, and negotiating dowry and *mahriyeh*. In the 1980s leftist and Islamist party leaders adopted parental roles and were expected to give their consent before a couple could marry.

By the first decade of the twenty-first century, in urban and even rural communities, arranged marriages and endogamous marriages (within kinship groups) have become less common. Although daughters still need their fathers' legal permission to marry in the Islamic Republic, at other levels the enforcement of Islamist strictures has slackened. Marriage is seen less and less as merely an institution for procreation, and women have come to expect intimacy and spontaneity along with a greater degree of emotional and sexual closeness. Moreover, the mean age of marriage for girls has gone up, and dating has become a more acceptable part of life. In urban and northern rural communities, young men and women form friendships on the streets, at the universities, and in the workplace. This occurs even though the Islamist state has established many prohibitions against the mingling of unmarried men and women. After about a year of such semi-secret dating, a young man might go to the father's house and ask for his daughter's hand. Parents still help their sons and daughters with the cost of a new home and regard this as their responsibility. In part, this is because renting an ordinary two-bedroom apartment in better parts of Tehran, for example, required a huge down payment in 2007 Iran, plus a monthly rent of around \$600. The idea of unmarried cohabitation has also gained limited social acceptance in the capital city, in spite of its nominal illegality. Romantic love in relationships and marriage is greatly valued and Valentine's Day has become a big day of celebration, much to the consternation of the government.

In addition to covert homosexuality in many social sectors, especially religious seminars and same-sex high schools, within Tehran's educated and cosmopolitan population, a small, clandestine, gay subculture has also emerged, along with cyberspace publications in Persian which advocated a modern gay and lesbian lifestyle. Iran's gay and lesbian community desires legal recognition of homosexuality by the public and the state, as well as more egalitarianism within relationships.

Meanwhile surging rates of unemployment and rising expectations concerning marriage have led to dramatic increases in the number of runaways, prostitutes, drug addicts, and suicides among young Iranian women. Many women complain of domestic violence and their husbands' extramarital affairs and want a way out. These upheavals have unleashed new anxieties about the changing sexual mores of the country. This article explores the link between politics and the shifting gender roles in this third generation of Iranian youth since the revolution.

***Women, the Politics of Reform, and the Discourse of Human Rights***

In the mid-1990s, the battles for a more tolerant Iranian society were fought in numerous and sometimes unlikely sites. Journalists, lawyers, ministers, doctors and nurses, fashion designers, actors and film directors, college students, literary writers, and homemakers became activists in the reform movement. Reformists came from many different social and religious orientations, including both secular and moderate Muslims. Some were leftist Islamists who had participated in the revolution, fought in the war, or had relatives who were martyred. Many contributed to literacy and health campaigns. Such early supporters of the theocratic state, including women who had suffered the loss of loved ones in the war, were now increasingly dissatisfied with corrupt state policies and felt abandoned by it. Most reformists had gone through a dramatic ideological transformation that was influenced further by the collapse of the Eastern European and Soviet systems. Veteran Islamists and opposition activists gradually reached a fragile truce in order to unite provisionally for a common cause. These organizations were reinforced by the increasing numbers of youth raised on satellite television and the Internet who resented the excesses of the theocratic state and its morality police. Reformists argued that opposition to the shah and Western domination had been only one dimension of the revolutionary agenda. Issues of more importance were the creation of a viable democracy and a new interpretation of Islam compatible with the requirements of modern life.

*The May 1997 election of Mohammad Khatami as president strengthened the voices of women's rights advocates, who supported his run for office. He was reelected in June of 2001 with close to 76 percent of the vote, despite his limited success in carrying out his program in the face of resistance on the part of entrenched hard-liners. In 1999, more than seven thousand women ran as candidates for urban and provincial councils. In twenty cities these women candidates placed first in contests for council leadership positions, and in 58 cities they took second place. The February 2000 elections brought a new generation of deputies to the Sixth Islamic Parliament (2000-2004), giving reformists a clear majority. Many deputies assumed they could simply reinstate greater social freedoms, changing the Islamist regime through legal, parliamentary means. Between 2000 and 2004, the reformists who dominated the presidency, the Parliament and the provincial councils attempted to liberalize the system. Women deputies organized a caucus and introduced a series of laws pertaining to the rights of women and girls, managing to pass a few of them. One reduced the severity of the hijab for children and high school students by allowing more colorful uniforms and scarves. The Parliament raised the legal age of*

marriage for girls from nine to fifteen, but the all-powerful Guardian Council disagreed, and it was eventually set at thirteen. Single women received permission to study abroad on government scholarships. In the early 1990s women had gained limited rights to initiate divorce if their husbands were drug addicts, had a mental disorder or contagious disease, or had abandoned their families. Wives also gained limited child custody rights. The Reformists attempted to expand these rights further.

President Khatami supported these efforts, including ones that would have equalized women's inheritance rights and given them greater divorce rights. But the right to inheritance and several other bills were either rejected or severely revised by the Supreme Religious Leader, the Guardian Council, and the Expediency Council. The latter is a tribunal that arbitrates between the Parliament and the Guardian Council, usually siding with the latter. More ambitious projects, such as calls for the adoption of the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which the Khatami government had helped introduce, were ratified—with some reservations—by a parliamentary majority.

Fierce opposition to the CEDAW developed in Qom, where Islamist men and women held demonstrations against the new law. Conservative clerics declared that joining CEDAW would amount to “a declaration of war against Islam.” Another accusation was that the CEDAW represented a perverted “Western sexual ethos and prostitution” that would result in the creation of unisex bathhouses. Eventually, the Guardian Council rejected the proposed law on the grounds that it conflicted with several principles of the constitution and Islam, including inheritance and divorce laws, the hijab, and polygamy.

Despite strong public support and enthusiasm, the Khatami era did not succeed in overhauling the Islamist state, though it did provide greater opportunities for cultural expressions and political criticisms. Moreover, the reformers faced repression at every step, since the police and the legal system remained under the control of the Guardian Council and the Supreme Religious Leader, as did military and foreign affairs. One result was that between 1997 and 2004, more than a hundred newspapers were closed down, and the state targeted political dissidents, journalists, and even some reform politicians. Many were arrested, murdered, or forced into exile, including a generation of student activists who held dramatic demonstrations in Iranian universities in 1999.

When many disillusioned pro-reformists stayed away from the polls, conservatives were elected to control of the Seventh Islamic Parliament

(2004-2008). *These conservatives halted the debate on the CEDAW and many other progressive gender reforms. Among them were large numbers of the Basij and Pasdaran, whose ascendancy to the top decision-making institutions marked a new stage in Iranian politics. Women deputies affiliated with the Basij, and with close ties to the rural sectors, promoted a few progressive measures, such as reinstating abortion to save the life of a mother and the appointment of women judges in an advisory capacity. However, for the most part they supported the new conservative agenda.*

*The reformists were further weakened when US President George W. Bush included Iran in his "Axis of Evil" in 2002 and suggested that the United States might invade Iran. The powerlessness of the reformists in the face of these foreign and domestic challenges led to widespread public disillusionment. Following a decade of reformist control in the provincial councils, the Parliament, and the presidency, the 2005 presidential elections brought to power Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a conservative populist and former member of Pasdaran. The presidency, the Parliament, and the provincial councils were now all in the hands of a new generation of conservatives who worked closely with the Pasdaran. Every year, Iran inched closer to becoming a militarized state.*

The decision of nearly twenty million disillusioned pro-reformist voters to boycott the elections, a certain degree of voting fraud engineered by the office of the Supreme Religious Leader, and the zeal with which the Basij got out the vote all helped bring Ahmadinejad to power. Various reports estimate that by 2005 there were around eight million "card-carrying" Basijis: three million active members (trained at military camps and used in domestic repression) and five million inactive members (individuals who receive handouts and can be mobilized at election times). Those who voted for Ahmadinejad did so out of Basiji loyalty and support for his economic agenda. They were moved by his piety, his promises of social justice, and his opposition to the pro-market economic liberalization proposals of his rival, Hashemi Rafsanjani, plans which would have ended many government subsidies.

Ahmadinejad's election also expressed a backlash against the sexual revolution taking place in Iran. I was in Tehran just before the election and was amazed by the range of negative comments on the streets and in social gatherings about women's supposed scandalous behavior. Many men, including young working class men bitterly opposed to the government, nonetheless expressed outrage over young women's presumed sexual promiscuity and at the sight of girls and boys walking in the streets with clasped hands. In such conversations, public criticisms of the economy were almost always tied into stories of young women

selling their bodies to Arab Sheikhs (and not Iranian clients) in the Persian Gulf to raise money for their dowries and support their families. As journalist Christopher de Bellaigue reported at the time, many of Ahmadinejad's supporters were deeply concerned with the "dramatic rise in prostitution, marital infidelities, and drug addiction," which they blamed on reformist social and cultural policies. They remembered that, as mayor of Tehran, Ahmadinejad had arranged low-interest loans for newly married couples, thus encouraging the institution of marriage. As a presidential candidate, he promised not only to reduce the staggering unemployment rate but also to provide more generous financial support for young couples.

Supporters of Ahmadinejad tapped into these feelings by distributing a documentary film by director Massoud Dehnamaki (a former Basiji) entitled *Prostitution and Poverty* (2002) before the elections. The film, a brilliant piece of propaganda worthy of Karl Rove in George W. Bush's administration, was aimed at Ahmadinejad's poor urban and rural supporters. It featured a series of interviews with poor urban women who had entered the sex trade in the Persian Gulf, often for a limited period. Some saved up to help desperate family members or to raise a respectable *jahiziyeh* to get married. This clever manipulation of social and cultural grievances, which played also on Iranian prejudices against Arabs, contributed to the defeat of the reform movement.

Between 2005 and 2008, Ahmadinejad ratcheted up the nuclear confrontation with the West, and clamped down on Reformists, advocates of women's rights, labor activists, and other progressive social sectors. Yet it became clearer than ever that no amount of moral exhortation, foreign provocation, or fiscal reforms could take Iranian society back to the early days of the revolution, when young people followed the dictates of the Islamist state on gender and morality issues, many of them willingly.

### ***The Politics of Birth Control***

The dramatic change in gender relations in Iran can be traced to some of the unintended consequences of the nation's family planning program, which in turn altered people's expectations of marriage. Soon after taking power in 1979 the state instituted its own religious sex education, which served a different function. Rather than censoring all discussion of sex, the state initially took a more traditionalist stance, banning only progressive treatments of sex influenced by Western discourses. The religious manuals of the clerics, with their detailed instructions on proper sexual conduct and on the rituals and purification required after sex, became mandatory reading in school. During



religious instruction in public schools, teachers spent a great deal of time describing proper procedures for ablution of the genitals and restoration of *taharat* (ritual cleansing). Instructors provided students with information about the anatomical and biological differences between men and women (menstruation, ejaculation, childbirth, etc.) from a religious perspective. Ziba Mir Hosseini points out that similar information was disseminated in neighborhood mosques and prayer sessions. Discussions of issues such as masturbation (viewed as reprehensible), vaginal discharge, and nocturnal discharge focused on avoiding ritual pollution before prayer. In these manuals, *shahvat* (sexual desire) and interest in *jama'* (intercourse) were seen as much stronger in women than in men. But women's *haya* (modesty) and men's *gheyrat* (honor) controlled excessive female desire. A high school teacher from Qom recalled that children constantly asked for definitions and explanations of words like sodomy, bestiality, and a variety of other forms of sexual conduct they encountered in these religious manuals of sexual etiquette, demands that placed their parents and teachers in an awkward position.

Additionally, the new regime adopted natalist policies. Couples with seven or more children received a plot of land on which to build a home. The state limited access to birth control and banned abortions, which had been permitted during the first trimester in the Pahlavi era. Families who sent their sons to the war were compensated with food coupons, monetary rewards, and expanded educational opportunities. Overall, total fertility rates increased from 6.3 in 1976 to 7.0 in 1986, as Iran's population expanded dramatically from 34 million to 49 million.

When the war ended in 1988, the government faced a population explosion and a disastrous economy. Supported in this by Ayatollah Khomeini, the state began to encourage family planning. Modern approaches to reproductive health were integrated into religious teachings and implemented as part of state health policy. Birth control was reauthorized in 1989. The state also requested assistance from the UN Fund for Population Activities. The architects of the new birth-control program were Hussein Malikafzali and his colleagues Habibollah Zanjani and Muhammad Alizadeh. Each had held positions in the Ministry of Health since the Pahlavi era. Their goals were to encourage birth spacing of three to four years, to discourage early and late pregnancy, and to limit family size to first to three and later to two children. The team reintroduced some of the birth-control policies of the pre-revolutionary National Organization of Women that had been shelved, and added many new features. This time, they had more success than under the shah's regime.

By the end of the twentieth century, Iran had become a model for other developing nations in the area of population control. Before the revolution, the annual rate of population growth had dropped from 3.1 percent in 1966 to 2.7 percent in 1976. This trend had reversed itself after the revolution, so that by 1986, the annual rate of population growth was 3.9. In the next decade (1986-1996), the annual rate dropped once again, this time more dramatically, to 2.0 percent. Total fertility rates also dropped to 2.1, making Iranian rates comparable to those of South Korea, Thailand, and Malaysia. Between 1986 and 1996 there was a 50 percent drop in the number of women who married before the age of twenty, even though the state encouraged early marriage. The average age of women at first marriage increased from 19.7 in 1976 to over 22 in 1996, with the gap between rural and urban women at first marriage almost disappearing. Meanwhile 74 percent of the women of childbearing age were using contraceptives.

A subsequent study showed that the increase in a husband and wife's level of education in the same period had led to the success of the program. After a decade of revolution and war, families seemed to place greater value on having daughters than before. Fathers and brothers now welcomed financial assistance to parents by daughters. The number of unmarried women who financially support their parents rapidly increased. This process improved relations between fathers and daughters and reduced the financial burden on brothers, who were the major source of support for older parents. As a result, sisters felt they were entitled to a larger share of their father's estate and many went to court to challenge their brothers over inheritance rights.

An international study similarly suggested that men's attitudes towards women had changed. In a comparative study of Iran, Jordan, and Egypt, Mansoor Moaddel and Taghi Azadarmaki found that 76 percent of Iranians agreed that two or less was the ideal number of children in a family, 40 percent felt that a woman's employment did not interfere with her intimacy with her children, and only 45 percent felt that a woman needed to have children to feel satisfied. All of these numbers were substantially lower than those in Egypt and Jordan.

Iran's birth-control campaign showed that the state was willing to articulate a more liberal discourse on sexuality when it suited its purposes, in this case, population control. Even so, child marriage, violence against women, repudiation, polygamy, lack of community property, and unequal inheritance rights persisted. On the latter issues, the regime followed a patriarchal and often misogynistic reading of Islam, and refused to adopt a more liberal and tolerant interpretation that would have empowered women in their personal lives.

Women's empowerment was hardly the goal of the Islamist state. Moreover, whenever birth control came in conflict with men's access to sexual pleasure, the state refused to support the former. For the purposes of population control and women's health, doctors in the Ministry of Health recommended that women not have children until after the age of twenty. But the state continued to keep the legal age of marriage low in order to serve men's sexual interests. Finally, during the reformist Sixth Parliament, the state agreed to raise the legal marriage age from nine to thirteen. Nonetheless, there was still a ten-year discrepancy between the legal age of marriage and the mean age of marriage.

Likewise, temporary marriage and polygamy remained legal, though both practices contributed to prostitution and venereal disease. The state continued to follow a dichotomous policy, on the one hand intervening in the sexual conduct of citizens to encourage smaller families and to assure men's easy access to sex, and on the other denying women greater control in other areas of their lives. This was the secret of the Islamist state's sexual economy.

By 2005 the government of the Islamic Republic had woken up to the unintended results of its family planning. But the genie was out of the bottle; women had become aware of benefits of low fertility and could not be persuaded to return to old practices. Moreover Iran's high unemployment rates did not permit a return to such policies. Once in office, Ahmadinejad did try to reverse the fertility trend and revive the pronatalist trends concomitant with Khomeini's jihadist policies of the early 1980s, even though Khomeini had supported population control by the time of his death in 1989. Ahmadinejad declared that a stronger Iran, with a nuclear capability, needed to be more populous and recommended more part-time rather than full-time employment for women. Even before he assumed power, the state attempted to restrict abortions. However, the president's comments alarmed the public and even many in the government, who saw them as yet another sign of his bellicose foreign and domestic politics.

### ***Sexual Awakening: Rural and Town Marriages and the Dilemma of Unmarried Girls***

Companionate, monogamous marriages, in which young adults have a strong voice in choosing a spouse, had become the accepted norm among the educated new middle classes by the 1970s. But in poorer rural communities, parents continued to arrange their children's marriages, and girls were married at a very young age, often around puberty or before. With the nearly universal adoption of birth control among married couples, better health and sex education in the 1990s, and expanding access to a broader range of media, marriage practices

evolved in rural communities as well. By 2000, people in poor rural communities of southwest Iran no longer viewed marriage as only an institution for procreation. Young people looked for psychological and social compatibility, mutual intimacy, and affection, and insisted on choosing their partners.

Despite continued resistance by more conservative sectors of society, birth control and sex education classes became mandatory for prospective couples after 1993. Participants received contraceptives and advice on intimate sexual matters. Offered in about 5,000 health centers, these classes lasted over an hour, with separate sessions for men and women. Class content varied somewhat according to the cultural diversity of the nation, from the more liberal northern province of Gilan to the much more conservative southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan. Generally, participants watched a film, explaining the body's erogenous zones, the sexual needs of men and women, and the ways of stimulating one's partner. The emphasis seemed to be on male sexual gratification and ways in which wives should keep their husbands satisfied and content. Female sexuality was discussed. Many women were surprised by what they learned in this class. Shohreh, a 20-year-old sociology student, who attended the classes before marrying her fiancé, declared

*I feel ashamed . . . that I'm twenty years old but I still know nothing about sex. I ask myself why I've never read any books about it. Before I watched this film, I thought that an orgasm was something only men had. I didn't know that women could have such a feeling.*

Many couples returned for individual counseling after marriage. This meant that young couples no longer had to exclusively rely on in-laws to resolve marital conflicts and had access to other sources of authority.

In an effort to reduce sexual and psychological trauma for young women who might be virgins until their wedding, doctors now advised a couple to wait until both were mentally and physically prepared and reminded them of the importance and impact of the first sexual encounter, especially on women. As Dr. Aminian points out,

*If, for example, a couple is suffering from stress, or is physically tired, or one of the partners really doesn't feel like having sex, then they shouldn't force it just because it is the wedding night.... We even tell the couples that it can take two or three weeks before the time is right to have sex for the first time.*

The young couple is also advised to delay pregnancy until they have adjusted to their new life.

Other shifts in social and economic trends contributed to these dramatic changes in gender relations and sexual mores. The basic family structure now incorporates not only the extended (traditional), but also the neolocal (established at marriage) unit. As parental authority has substantially weakened in Tehran and other urban communities, a decline in arranged marriages and an increase in “marriages based on free choice” has been observed. Marriages within kinship groups have also decreased. Slightly more than 20 percent of couples are first cousins, and around the same number are distant relatives. The lowest numbers of kin marriages were found in culturally liberal northern province of Gilan, and the highest in the culturally conservative southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan, where the mean age of women at first marriage is sixteen.

Despite significant changes in the 1990s, great differences have continued to exist between urban and rural communities, and between different regions. In increasingly urbanized northern villages, and those around Shiraz and Isfahan, educated girls, including doctors and dentists who earned substantial incomes, have become desirable marriage partners. High school teachers are even more sought after because their summers off give them more free time in which to raise a family. Young women’s expectations in marriage have also changed. Anthropologist Erika Friedl writes that their ideal husband is a man who is “good to talk to, pleasant to look at, reasonable and good-tempered, [had] a good income, and [helped] with housework.” Marriage ceremonies and the requisite gifts had also become more extravagant. A woman’s family regarded an expensive wedding ceremony and a large *mahriyeh* as the best forms of insurance against repudiation.

In villages surrounding Shiraz, young boys might decide whom they wanted to marry, and girls might refuse the husband their parents had chosen for them. Anthropologist Mary Hegland reports:

*As a newly married couple moves to its own home, the older generation loses influence over their lives. Brides and daughters-in-law no longer have to work under the direction of their mothers-in-law and defer to their wishes. Brides run their own homes and kitchens, and do not want their mothers-in-law to tell them what to do. Twenty-five years ago, married couples barely spoke to each other in public.... Now married couples can be openly affectionate physically with each other in front of others.... Engaged couples go visiting together to the homes of relatives. They even go into Shiraz together. They visit in each other’s homes, and may even stay overnight.*

Thus, a gradual process of individuation was taking place in rural communities as well. At the same time, the increase in the age of marriage for women and the reduced popularity of arranged marriages and kinship marriages had led to the appearance of an unprecedented social category, “the unmarried female teenager who lives at home.” Friedl writes that in villages and small urban communities this phenomenon was so new that

*no culturally and socially acceptable and meaningful way of living has yet developed for these young women. While their teenage brothers have the run of their village or town, the young women cannot go out unchaperoned without risking their reputation; they have no income and are therefore entirely dependent on the generosity of their father and brothers; they have little to do at home because housework is shared among all female family members; their social circle is extremely limited; and outside work is not to be had. Most of them simply sit, bored, in front of the television. They “sit at home waiting for a good suitor,” people say. And as the days of early, arranged marriages are over in most families, this “waiting for a suitor” is more dependent on chance than ever before.*

In more culturally conservative parts of the country, such as the southwestern province of Sistan-Baluchistan, the southern province of Khuzistan, the western province of Kurdistan, the northeastern province of Khorasan, or the central province of Yazd, where arranged marriages were still the norm, girls with college or even high school diplomas were threatening to some men and their families. As sociologist Mitra Shavarini reports, here young women found out that “their higher education, which they hoped would improve their marriage prospects, now ‘overqualifies’ them with most Iranian men.” From an early sample of more than 500 women in Yazd who had married and given birth before the age of fifteen, Soraya Tremayne concludes that girls who left school after the primary level married more easily and gained status by virtue of their marriage and children. Those who enrolled in university and moved away from home might find partners at the university. The problem, Tremayne reports, resided with the large middle group of girls who stayed in their villages, continued into secondary school, but neither attended college nor found employment. These young women missed out on both jobs and husbands, and were subject to much stricter paternal control. Their recreation seemed limited to intrafamilial activities, such as going out for pizza, watching television, visiting the extended family, or occasionally going on pilgrimage with them.

These young women were not ignorant of sexual matters, however. Religious teachers at school and on local television stations lectured on Shi’i regulations

of sexuality. *Bazaars* and itinerant vendors openly sold condoms alongside candy and cigarettes. Satellite television, present in a significant number of urban and rural homes, provided Western representations of sexuality in popular programs ranging from *Baywatch* and *Sex in the City* to more sober and educational ones, such as the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, where sex and sexuality were common themes.

Ahmadinejad knew well that such households comprised his political base. Rather than expanding employment for women, Ahmadinejad's central policy with regard to the family was facilitating marriage through various loans and subsidies, advocating pronatalist policies, and promoting part-time employment. In 2007, Tehran's mayor Muhammad Baqir Qalibaf complained that he could not continue the marriage-loan program, which his predecessor Ahmadinejad had instituted as mayor, because it would bankrupt the city's treasury. At the same time, Ahmadinejad viewed marriage loans as integral to his campaign strategy and battled with the Seventh Parliament to institute similar loans for the whole nation. In 2006 he required the sum of 1.3 billion dollars to provide cash subsidies for marriage and rent to low-income families, and established the Imam Reza Love Fund (*Sandoq-i Mehr-i Imam Reza*) for this purpose. When the Parliament refused to approve the fund, Ahmadinejad created an alternative venue, including conservative NGOs, that were not responsible to the Parliament and could distribute the funds independently. This provoked a major conflict between the president and the Parliament that spilled into other areas. The marriage crisis, coupled with high unemployment rates and a series of other social problems, could not be resolved with stopgap measures. Still, these measures were meant to enhance Ahmadinejad's populist credentials.

### ***A Radical Discourse on Gay/Lesbian Rights***

The new discourse on sexuality has not been limited to heterosexual relations, dating practices, or traditional marriage issues. In addition, it has cautiously touched upon the nation's small gay subculture. The Iranian Queer Organization (formerly known as the Persian Gay and Lesbian Organization or PGLO) was founded in 2004. Its headquarters are in Toronto, Canada, but the group has many branches in Europe and the US, as well as an underground office in Iran.

In December 2004, *MAHA: The First Iranian GLBT e-Magazine* began publication from an anonymous site inside the country, with the support of diaspora GLBT activists in England. Like other journals of its kind, *MAHA* interviewed international gay activists, published articles and letters about the experience of being closeted, addressed the trauma of hiding one's sexuality in

both the family and the workplace, and celebrated coming out and rejoicing in one's sexuality. Additionally, it contained advice columns responding to readers' concerns about sexual problems, including HIV/AIDS.

The journal included glossy, provocative photographs, though it avoided illustrations with frontal nudity. It had regular features on the history of homosexuality. Articles about Oscar Wilde, Sigmund Freud, and Alfred Kinsey, as well as essays on sexuality under Stalinism and Nazism, appeared alongside discussions of homosexuality in Iranian history, including brief biographies of prominent artists such as Sadeq Hedayat and Fereydoon Farrokhzad.

Efforts to redefine homosexuality and encourage a more modern gay culture extend to the domain of language itself. Instead of the term *hamjens baz* (roughly translated as "faggot") the journal used the more respectable term *hamjens gara* (homosexual orientation).

What made the journal such a groundbreaking publication is its discussion of homosexual relations within contemporary Iranian society and of the many ways in which closeted homosexuality also affects heterosexual marriage. *MAHA* was fearless in challenging the state's prohibition against homosexuality, writing, for example, that many religious texts recognize the right of a man to have sex with a little girl, but not the right to consensual homosexual relations among consenting adults: "We belong to a society where pedophilia is legal and justified according to the *shari'a*, yet a free and voluntary sexual relationship, between two homosexual adults, is considered a crime."

Like many advocates of women's rights, *MAHA* was critical of the new religious thinkers for their silence concerning sexuality and gender. Religious reformers such as Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar, who speak of "Protestantization of Islam," close their eyes to the sexual concerns of the nation:

*Thousands upon thousands (if not millions) of Muslim homosexuals, who attend mosques, including homosexual clerics, cannot be forgotten. The truth is that these individuals form a significant social, cultural, and religious foundation out of which the [reformist] religious thinkers have emerged. The silence of the theoreticians of Islamic Protestantization about the social and cultural rights of homosexuals, especially Muslim homosexuals, is the missing link in the discourse of our religious thinkers.*



*MAHA* proposed a more tolerant reading of the Qur'an. Pressing a believer into choosing between his "religious and conscientious beliefs" and his "sexual and inner inclinations," is akin to condemning him/her to a life of hell. It is not man but God who should render this type of judgment in the afterlife. If Islam is a religion of equality, then believers should not be divided on the basis of their sexual orientation, "where homosexual believers become 'second class citizens' and non-homosexuals ones are deemed closer to God. No one can claim to own God and the Qur'an, and no one can be forced out of a religion."

Critically appropriating the Aristotelian-Islamic definition of rational happiness, which calls for moderation as a prerequisite to contentment, *MAHA* argued for a "rational moderation" between one's religious beliefs and sexual desires, without clerical mediation between God and Human beings. Every person should be the judge of his/her ethical conduct. Since homosexuals of "the two other Abrahamic religions [Judaism and Christianity] have reached a consensus between their religious beliefs and their sexual inclinations," Muslims should be able to do the same and continue "the path laid out by Jewish and Christian religious thinkers. This new reading of the Qur'an, *MAHA* advised, ought to begin with a reinterpretation of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. "The story of the people of Lot suggests that homosexuality has been part of human society from its beginning and, contrary to what orthodox clerics claim, is not an imported Western product" Also, in the Qur'anic or Biblical accounts "there is no single reference to female homosexuality. So why is female homosexuality (*mosaheqeh*) not free and recognized in Muslim societies?"

*MAHA* criticizes secular Iranian intellectuals and artists who dare not speak out in defense of homosexuality: "If an artist or anyone else is sent to jail for the 'crime' of homosexuality, would Iranian artists and leftists speak out in his/her defense? We can definitely say no! This is the legacy of Islam and Stalinism! Though we must admit that in Europe, too, homosexuality is still viewed as only a tolerable 'perversion.'"

Many clerics (including Ayatollah Khomeini) have approved of sex-change operations, reasoning that surgery would end gender ambiguity. Muhammad Mehdi Kariminia, a university professor and cleric in Qom, who wrote his doctoral thesis on Iranian transsexuals, illustrates the mindset of those who encourage such operations. He believes that "transsexuals are sick because they are not happy with their sexuality and so should be treated" through operations, while "homosexuality is considered a deviant act" and punishable by law. These operations are often unsuccessful in resolving a person's sexual ambiguity and might lead to depression and suicide. However, the state's recognition of transsexuality as a medical condition that can be "cured," has created new

spaces for living a transgendered life. Gay men and lesbians who pass as transsexuals receive a medical certificate that protects them from legal persecution. Many go through such ruses, claiming that they are waiting for an operation at some unforeseeable future.

The rigid gender division between “active” and “passive” partners is not limited to gay men, but also defines many lesbian relations in Iran. A lesbian columnist who writes under the pen name Delaram complains,

*Unfortunately in our country, and among lesbians, a situation has developed where they avoid calling themselves passive (maf ‘ul) or even versatile. This is a term of ill repute for them. They even argue among themselves about who is more active (fa’el). Each tries to speak with a lower voice, or act as a luti [physically strong, even gangsterish male homosexual] and adopt such mannerisms. . . . Many refuse to perform so-called feminine chores. For example, they never want to cook. It is as if they view themselves as distinct from women. . . . But how could you be a homosexual and not be a feminist? How could you want a woman as your partner, but not demand equal rights for yourself and for your partner?*

According to MAHA, compulsory heterosexuality is a significant problem in contemporary Iranian society, since family members continue to view homosexuality as a transitional stage to adult heterosexuality and therefore pressure homosexual relatives to marry a member of the opposite sex. In addition, the state, the media, and the society as a whole, place a great deal of pressure on unmarried people to wed. Many parents also blame the mandatory sex-segregated policies of the state for their children's homosexuality, and pressure them to seek medical advice. Doctors adopt various approaches with homosexual clients. They prescribe antidepressants and spend most of the therapy sessions (often paid for by the parents) discussing other issues in the lives of their clients. More enlightened doctors tell their clients that nothing can be done to “cure” their homosexuality. A significant number of homosexuals end up marrying, hoping to shed their sexual inclinations, or just to have a family. A modern solution (which replicates some premodern patterns of sexuality) is an arranged marriage between a lesbian and a gay person. The couple would have a “perfunctory marriage and look like a husband and wife,” but in reality each would pursue his/her own lifestyle.

A much older practice is to arrange the marriage of one's same-sex beloved with a sister or cousin. For example, a young man might arrange the marriage of his sister to his male lover. He would then marry another woman himself. In this way, the two male lovers (who are now both married) become brothers-in-

law and would be able continue the relationship under the guise of family connections. *MAHA* rejected the idea of marrying an unsuspecting partner and suggests that such marriages exploit other people:

*Do we really solve our pains and problems as gays and lesbians by getting married? Have we not sacrificed another human being, along with ourselves, in this marriage? Doesn't the person we marry have hopes, wishes, and dreams as we do? Does s/he not need an honest (and not forced) love and affection? Have we been honest with the person we are marrying for a lifetime? Why should we selfishly sentence such a person and ourselves to a life of misery without love and honesty?*

The desire to have children is important, but does not justify marrying an unsuspecting heterosexual partner:

*Yes, some homosexuals want to have children. However, we cannot ethically or responsibly use marriage with a non-homosexual to reach our goal. More than anything else, marriage should be based on love, attraction, and affection, the desire for the union of two people, not the desire to have children.*

*MAHA* claimed that among various NGOs and dissident political groups, there is greater tolerance for modern gay rights. In the 2005 presidential elections, several (unsuccessful) candidates, such as Mostafa Moin, included the slogan “respect for different lifestyles,” a euphemism for gay and lesbian rights, in their political platforms. But *MAHA*, which was distributed electronically in portable document format (.pdf) and managed to elude the Islamic Republic's censorship laws for two years, finally folded in 2006 under fear of arrest and execution of its contributors. Through its courageous reporting, *MAHA* showed that the demands of the Iranian gay/lesbian community are very similar to those of women in heterosexual communities; these include more companionate unions and the right to live in dignity and respect outside the matrimonial unit. Other publications such as *Cheraq* and the Iranian Queer Organization (formerly PGLO), led by Arsham Parsi in Canada, continue this work from diaspora with covert input from Iran's queer community.

### ***State Persecution of Sexual Transgression***

Discussions surrounding marriage, fidelity, and sexual orientation continued, even in a persistent atmosphere of fear and intimidation, when the regime's persecution of openly gay men and transgressive heterosexual women increased after 2005. Mindful of its international image and reputation, the state

sometimes replaced the stoning of women with public executions. In August 2004, Atefeh Rajabi, a feisty sixteen-year-old, was hanged from a crane in the main public square of the town of Neka for no greater crime than having had sex with a man to whom she was not married. By contrast, her male partner's crime did not merit the death penalty in the eyes of the law. This discrepancy is based on the notion that a woman's sexual transgression is a much bigger offense than a man's. Neka was also the city where several government officials and security forces were arrested a few months later for setting up brothels and organizing child prostitution rings.

The war against homosexuality and an openly gay lifestyle escalated almost immediately after the Basiji Ahmadinejad was elected to the presidency. In July 2005, the world was horrified by the torture and execution of two teenage boys in Mashhad, Ayaz Marhoni, 18, and Mahmoud Asgari, who was either 16 or 17 according to press reports. The authorities initially accused them of sodomy [*lavat*] but later charged them with rape of a younger boy. However, as Doug Ireland reported, three independent gay sources inside Iran confirmed that "the teens were well-known in the city's underground gay community as lovers who lived together, and the rape charge was fabricated." This was followed by the torture and execution of several other men charged with pedophilia and various sexual transgressions, whose sole "crime" was consensual sex.

Under Ahmadinejad, the state gave additional responsibilities to the Basijis, who began to function as *agent provocateurs*. Undercover Basiji agents entrapped gay men through ads in Internet chat rooms. Once the unsuspecting young men arrived at the designated meeting place, they were apprehended by the Basijis and tortured. Meanwhile, in the same culturally conservative provinces where girls lived under harsh patriarchal fathers, male homosexuals risked death at the hands of the security forces, or even members of their own families, who justified the murder of a "deviant" relative as a matter of honor.

While the *shari'a* requires either the actual confession of the accused or four witnesses who observed them *in flagrante delicto*, today's authorities look only for medical evidence of penetration in homosexual relationships. Upon finding such evidence, they pronounce the death sentence. Because execution of men on charges of homosexuality has prompted international outrage, the state has tended to compound these charges with others, such as rape and pedophilia. Continual use of these tactics has undermined the status of Iran's gay community and attenuated public sympathy for them. Meanwhile, many Iranians believe that pedophilia is rampant in the religious cities of Qom and Mashhad, including in the seminaries, where temporary marriage and prostitution are also pervasive practices.

Iranian society is in the midst of major changes in sexual behavior. Partly as a result of the successful family planning program, many women now expect greater intimacy and sexual gratification. As we know, similar processes in the West have led to sweeping reforms in marriage and divorce laws and greater tolerance for homosexual relationships. In Iran, while the state sometimes backs reforms that increase health and education for women, it has adamantly refused to budge in its opposition to reforms that curtail men's rights to unilateral sexual pleasure inside or outside marriage. In response, many young women (and men) have delayed marriage and some have refused to marry at all. These shifts in the sexual mores of women have led to new anxieties. The rise in premarital sex among women and the increase in unhappy marriages, prostitution, and female suicide rates have led to public apprehensiveness about the stability of the institution of marriage. As in the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century, "family values" and "immoral sexual conduct" have become hot-button issues that have aided attempts by neoconservatives to hold onto or extend their power.

### ***The Green Movement***

On June 15, 2009 some three million people took to the streets of Tehran forming a sea of green to protest a stolen presidential election that had reinstated Ahmadinejad and robbed the candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi from his victory. Iranian women were a major presence in this outpouring known as the Green Movement. Armed with nothing but green head bands, they stood up to the violent Revolutionary Guards and government thugs who smashed the protesters with their batons and jailed whomever they caught. No longer were the women an auxiliary branch of some Islamist or leftist male organization chanting the men's slogans but autonomous individuals, fighting for democracy, human rights, and women's rights and in the words of the *New York Times* columnist Roger Cohen, "the vanguard" of the movement.

Mir-Hossein Mousavi was not a charismatic figure and in the months before the election had received little public support. It was the presence of Mousavi's wife, Zahra Rahnavard, a former university president, author, and artist that gradually energized the public and brought them into the streets in support of Mousavi. During a public television debate with Mousavi, Ahmadinejad made the mistake of berating Rahnavard and her academic accomplishments. Mousavi came to the defense of his wife and through this simple act gained the educated and reform-minded public's trust. In a matter of days polls began to predict a decisive victory for Mousavi. Soon he and Rahnavard were campaigning together, a first in Iranian politics, and reminding the public of

their more egalitarian marriage. Mousavi spoke against polygamy and Rahnavard campaigned for ratification of the United Nations-sponsored Convention for Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Since the brutal crackdown of summer 2009, many leading feminists and supporters of the Million Signatures Campaign have been jailed or forced into exile. Many other women-- often sisters, daughters, wives, and mothers of reformist figures-- have been detained and/or suffered persecution. But for the first time in Iranian history, the public has come to recognize the crucial role of women in the struggle for democracy. Among pious and culturally conservative women affiliated with leaders of the Green Movement, a new genre of literature has also emerged. Wives are writing open letters to the Supreme Leader and to international organizations on behalf of the Green Movement, protesting their husbands' incarceration but also openly declaring their love for their men. In a culturally conservative society where the religious classes seldom publicly pronounce their marital love this is an unprecedented action. Society is changing when veiled women from the formerly Islamist nomenclature campaign as companionate compatriots of their husbands and express their devotion to human rights and democracy.

## **İRAN İSLAM RESPUBLİKASININ GENDER İQTİSADİYYATI: PLANLI UŞAQ DÜNYAYA GƏTİRMƏ, QADININ CİNSİ YETİŞKƏNLİK DÖVRÜ, HOMOSEKSUALLARIN HƏYAT TƏRZİ**

*Janet Afary*

*(Kaliforniya Universiteti, Santa Barbara, ABŞ)*

Məqalədə 17-ci əsrdən başlayaraq, Avropada seksual qadağaların qoyulması, bu qadağaların aradan qaldırılması üçün fəaliyyət göstərən müvafiq cəmiyyətlərin səyləri nəticəsində əldə olunan nailiyyətlər, 18-ci əsrin sonlarında gender nizamlanması ilə bağlı müvafiq hüquqi qaydaların tətbiq olunması, dövlətin hansı hallarda müdaxilə edə bilməsi, ailə həyatı qurmaq və doğum üçün qoyulan yaş həddi və.s haqqında bəhs edilir. Dövlətin iqtisadi, hüquqi, tibbi və sağlamlıqla bağlı yürütdüyü siyasətlə əlaqədar bu qaydalar dəyişilərək, yenilənir. Nəticədə 20-ci əsrdə Avropada cinsi azadlıq daha geniş vüsət almağa başladı. İran İnqilabından sonra xüsusü ilə 1980-ci illərdə İranda insan hüquqlarının kobud şəkildə pozulması, homoseksualların ciddi şəkildə cəzalandırılması, hətta bir çoxlarının edam olunmaları ilə bağlı məlumatlar da məqalədə öz əksini tapır.

20-ci əsrin ortalarında İran ilə müqayisədə Amerikada gender bərabərliyi, nizamlanması, sağlam təməlli ailələrin qurulması, nigahdankənar hamiləliyin qarşısının alınması və bu kimi sahələrdə artıq kifayət qədər təcrübəyə malik olmaları, Xristian və Yəhudi icmalarının da dini aspektlər baxımından bu siyasətə necə önəm vermələri xüsusi diqqət çəkir. 1960-1970-ci illərdə Amerikada boşanmaların qarşısını almaq, qadınlara iqtisadi azadlığın verilməsi, gələcək həyat yoldaşı ilə ünsiyyət qurmaq bacarığını artırmaq üçün təhsilin nə qədər önəmli olduğunu qeyd edərək, yüksək səviyyədə şəraitlər yaradıldı. 1980-ci illərdə Amerikada homoseksuallar üçün yeni hüquqlar əldə edildi. Eyni zamanda nəticə etibarlı ilə 21-ci əsrin əvvəllərində QİÇS epidemiyasının qarşısının alınması ilə bağlı bir çox nailiyyətlər əldə olundu. İranda əsasən Pəhləvilər dövründən ancaq valideynlərin icazəsi ilə ailələrin qurulması, təhsilin aşağı səviyyədə olması, qadınların hüquqlarının əllərindən alınması, onların cinsi azadlıq hüququndan məhrum edilməsi diqqət çəkir. Nəticə etibarlı ilə çox qadınlar ailə zorakılığından, rəsmi kəbinlərinin olmamasından şikayət edirdilər. Bu çevrilişlər də öz növbəsində əsasən seksual adət-ənənələrdə yaranan xoşagəlməzliklərə səbəb olurdu. Məqalədə qadınlar və homoseksualların bu sahədə dəyişikliklərin edilməsinin nə qədər çox arzuladıqlarını, İran inqilabından bəri gender siyasətində edilən dəyişiklikləri və rollarını necə tədqiq etmələri ilə bağlı məlumat verilir. 1990-cı ilin ortalarında ixtisasından asılı olmayaraq, İran cəmiyyəti nümayəndələrinin bu dəyişiklikləri etmək üçün göstərdiyi fəaliyyətləri haqqında məqalədə geniş bəhs olunub. Gender sistemini liberallaşdırmaqdan ötrü edilən cəhdlər nəticəsində qadın nümayəndələrindən ibarət yığıncaqların keçirilməsinə, qadınların hüquqlarının qorunması ilə bağlı müvafiq qanun layihələrinin təqdim olunmasına, dövlət hesabına qadınların xaricdə təhsil almasına, hicabın nə qədər ciddiyyət xarakteri daşdığına nəzərə alaraq, orta məktəb şagirdlərinin geyimlərini daha rəngli geyimlər və şərflərlə əvəz edilməsinə nail oldu. Eyni zamanda Birləşmiş millətlər təşkilatının, "Qadınlara qarşı tətbiq olunan bütün zorakılıqların aradan qaldırılması" ilə bağlı Konvensiyanın imzalanması ilə bağlı ölkədəxilində etirazlara səbəb olmasını da qeyd etməliyik. Belə ki bu konvensiyanı, "İslama qarşı müharibə elanı" kimi qələmə vermələri də məqalədə öz əksini tapmışdır. Gender siyasətinin İranda yeridilməsinin qarşısını almaq üçün müvafiq qurumlar əllərindən gələni edirdilər. 2002-ci ildən başlayaraq inqilabçılar zəifləməyə başladılar. 2005-ci ildə keçirilən prezident seçkilərində qadınların öz hüquqlarını tələb etmələri ilə bağlı hökumətə qarşı çıxmaları, göstərdikləri səyləri artıq əvvəlki kimi ciddi rol oynayırdı. Xüsusi ilə 2005-2008-ci illərdə nüvə silahı ilə bağlı Qərbi ilə İranın üzləşməsində bu səylər getdikcə azalmağa başladı, bütün cəhdlərə baxmayaraq inqilabın ilk günlərindəki kimi əldə olunan uğurlu nəticələr qədər öz təsirini göstərə bilmədi. Həmçinin məqalədə İran cəmiyyətində cinsi oyanma, nikahda olmayanların hüquqların müdafiəsi, planlı uşaq dünyaya gətirilməsi, cinsi tərbiyə və təhsili ilə bağlı aparılan araşdırmalar və tədqiqatlarla bağlı məlumatlar öz əksini tapır. Məqalədə diqqət çəkən hissə İranda homoseksualların hüquqlarının tənzimlənməsi ilə bağlı atılan radikal addımlar, cəmiyyətin cinsi davranışlarda dəyişikliklər etməyə can atması, bədbəxt nigahların və qadın intiharlarının artmasının qarşısını almaq üçün göstərilən səylər və maraqlar barədə geniş bəhs edilmişdir.