

## Debating Women: Gender and the Public Sphere in Post-Revolutionary Iran

*Ziba Mir-Hosseini*

### **Introduction**

In the third decade of the Islamic Republic, Iran is going through a transition as significant as that which ushered in the 1979 Revolution. The radical discourse of the 1980s is yielding to a more pluralistic one that is painfully trying to reconcile Islam with democracy and human rights. The turning point in this transition was the 1997 presidential election, which brought the moderate government of Mohammad Khatami into office. It also gave birth to a reformist movement and a vocal press that are paving the way, against intense and sometimes violent opposition from part of the clerical establishment, for 'democracy Iranian style'. The massive victory of reformist candidates in the municipal and parliamentary elections of 1999 and 2000, and Khatami's re-election in June 2001 with over 77 per cent of the votes, speak not only of the strength of mass support for the movement, but of the degree to which people have learned to exercise their democratic rights.

One visible outcome of this movement is the emergence of a public sphere in which different notions of Islam, modernity and

citizenship are openly debated. I use the term 'public sphere' in Habermas's sense, of 'a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence an institutionalised arena of discursive interaction'. Conceptually distinct from the state, the public sphere is 'the site of the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state'.<sup>1</sup> For almost three years between August 1997, when Khatami took office, and June 2000, when the sixth Majles opened, the press was the main site of such discourses in Iran. Assuming the role of absent political parties, the press (though not the media at large) also became the sole platform through which the reformists could promote their agenda and their visions for a democratic system of governance.<sup>2</sup> In this, the press injected notions such as transparency, accountability, the rule of law and respect for the civil rights of individuals into the opaque, factional and undemocratic political culture of the Islamic Republic. All this was done under the rubric of 'Civil Society' (*jame'eh madani*).<sup>3</sup>

In this paper, I examine the ways in which women have used the emergent public sphere in the Islamic Republic to debate and negotiate their rights in law and society. I do this through a discussion of the 'women's press', which continues to serve as the main site of production of discourses on gender rights. I ask two questions: To what extent is the emergent public sphere not only informed and shaped by established patriarchal views of religion, culture, society and politics, but also challenging and transforming these views? And what do the women's press and the positions taken by their key female protagonists tell us about the potential of political reforms in creating a democratic society within the context of an Islamic Republic?

It is imperative, in my view, to address these two questions, not only because of the unequal constructions of gender rights in Islamic law but also because of the patriarchal and male-centred political culture of Iran, where discussion of gender rights is largely confined to women's magazines. A democratic society should surely address core problems of power relations, such as gender

inequality. Yet male Iranian intellectuals, both secular and religious (though not clerics), have so far resisted any serious engagement with gender issues.<sup>4</sup> But first, let me situate the civil society debate within the currents and eddies of reformist Iran.

### **The Civil Society Debate in the Iranian Political Context**

The notion of ‘civil society’ entered the official discourse of the Islamic Republic during the 1997 presidential election, becoming a kind of euphemism for a democratic system of governance. The debate has its roots, however, in a critique of the state that emerged in the late 1980s, and by the early 1990s was being aired in religious and secular intellectual journals.<sup>5</sup> Civil Society or *jame'eh madani* stood in opposition to Islamic Society or *jame'eh eslami* as promoted by the segment of the state that adhered to a totalitarian mode of governance and a legalistic notion of Islam (*eslam-e feqahati*). The debate was actually much older, and has been part of twentieth-century political discourses and developments in Iran. It was present during both the 1906 Constitutional Revolution and the 1979 Islamic Revolution, though in different forms.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the ‘Islamic Republic’ was but the latest child of this debate; its constitution, as Schirazi has shown, is a compromise document, combining theocratic and democratic principles and institutions.<sup>7</sup> On the one hand, the constitution recognises the people’s right to choose who will govern them, establishing democratic and legislative institutions such as the Majles (parliament) and the presidency, both elected by direct vote. On the other hand, it subordinates the people’s will to the clerical establishment, through institutions such as the *velayat-e faqih* (Rule of the Supreme Jurist or Jurisconsult) and Shura-ye Negahban (The Guardians’ Council).<sup>8</sup>

As long as Ayatollah Khomeini was alive, the tension between those two notions of sovereignty was relatively dormant. His personal and political charisma helped to bridge the gap between *eslamiyat* and *jomhuriyat* Islamism and Republicanism. In the late 1980s, however, the tension was beginning to surface and the contradictions inherent in the very concept of ‘Islamic Republic’

were felt even by those who, a decade earlier, had argued vehemently for the vesting of all power in the clerical establishment as guardians of the sharia.<sup>9</sup> The end of the war with Iraq in 1988, and Khomeini's death in 1989, brought a shift in the power structure. With Ali Khamene'i as the new *vali-ye faqih* (Supreme Jurist) and Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani as President, the Islamic Republic entered a phase often referred to as 'Reconstruction'. It was marked by increased tension between the different visions of Islam – and between the two ruling factions, the so-called 'Rightists' and 'Leftists'. The latter were dominant under Khomeini and enjoyed his implicit sanction, but gradually lost their hold on government ministries and the Majles, and also their influence in the judiciary. Among the Leftists was the current prime minister, Mohammad Khatami, who had been minister of Islamic Guidance and Culture since 1982; he resigned in 1992 under pressure from the Rightists, who saw his policies as allowing a form of 'cultural invasion'.

Marginalised and experiencing the same treatment that they had meted out to their political rivals a decade earlier (as the Liberation Movement which formed the majority in the first revolutionary government of Mehdi Bazargan), the Leftists went through a process of rethinking. It was during this period of political retreat that some of them broke away from an absolutist ideology, and began to argue for democratic principles and the rule of law. During the 1997 presidential elections, this faction re-emerged, with Khatami as its candidate and Civil Society as its slogan. The Rightists, who now enjoyed the support of the new *vali-ye faqih*, thought their hold on power complete and saw the time as ripe for realizing their *jame'eh-islami*, a totalitarian utopia shaped by the mandates of Islamic law and subject to the rule of the clerical establishment. Their triumphalism blinded them to the potency of the *jame'eh madani* slogan as signalling the ardent desire of most Iranians for freedom and democracy.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Politics of the Women's Press and Reforms**

The women's press, as the main forum for gender debates, has

been both player and pawn in these developments on the country's fragile political landscape. In August 1998, Fa'ezeh Hashemi – then a member of the Fifth Majles and still in the reformist camp – launched *Zan* (Woman), the first-ever women's daily newspaper.<sup>11</sup> In April 1999, it was shut down on the orders of the Revolutionary Court. Among the charges brought against *Zan* was 'insulting Islam': the culprit was a cartoon which showed a man holding a couple at gun-point in their house. The husband advises the robber: 'Kill her not me, her *diyeh* (blood money) is half.'<sup>12</sup>

In spring 2000, when I conducted my latest field-research in Iran, there were ten publications that could be classed as 'serious' women's magazines.<sup>13</sup> All but three were aligned with the reform movement, though belonging to assorted political groups and tendencies and adhering to varying gender perspectives. Here I discuss them in order of their emergence, locating them within the broader context of the reform movement – but with two caveats.

First, rather than focusing on their content as 'texts', I consider who produces them, and whose voice and what gender perspective they represent. I shall do this through recounting my debates with their editors, with some of whom I had already established a dialogue in the mid-1990s.<sup>14</sup> To understand gender debates in Iran (or for that matter any other debate), it is not sufficient to examine what is said: one must appreciate who the debaters are, and 'read between the lines'. What is not articulated (silences, omissions) can be as significant as what is.

Second, I exclude from the discussion three publications which, in my view, have made little contribution to the gender debates in reformist Iran. All three are aligned with the anti-reformist camp (now referred to as the 'Conservatives') and have retained the early gender discourse of the Islamic Republic, which is highly ideological and has little appeal in today's ideology-fatigued Iran. They are: *Mahjubeh* (Veiled), published in English by the Organisation for Islamic Propagation and intended for foreign readers; *Sorush-e Banovan* (Women's Messenger Angel), published by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB); and *Zan-e Ruz*

(Women of Today), published by the Kayhan Institute. Both the latter are aimed at a readership within Iran. *Zan-e Ruz* is Iran's oldest women's magazine, and the only one to have survived the Revolution. In its pre-revolutionary incarnation, it combined fashion with serious advocacy of women's rights. Ayatollah Motahhari's seminal text, 'Women's Rights in Islam', which framed the official gender discourse of the Islamic Republic, first appeared as a series of articles in *Zan-e Ruz* in 1966 amidst a debate between Motahhari and a pro-reform judge. After the Revolution, *Zan-e Ruz* continued its advocacy role, and helped shape and criticise the Islamic Republic's nascent discourse and policies on gender. However, by the late 1980s, it started to lose its impetus and, as we shall see, defections from *Zan-e Ruz* gave birth to three new journals. *Zan-e Ruz* has never quite been an independent voice; today, it is also more marginal than ever to gender debates.

#### ***Payam-e Hajer: The Voice of Religious-Nationalist Opposition***

*Payam-e Hajer* (Hagar's Message) started life in 1980 as the journal of the Islamic Women's Institute of Iran (*Mo'assaseh Eslami-ye Zanan-e Iran*) headed by Azam Taleqani, a political prisoner in Pahlavi Iran and daughter of the late Ayatollah Taleqani. Shortly after the Revolution, Azam Taleqani and her associates took over the pre-revolutionary, state-sponsored Women's Organisation of Iran (*Sazman-e Zanan-e Iran*) and, to 'Islamise' and 'purify' it, purged its personnel and destroyed part of its library. But the journal's budget was axed by the Provisional Government, and disagreements developed between Taleqani and some of her allies.<sup>15</sup>

A veteran politician, Azam Taleqani kept the journal going and became its licence-holder, which under Iranian law means bearing the burden of responsibility for its religio-political correctness. *Payam-e Hajer* has since gone through several formats and editorial boards. In spring 2000, it appeared as a weekly, and was among the best-selling reformist journals, found in all Tehran news-stalls. It is aligned with a tendency within the reformist movement that currently has no share in the state structure of the Islamic Repub-

lic. Known as National-Religious (*melli-mazhabi*), this tendency played an active role in the Revolution, and formed the Provisional Government headed by Mehdi Bazargan. After his resignation, which followed the occupation of the United States Embassy by radical forces and the subsequent hostage-crisis, the tendency was marginalised. Although some key figures were prosecuted, it continued its political activities in the Islamic Republic as the only tolerated opposition. In the 1997 presidential election, the tendency joined the reformist forces and supported Khatami, but it again became the target of persecution. In March 2001, the head of the Revolutionary Courts ordered the arrest of 42 distinguished members of the tendency. Among them was Mohammad Bastehnegar, Azam's brother-in-law. Their arrest was clearly intended to create divisions among the reformists and to discourage participation in the coming presidential election in June, but it backfired. Not only did it provoke strong protest from the Majles and leading reformists, but it also became another argument for civil society and the rule of law – and a further incentive for people to vote for reform. In a bizarre statement issued by the Revolutionary Court (and reported by the official news agency, IRNA), the National-Religious detainees were charged with 'trying to overthrow the Islamic Republic by legal means'. Some of those arrested were released, while the rest remained in detention. The Revolutionary Court's statement speaks volumes about the inability of the anti-reform forces – for whom the judiciary is the last bastion – to come to terms with the realities of civil society activism in reformist Iran.

Taleqani and her journal are the voice of the Islamic Republic's first generation of women activists, who soon became disillusioned by its policies. Some of them with more radical views were later barred from holding public office. These women avoid any association with the term 'feminism', and their gender activism is a mixture of conformity and subversion.<sup>16</sup> While awaiting their ideal vision of Islam to materialise, they question and challenge the conservative forces within the clerical establishment.

Taleqani was a member of the first Majles (1980–84), but in 1992 and 1996 the Guardians' Council vetoed her candidacy. She

nominated herself as candidate in the 1997 presidential election, and was once again rejected. She did not remain silent but demanded an explanation. In an open letter to the Council, she asked whether she was rejected because of her gender. The Council never replied, but the episode triggered a debate on a woman's right to be President: did the phrase *rejal siyasi va mazhabi* in Article 115 of the constitution mean 'political and religious personalities' irrespective of gender, or were only men envisaged, as in the literal meaning of the Arabic term *rejal* (plural of *rajul*)? The Council did not allow her to run for the February 2000 Majles elections.

From the outset, Taleqani has been bold in her critique of the Islamic Republic's gender policies; yet in her journal, factional and ideological politics have always overshadowed discussion of gender and women's rights. As Parvin Ardalan notes, whenever censorship in the country relaxes, *Payam-e Hajer's* coverage of women's rights diminishes.<sup>17</sup> I asked Taleqani why.

She replied, 'I believe that in our country women's problems are secondary to political ones. What our people need is a correct analysis. Women are part of society, and when its problems are solved, women's issues will be solved'. I reminded her that she had said the same thing over twenty years before; when the Revolution succeeded, she took over the Women's Organisation – only for Iranian women to lose some of the legal rights they had enjoyed under the Pahlavi regime. Taleqani protested:

This was not my position. I wanted certain [Islamic] foundations to be consolidated, and then to move according to them; that is to say, to have rational foundations, so that we can reason with them ... That is why it is so important to have a free press, without which, of course, reforms will still go ahead; as they started without a free press. But only in a society governed by a democratic logic can one examine all shortcomings and find solutions for them. In reality, this reformist movement will transform the society's culture.

This exchange took place on 18 April 2000, when the Conservatives were striking back in full force after the landslide victory of the Reformists in the Majles elections in February.



The future of the reforms hung in a delicate balance; it was not the time to re-open old wounds. Taleqani had given me an appointment at 10 p.m. that day (the only free time she could manage) in her office, which also houses *Payam-e Hajer*. On arrival, I found everyone clustered around a small television set, watching the broadcast on the national channel of an edited film of a conference held a week earlier in Berlin to discuss reform prospects in Iran. Attended by key reformists, the conference was disrupted by a group from the Iranian extremist opposition abroad – one woman performed an erotic Persian dance, another appeared in a bikini and head-scarf, and a man stripped to show his torture-marks. All this was filmed by – and cynics say, staged in collaboration with – the Conservative-dominated Iranian Television (IRIB), which by broadcasting a carefully-edited version was effectively discrediting the reformists for taking part in a meeting where ‘immoral acts’ occurred. This logic convinced no one, but became the pretext for the judiciary’s prosecution of the reformist participants. On their return to Iran, they were all summoned by the Revolutionary Court and four of them, including two women, were jailed.

A week later, in the wake of a speech by the *Vali-ye Faqih* deploring that some newspapers were infiltrated by ‘enemies of the revolution’, fourteen reformist newspapers and magazines were closed down by the judiciary.<sup>18</sup> *Payam-e Hajer* was one of them. This was not the first time that Taleqani and her journal faced the wrath of the judiciary. In 1993, after ignoring a caution to stop publishing Ayatollah Montazeri’s lectures, all its printed copies were confiscated, and it remained closed for two years, after which it reappeared as a quarterly.<sup>19</sup> It remains to be seen when and in what format it will re-emerge.

#### ***Neda: The Voice of Women of the Elite***

*Neda* (The Call) is a quarterly published by the Women’s Society of the Islamic Republic (*Jami’at-e Zanan-e Jomhuri-ye Islami*), headed by Zahra Mostafavi, Ayatollah Khomeini’s daughter. It is edited by his granddaughter, Fereshteh A’rabi. The Society was formed in 1987, as A’rabi explained to me in an interview, ‘because we felt

the need for a political organisation in which women could be active, and act as a political party'. Two years later, she continued, the Society launched its own journal, because 'an organisation needs to make its objectives heard and to have an audience. We did not want women as our sole audience. We believed that we could be effective for women when we reform our society. We first need to correct the views of our men – our law- and policy-makers – about women's issues'.

Like other such groups, the Women's Society makes its presence felt mainly at election time, by issuing a list of candidates and declaring support for specific positions and policies. During the 1997 presidential election, the Society supported Khatami, whose brother, Mohammad Reza, is married to another granddaughter of Khomeini. Since then, the Society has been among the moderate groups in favour of reform. In February 2000, four women on its list entered the Sixth Majles, of whom two – Soheila Jelowdarzadeh and Fatemeh Rake'i – are members of its central committee. Rake'i, who is also a poet and university lecturer, has been among the most outspoken reformist members of the Sixth Majles.<sup>20</sup> Jelowdarzadeh, who had been in the previous Majles, now became the first woman to be elected to the Majles Speakers Committee. Both are also among the most active members of the Women's Commission of the Majles, pushing for legislation to address gender inequalities in current laws.

*Neda* is the voice of the women of the power elite, demanding a share for themselves in politics. Its readership is narrow, it is rarely found at news-stands, and many women do not know of its existence. '*Neda* lacks the attraction of other women's journals, and is a bit heavy for women; most of our subscribers are men, or research and governmental institutions', its editor boasts. The 29 issues that have appeared so far (it publishes irregularly) lack a coherent gender discourse and vision. The early issues are highly ideological, featuring Ayatollah Khomeini's life, his views on women, and interviews with his family; or his two sons, Ahmed and Mostafa. Though more recent issues address women's legal rights, featuring interviews with progressive-minded clerics, they remain timid in their critique of the gender inequalities in sharia

law. The journal evidently addresses the male ruling elite, not women, and is unmoved by women's increasing discontent. Rather than linking it to state gender policies, *Neda* sees this discontent as a by-product of modernity, for which there can be no immediate solution. As Akrabi put it to me: 'the situation for our grandmothers, whose lives were totally ruled by tradition, was perhaps better than ours; their situation was more or less in harmony with their expectations; in some ways we are paving the way for our daughters.'

#### *Zanan*: The Voice of Islamic Dissent

*Zanan* (Women) is an independent monthly and the first journal in the Islamic Republic to challenge unequal gender rights. It is part of a modernist tendency that remained dormant during the years of war with Iraq (1980–88), then re-emerged after Ayatollah Khomeini's death, which, as already mentioned, was followed by an increase in tension between different visions of Islam. Supporters of this tendency, referred to as 'New Religious Thinking' (*now-andishi-ye dini*), show a refreshing pragmatic vigour and willingness to engage with non-religious perspectives. They no longer reject an idea simply because it is Western, nor do they see Islam as a blueprint with an in-built and fixed programme for social action.

Debates stemming from their ideas, now aired in a variety of journals and periodicals, can be traced to developments in the Kayhan Institute, following the publication of Abdol-Karim Soroush's controversial articles on the historicity and relativity of religious knowledge. Known as 'Contraction and Expansion of the Sharia', these articles appeared intermittently in *Kayhan Farhangi* (Cultural Kayhan) between 1988 and 1990. Separating religion from religious knowledge, Soroush argued that while the former was sacred and immutable, the latter was human and evolved over time as a result of forces external to religion itself. The heated debate that attended their publication led to the closure of *Kayhan-e Farhangi* in June 1990 – and the departure from Kayhan Institute of a group of Muslim intellectuals sympathetic

to Soroush. Two key figures among them were Shahla Sherkat, who had been editor of *Zan-e Ruz* since 1982, and Mashallah Shamsolvaezin. Both soon became editors of new journals: Shamsolvaezin of *Kiyan* (Foundation), launched in October 1991, and Sherkat of its sister paper *Zanan*, launched in February 1992.<sup>21</sup>

These two journals became a magnet for those whose ideas and writings now form the backbone of the New Religious Thinking. One might observe that in the Iran of the 1990s, they played a role similar to that of the Hosseiniyeh Ershad in the 1970s: *Kiyan* was the main forum for influential Muslim intellectuals like Soroush, just as the Hosseiniyeh had been for Ali Shariati.<sup>22</sup> *Zanan* ensured that women and their demands remained part of the new discourse, and set a new frame of reference in which Islam could be reconciled with feminism. It made no apologies for drawing on Western feminist sources and collaborating with Iranian secular feminists – both novel and daring in the context of the Iran of the early 1990s. Two of its regular contributors were a secularist female lawyer, Mehrangiz Kar, and a male cleric, Seyyed Mohsen Sa'idezadeh, who in their articles took issue with very premises of the official Islamic discourse on women, laying bare their inherent gender bias.

During the 1997 presidential elections, *Zanan* had a role in mobilising women's support for Khatami by depicting him as the candidate in favour of gender equality, and his opponent, Nateq-Nuri, as the one against it.<sup>23</sup> In autumn 1999, *Zanan* started a new section entitled 'New Religious Thinking and the Question of Women', in which leading male reformists were drawn into a conversation. This proved revealing in many ways. It not only showed that none of these men had thought about gender equality or taken the issue seriously, but also betrayed their ambivalence over the issue of gender equality, especially when it came to the family domain. They repeated old clichés, or talked in broad and general terms, or displayed their reluctance to include gender rights among the priorities of the reform movement. Some stated that once their democratic ideals were realised, issues such 'women's rights' would sort themselves out; others said that women themselves should fight their own battles, and it was time for women to

become producers of theories, not mere consumers. The more forthright ones said that they did not believe in gender equality and saw it as a red-herring.<sup>24</sup>

*Zanan* is the only women's magazine that is commercially viable, and is also respected by most Iranian feminists living abroad. It has survived three court trials, but lost two of its most important contributors. Sa'idzadeh was detained in June 1998 after the publication of an article in the now-closed liberal daily *Jame'eh*, in which he compared religious traditionalists in Iran to the Taliban in Afghanistan. He was released five months later but defrocked and deemed 'forbidden-pen' – deprived, in other words, of his clerical status and the capacity to have his writings published. Kar was detained in April 2000 after her return from participation in the Berlin conference; she was released two months later, and tried in November along with other reformists. Her trial and that of Shahla Lahiji, a prominent women publisher and another Berlin participant, were closed, although the trials of the others were open. Kar and Lahiji were both sentenced to four years and six months of imprisonment for 'threatening national security' and 'propaganda against the Islamic Republic'. It is expected that the sentences will be curtailed on appeal; but to judge from her recent interviews, Kar's co-operation with *Zanan* has come to an end.<sup>25</sup>

Shahla Sherkat, another participant in the Berlin Conference, was also charged with 'denying the necessity of the rule of *hejab*'. In her trial (which was open) in November 2000, Sherkat questioned the wisdom of the compulsory imposition of *hejab*. While stressing that she believed in the Islamic rule of *hejab* and had observed it all her life, she questioned the religious value of the dress code imposed by the Islamic Republic, calling it the 'official uniform' rather than the 'true *hejab*' mandated by Islam. She was sentenced to a six-month suspended term of imprisonment and also fined. If not overturned on appeal, this could bring about the closure of *Zanan* since, under the controversial press law of 1999 (passed in the final days of the Fifth Majles), no one with a court conviction can be the 'licence-holder' of any kind of publication.

Where is *Zanan* now headed, almost a decade after its launch? A glance at the issues so far published suggests that it has gradually moved away from its preoccupation with progressive *ijtihad* as the primary means of improving women's legal and cultural lot. Its legal section is no longer the centrepiece, and has been replaced by articles about conceptions of women's rights in Islamic and feminist discourses, round-table features and discussions with reformists. One reason is the loss of two of its key collaborators, Sa'idzadeh and Kar; another is that to remain commercially viable, *Zanan* must attract readers from among middle-class women, most of whom are repelled by religiously-framed arguments. There is also Sherkat's own growing disillusionment with the politics of gender in Islam. Her open embrace of feminism puts her in a difficult situation. She receives little support from male reformists, who are reluctant to take part in gender debates, and when they are drawn in have nothing of substance to say. Her colleagues in *Kiyan* have totally ignored gender issues in their journal, which has neither featured any articles on women's rights in Islam nor made any allusion to the politics of gender in the Islamic Republic. Elite women, like those in *Neda* and in government, keep their distance: feminism is still a taboo subject in Iranian politics, and they dare not risk their political legitimacy by association. Sherkat is more or less ignored by secular women, those whose voices and organisations were suppressed soon after the Revolution, and for whom it became a political act *not* to get involved in the gender debates of the Islamic Republic. At the same time, the threat of closure hangs over *Zanan* like the sword of Damocles; Sherkat cannot afford to be more outspoken in her critique of gender inequality in Islamic law, or of the official discourse.<sup>26</sup> Despite all this, she is determined to continue airing women's problems in *Zanan*, which, in her own words, 'is a like a child to me, but a child that is very bothersome'.

#### ***Payam-e Zan: The Voice of Clerical Orthodoxy***

Launched in March 1992, *Payam-e Zan* (Woman's Message) is published in Qom, the heart of the Iranian clerical establishment.

One of the publications of the Islamic Propaganda Office of Qom Seminaries (*howzeh*),<sup>27</sup> its entire editorial board is made up of male clerics. Its gender discourse, which seeks to counter that of *Zanan*, is a modified version of that developed by Ayatollah Motahhari in pre-revolutionary Iran, as part of the discourse of religious opposition to the Pahlavis.<sup>28</sup> It rejects gender equality as a Western concept with no place in Islam, and instead puts forward the notion of complementarity of gender rights and duties. It argues that the apparent disparity in rights and duties between men and women as mandated in Islamic laws, if properly understood, is the essence of divine justice. This is so because the sharia is in harmony with the law of nature, embodying God's design for men, women and society. While admitting the injustices that are done in the name of the sharia – the plight of divorced women was widely highlighted in the 1960s by the secular women's press, as it is now by their Islamic counterparts – Motahhari then blamed them on the non-Islamic state of society and men who had abandoned Islam. *Payam-e Zan* now blames them on incorrect interpretation and implementation of the sharia.

Rather than 'woman's message' as might be understood by its name, *Payam-e Zan* is the message of clerics in Qom, intent on finding an 'Islamic solution for the Woman Question'. It is also the message of the clerical faction that adheres to Khomeini's vision of an Islamic state, the *velayat-e faqih* where the sharia, as interpreted and administered by a jurist selected by the consensus of other jurists, reigns supreme. This doctrine holds that the sharia should regulate every aspect of life, but must be able to deal with the challenges of the new world in a realistic way. The latter consideration has been at the root of the emergence of a new 'dynamic' school of Islamic jurisprudence in Qom (*feqh-e puya*), as opposed to the 'traditional' school (*feqh-e sonnati*).

So far there has been little manifestation of the new school in *Payam-e Zan*, though a gradual shift in the tone and content of journal's articles, if not its gender perspective, can be detected. Articles in the early years are defensive and apologetic in tone and uniform in the arguments put forward to justify the sharia position; articles in recent issues are more diverse in tone, and

some are indeed critical of traditional views on the nature of women's rights. This shift has become more evident since 1997. The editor, Seyyed Zia Mortazavi, is a student of Ayatollah Yusef Sane'i, who is well known for his progressive interpretations of family law, and has come out in defence of the reformists. *Payam-e Zan* has a wide readership in Qom, and among conservative religious families who do not allow *Zanan* into their homes.

Between 1995 and 1997 I held a series of discussions with the editorial board of *Payam-e Zan*, during which we debated women's rights in Islam. Elsewhere I have written a detailed account of these meetings, in which we often talked across each other.<sup>29</sup> My repeated efforts to bring a sociological dimension to the discussion were in vain, as the clerics would skilfully shift ground, invoking ethical rules. When I reminded them that many of these ethical rules have never been translated into legal rulings, they would answer, 'Then that is the fault of Muslims, not Islam'. We often found ourselves in a position where, although we agreed that a particular ruling was discriminatory, they could not retract their assertion that all sharia legal rulings were the essence of justice; they saw it their duty to defend these rulings and rationalise them on religious grounds. At the same time, I could not pursue my points, as I was concerned about being accused of a lack of belief and being too 'Western' in my orientation.

My exchanges with *Payam-e Zan* were clearly conservative in content. Not surprisingly, the journal managed to keep this flavour in the way it published the transcript, giving the reader the impression that they had prevailed in our arguments, and even managed to persuade me. They changed the order in which I raised the issues. The first session, in which I was seeking common ground with the clerics, and testing how far I could go in exposing my own ideas, appears in *Payam-e Zan* as though it were the concluding session. The actual final session, though amicable, was confrontational and concluded without agreement. In addition, though they carefully preserved the wording of my questions and their responses, they omitted some of my questions while expanding their responses to beyond what was in fact recorded.



Both the omissions and the additions highlight *Payam-e Zan*'s own perspective.

The significance of these discussions is that it is now feasible to conduct them in clerical circles in Qom and that clerics are willing to debate with women like me (educated in the West) to seek to understand the logic of feminist critiques of the sharia rulings and to ascertain for themselves whether they contain any useful proposals for resolving basic gender problems. This is indeed new and has little precedent in the scholarly tradition of the Qom seminaries.

#### ***Farzaneh: The Voice of Pragmatism and Opportunism***

If *Payam-e Zan* was the response of men in Qom to *Zanan*'s line, that of women in the political establishment in Tehran was *Farzaneh* (The Wise), launched in autumn 1993. A quarterly with academic claims, offering articles in both Persian and English, *Farzaneh* announced itself as the first women's studies journal in Iran. As with *Zanan*, its birth was related to disagreements within *Zan-e Ruz* over how women's issues should be addressed.<sup>30</sup> In winter 1991, soon after Shahla Sherkat's departure, four articles appeared in *Zan-e Ruz*, under the banner 'Feminism from the beginning until now'. Disparaging the stance taken by Sherkat, these articles contend that 'feminism', as a movement and consciousness, is alien and irrelevant to Muslim societies, where Islam grants women their rights. They reject feminism as a concept rooted in the West, where Judaeo-Christian religious traditions imposed such disadvantages on women that they have little choice but to organise themselves.

The writer of these articles, Mahboubeh Ommi (Abbasqolizadeh), became editor of *Farzaneh*, where she adopts a rather different stance. In 'Why *Farzaneh*?' her editorial introduction to the new journal, she argues for establishing the field of Women's Studies in Iran though rejecting organised and independent feminism. 'The women's question is a universal one that stems from the characteristics of feminine nature', she writes, even if it manifests itself differently according to context. It is futile, therefore, to address women's disadvantages in the same way as

those resulting from class, race or other stratifications. Instead, she argues that the 'Women's Question' must be brought into the academic domain where it can be analysed and understood, and where suitable strategies can be planned to redress it. The solutions found can then be filtered into society at large, as 'experts' give their informed advice to policy-makers. In short, she proposes a top-down approach, a prescriptive feminism from above.<sup>31</sup>

*Farzaneh's* director, Massoumeh Ebtekar, is a veteran in political matters. She was the spokesperson of the students who occupied the United States Embassy in 1980 and seized hostages. Ebtekar was initiated into women's politics during the 1985 Women's Conference in Nairobi (Kenya), where she was a member of the Iranian delegation. For the 1995 Beijing Conference, *Farzaneh* played an active role. Both Ebtekar and Ommi organised a number of workshops in Iran to familiarise women's NGOs with the workings of United Nations' conferences, and both also participated in the international meetings at which the Conference Document was shaped.

Appointed as Khatami's Deputy in the Organisation for Environmental Protection, Ebtekar became the first woman in the government since the Revolution. But her entry into government brought a halt to *Farzaneh's* publication. The editorial in Issue 9 of spring 1998 – which appeared after more than a year's silence – speaks of a difference of opinion between the two women. Entitled 'The Red Line and Our Positions', Ommi's editorial addresses Ebtekar and criticises the government for its passive response, especially that of its female members, to the anti-women measures taken by the conservatives. She cites Iran's decision not to affirm the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (1979),<sup>32</sup> as well as two bills introduced by conservatives in the Fifth Majles in May, 1998. The first of those bills required the adaptation of medical services to religious laws, meaning that doctors could treat only patients of the same sex; the second banned press 'exploitation of images of women' and outlawed 'the creation of conflicts between men and women by propagating women's rights outside the legal and Islamic framework'. The editorial ends with a promise to devote

the next issue to critical evaluation of the legacy of the last two decades' developments in the area of women's rights.

This new issue (no. 10) finally appeared in spring 2001. Meanwhile, Ommi (who now uses her maiden name Abbasqolizadeh) runs a publishing firm that brings out books by reformist writers. In April 2000, when I asked her about the fate of *Farzaneh*, and her own current stance on gender matters, she replied, 'I need to find a new direction; I am now in the stage of deliberation'. She admitted that *Farzaneh's* attempt to promote feminism-from-above is no longer viable, but robustly defended its involvement in the organisation of women's NGOs. She asserted that she no longer believed in the effectiveness of piecemeal solutions, and doubted whether women's rights could be achieved in the framework of the official understanding of Islam. 'I now need to "pause" and "deliberate"', mused Abbasqolizadeh.<sup>33</sup>

#### ***Hoquq-e Zanan and Jens-e Dovvom: Emerging Religious and Secular Voices***

In March 1998, the cacophony of voices and ideas debating about women was joined by two other journals that approached the issues from two different angles, and framing them in varied discourses. One was Ashraf Geramizadegan's *Hoquq-e Zanan* (Women's Rights), which argues for attaining justice and women's equality within the norms of the sharia, as well as Iranian mores and culture. Geramizadegan replaced Shahla Sherkat as editor of *Zan-e Ruz* in 1991 – but resigned her post in February 1997 'to keep the respect of her pen', as she put it to me on her last day at work. She had joined *Zan-e Ruz* in 1982 as a legal advisor, and initiated a dialogue with a number of progressive clerics and women parliamentarians, which she continues in her own journal.

In *Hoquq-e Zanan* she takes these dialogues to a different level. Not only the thrust but the tone of the questions that she now poses are radically different from those in *Zan-e Ruz*. For instance, the third issue of *Hoquq-e Zanan*, which appeared in July 1998, carried a conversation with Ayatollah Musavi Bojnurdi entitled 'Islam Does Not Permit Violence Against Women', in which the

idea of *tamkin* (sexual submission) as defined by Muslim jurists is questioned. According to Bojnurdi, a husband cannot compel his wife to have sex, since it constitutes an act of violence that is condemned in Islam.<sup>34</sup> The editorial in the same issue carries Geramizadegan's response to those who objected to her journal's advocacy for women and condemned its feminist tone and agenda. She writes, 'Our women have made themselves the ladder for the progress of members of the family and society, without being able to achieve their own individual, social and scientific goals. Women have fewer resources than men to empower themselves, and above of all, the law has paid little attention to their situation.'<sup>35</sup>

So far, twenty issues of the *Hoquq-e Zanan* have appeared, similar in format, and to some extent in content, to early issues of *Zanan*.<sup>36</sup> There are articles on women's legal rights in Islam, on women's movements in the world and on women's political participation, which are essentially a discussion of the development of feminism and its various expressions in the West and elsewhere. But unlike Sherkat, Garamizadegan does not call herself a feminist, and has even avoided even mentioning the term in her editorials. I asked her why. Her response was:

Our problem with this term is that it is associated with radical and extreme expressions of feminism; that is, it is not been understood as women's social movement for equal rights and justice. Feminism is seen as a negative force and its positive contributions have been ignored. We consider ourselves to be advocates of women's rights, and if they call this feminism, then I must say we are feminist, but not in the radical meaning that they say. When we see inequality we want to change it in line with our culture and tradition.

Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, the editor of *Jens-e Dovvom* (The Second Sex), on the other hand, has no qualms with using the term and placing Iranian women's issues in the context of international feminism. In her late twenties, Ahmadi Khorasani, is a writer and publisher who belongs to a generation of women that have come of age in the Islamic Republic, and whose feminist consciousness has been shaped in opposition to its policies. On the occasion of International Women's Day in 1997, she edited a

special issue of *Farhang-e Towse-eh* (The Culture of Development), and then two collections of articles, entitled *Negah-e Zan* (Woman's Perspective). She applied for a licence for a women's journal, which has still not been issued by the Ministry of Islamic Guidance. Meanwhile, she brings out *Jens-e Dovvom* as a collection of articles. It is the first women's publication to openly adhere to a secular perspective. Its very existence is a measure of the greater tolerance and openness of the policies of the Ministry of Islamic Guidance under Khatami.

The first issue of *Jens-e Dovvom* appeared in March 1998, followed by eight others marked by a leftist penchant and the conspicuous absence of any discussion of religion. There are articles on working women and women's movements, translations of well-known feminist texts, and writings by and interviews with Iranian feminist scholars abroad, like Afsaneh Najmabadi and Nayereh Tohidi. Each volume has a section containing articles on a special theme, such as Women and Modernism, Women's Organisation, Civil Society, and Democracy and Women. The theme in combined issue 6/7, Spring 2000, was the imprisonment of Mehrangiz Kar and Shahla Lahiji, the two prominent women secular activists who attended the Berlin Conference. The texts of their conference presentations were published, together with other articles about them – including one by Ahmadi Khorasani, entitled 'The Demands of Three Generations of Women in Prison'. Concluding with the demands of women of her own generation, she writes:

Now Iranian women want to know, what is the actual 'crime' of these two women? Is 'writing' and 'speaking' on women's issues a crime? If so, you can return to sixteenth-century England, and dig out that 'damned' decree about women's chatter, and make it a law and enforce it in the twenty-first century! The reason for their arrest is a question that is whispering in the hearts of us women but does not have the power to emerge, because we don't know how to ask it without being 'trapped' ourselves. The fear of 'being trapped' is a plague that threatens our society. If the conditions are such that Iranian women today do not ask why their peers have been arrested is not because they do not care, but because of the suppressed 'fear'

that the Iranian nation has been accustomed to for centuries, and despite so many things that have happened in the past two or three years the ‘fear’ has not left our nest.<sup>37</sup>

### Conclusion

To recall the key questions that I posed at the outset: what do these journals and the positions that they adopt tell us about the state of civil society and gender rights in reformist Iran?

First, Iran today is going through an arduous transition from theocracy to democracy, a process that will doubtless continue for some time to come. The debate on civil society is part of this transition – an umbrella concept, a euphemism – in which different notions of Islam, and different modes of governance are juxtaposed. At one end of the spectrum are those arguing for a pluralistic and tolerant Islam at ease with human rights and democratic values. At the other are those who defend an absolutist and legalistic Islam that tolerates no dissent and makes little concession to the people’s will and contemporary realities. Paradoxically, the creation of an Islamic Republic in 1979 in Iran appears to be paving the way for the de-sacralisation of the sharia and the secularisation of society. As I have argued elsewhere, this has occurred mainly through the transformation of Shi’i jurisprudence from a scholarly discipline whose relevance was confined to the seminaries, into the ideology of a state backed by a modern state apparatus.<sup>38</sup> The close identification of the sharia with a ‘modern’ state and its practice in a ‘modern’ world – the backbone of the project of Islamisation – has opened the door to unprecedented interpretations of notions of family, gender, society and polity in Islamic law. This is so, because, once the sharia became the law of the land in Iran, not only the state but also ordinary people – whether believing or practising Muslims or not – have had to redefine their relationship with the sharia. Such a redefinition is the consequence of the state’s ideological construction of the sharia; its refusal to honour the *de facto*, if not *de jure*, independence of the sharia from the state apparatus. It would perhaps be one of history’s sharpest ironies if the legacy of Khomeini’s

doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* – intended to provide the basis for an Islamic state – opens the way for a full separation between state and religion in Iran, an eventuality that scholars like Ernest Gellner have argued was unlikely to happen in the Muslim world.<sup>39</sup>

Second, with the exception of *Neda* and *Payam-e Zan*, which are linked to patriarchal and clerical structures of power and put forward ‘politically’ and ‘Islamically’ acceptable gender perspectives, the other five journals discussed are independent voices that are rooted in civil society. They indicate the existence not only of ‘a theatre ... in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk’,<sup>40</sup> but also of a diversity of voices within the reformist movement. Though they take different gender positions, all these journals appear to agree on their aims and also on their premises as far as gender relations are concerned. They all want to change the present situation, they all agree on the principle of women’s rights. They differ, however, in the details of what they consider these rights to be, and the means of achieving them.

Finally, the debate on gender rights has so far been largely confined to women’s magazines. If this continues, it could both ghettoise and marginalise women’s rights in reformist Iran. The inherent contradiction between gender rights as constructed in Islamic law and in a democratic society, is one of the sore points on which there has been virtual silence from male participants in the debate. This silence was eloquently challenged by Mehrangiz Kar in her address to Akbar Ganji, Iran’s most outspoken pro-reform journalist, editor of the weekly *Rah-e Now* (The New Way) that is now closed, and presently serving a jail sentence for his writings.<sup>41</sup> Kar opens her address with a revealing observation about the malaise in reformist discourses when it comes to the ‘women’s question’. She notes that the front page of each of the first fifteen issues of *Rah-e Now* features a close-up photograph of a male intellectual, whether Islamic or secular, embellished by an impressive quotation; the editor seems to be unaware that half the population are women; neither their voices nor their issues seem to be part of this New Way for which the editor and his colleagues are agitating.

For male clerics in Iran, women’s demand for equal rights has

become a problem for which they are seeking an answer within the Islamic framework, though they prefer to do the thinking for women. But this is not the case with male lay intellectuals, whether secular or religious. The fact of the matter is that gender equality is a notion to which men in reformist Iran still tend not to subscribe. Whereas secular male intellectuals are trapped in leftist discourses that can only accept feminism as part of (and subordinate to) wider socialist goals, male religious intellectuals have so internalised the code of sexual segregation that they have abandoned even thinking about the issue to their female counterparts in *Zanan*. The reluctance of both secular and religious intellectuals to enter any meaningful debate on gender must be seen in this context, and their silence must be taken for what is. Farideh Farhi rightly observes that as democratic feminist theorists have repeatedly reminded us, the emergence of a democratic public sphere has never been defined solely by the struggle against absolutism and traditional authority but has always been based on the exclusion and containment of some people.<sup>42</sup> What reformists must realise is that the creation of a democratic society entails addressing core problems of power relations – among which is that of gender inequality.

### Notes

I am grateful to Richard Tapper and Farideh Farhi for reading and commenting upon earlier drafts of this paper; I remain solely responsible for any shortcomings.

1. Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', in her *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the 'Postsocialist' Condition* (London and New York, 1997), p.70.

2. Only a week before the 2000 Majles elections, the reformist press issued a list of thirty candidates – the quota for Tehran; twenty-eight of them were elected in first round of voting.

3. On the role of press, see Gholam Khiabany and Annabelle Sreberny, 'The Iranian Press and the Continuing Struggle over Civil Society 1998–2000', *Gazette: International Journal for Communication Studies*, 63 (2–30), (2001), pp.203–23. For an analysis of the mediating role of the press in



an earlier phase, see Camron Michael Amin, 'Selling and Saving "Mother Iran": Gender and the Iranian Press in the 1940s', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 33 (2001), pp.335–61.

4. See Farideh Farhi, 'Religious Intellectuals, the "Woman question" and the Struggle for the Creation of a Democratic Public Sphere in Iran', in Ahmad Ashraf ed., *Intellectual Discourse in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, special Issue of *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* (Winter 2001), pp.315–39; Ziba Mir-Hosseini, 'Religious Modernists and the "Woman Question": Challenges and Complicities', in Eric Hooglund, ed., *Iran in Transition* (forthcoming).

5. For instance, in *Kiyan* (Foundation), *Goftegu* (Dialogue), and *Jame'eh Salem* (Healthy Society). While the first is religious in perspective, the other two are secular. For an account of participation in the debate by secular as well as religious intellectuals, see Morad Saghafi, 'Crossing the Deserts: Iranian Intellectuals After the Islamic Republic', *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East*, 18 (2001), pp.15–46; Hamidreza Jalaeipour, 'Religious Intellectuals and Political Action in the Reform Movement', paper presented at the conference on 'Intellectual Trends in 20th-Century Iran', Princeton University (21 October, 2000); available at <www.seraj.org>.

6. See Farhad Kazemi, 'Civil Society and Iranian Politics', in Augustus Richard Norton, ed., *Civil Society in the Middle East* (Leiden, 1996), vol.2 pp??.

7. See Asghar Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic*, trans. John O'Kane (London, 1998).

8. *Ibid.*, pp.61–151.

9. Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who was instrumental in having the *velayat-e faqih* included in the final draft of the constitution, and was until 1989 the designated successor of Ayatollah Khomeini, provides a vivid account of this tension in his memoirs, available at <www.montazeri.com>.

10. Some of them mocked the slogan by twisting it to *jame'eh Mamali*—a play on the words *madani*, meaning 'civil', and Mamal, a pet form of Khatami's first name, Mohammad.

11. On her political career, see Ziba Mir-Hosseini, 'The Rise and Fall of Fa'eze Hashemi: Women in the Iranian Elections', *Middle East Report (MERIP)* 218, (2001), pp.8–11.

12. The idea being, of course, to satirise one of the gender inequalities in sharia penal norms under which the blood money due for a murdered woman is only half as much as that for a man.

13. The research on which this paper is based was conducted in Tehran in March and April 2000, and was aided by a grant from the British Institute for Persian Studies, to whom I am most grateful. I do not discuss the few glossy beauty magazines with no gender or political agenda, such as *Banu* (Lady).

14. See Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Princeton, NJ, 1999).

15. For a revealing account by Azam Taleqani, see 'Fa'aliyat-ha-ye dah saleh-ye mo'assaseh-ye eslami-ye zanan-e Iran' (Ten Years' Activities of the Islamic Institute of Iranian Women), *Daftar-e Dovvom: Masa'el-e Zanan* (Second Volume: Women's Issues) (Tehran, 1991), pp.1–10.

16. There are interesting parallels between Azam Taleqani and Zaynab al-Ghazali, the Egyptian Islamic activist. While both women live a 'feminist' style of life and have managed to free themselves from the constraints imposed on women by Islamic ideology, they continue to advocate 'Muslim values' of womanhood in their discourse. For an insightful discussion, see Miriam Cooke, 'Zaynab al-Ghazali: Saint or Subversive?' *Die Welt des Islams*, 34, 1 (1994), pp.1–20.

17. Parvin Ardalan, 'Zanan nashriyat-e zanan-ra mo'arefi mikonad: in bar *Payam-e Hajar*' (*Zanan* Introduces Women's Journals: This Time *Payam-e Hajar*), *Zanan*, 53, Khordad 1378 (June 1999), pp.16–17.

18. For the list of those closed down on April 23, as well as others after that date, see Khiabany and Sreberny, 'The Iranian Press', pp.219–20. On the *Vali-e-Faqih's* role in the suppression of the media and the implications for future reform, see Adam Tarock, 'The Muzzling of the Liberal Press in Iran', *Third World Quarterly*, 22:4 (2001), pp.585–602.

19. Montazeri has been more or less under house arrest in Qom since 1997 and has become an important figurehead for some of the reformists.

20. Mrs Dabbagh, the Society's most high-profile woman, three times Majles deputy, was not elected this time. She was an activist before the Revolution, and also close to Ayatollah Khomeini. See Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender*, pp.105–6.

21. Shamsolvaezin later became editor of four enormously popular reformist newspapers *Jame'eh*, *Tous*, *Neshat* and *Asr-e Azadegan* (all closed in succession during 1998–2000). When *Jame'eh* was closed down in June 1998, he was imprisoned and then released without trial. In April 2000, Shamsolvaezin was sentenced by the Press Court to thirty months in prison for his part, when editor of *Neshat*, in publishing two articles criticising capital punishment.

22. See Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent* (New York, 1993), p.127; Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati* (London and New York, 1998), pp.226–45.
23. *Zanan*, 34 (May, 1997).
24. For an incisive analysis, see Farhi, 'Religious Intellectuals'.
25. Both during the Berlin Conference and thereafter, Kar has hinted at her unwillingness to continue working with religious women. For an English text of one of her interviews, see the on-line Iranian feminist magazine <www.badjens.com> (21 November, 2000) 4th ed.
26. In February 2001, *Zanan* brother journal *Kiyan* was suspended on the orders of the Press Court, on the grounds of 'agitating public opinion'.
27. Which differs from another outfit with a similar name, 'Organisation for Islamic Propagation', that is government-sponsored.
28. See my *Islam and Gender*, pp.24–5; and Abdulaziz Sachedina, 'Woman, Half the Man? The Crisis of Male Epistemology in Islamic Jurisprudence', in Farhad Daftary, ed., *Intellectual Traditions in Islam* (London, 2000), pp.160–78.
29. *Islam and Gender*, part 2.
30. Afsaneh Najmabadi, 'Feminism in an Islamic Republic: Years of Hardship, Years of Growth', in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito, ed., *Islam, Gender and Social Change* (Oxford, 1998).
31. *Farzaneh*, 1 (Fall, 1993), pp.4–5.
32. Despite having affirmed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), that legally commits states to the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of gender.
33. Conversation with the author in April, 2000.
34. *Hoquq-e Zanan*, 3 (Tir, 1377), pp.5–10.
35. Ibid.
36. Financial problems mean that the journal has appeared irregularly, and after the March 2001 issue Geramizadegan said that she could no longer afford to keep the publication going.
37. *Jens-e Dovvom*, 6–7 (Spring, 2000), p.36.
38. Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender*, ch. 1.
39. Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals* (London and Toronto, 1994), p.15; and his 'The Importance of Being Modular', in John A. Hall, ed., *Civil Society: Theory, History, Comparison* (Cambridge, UK, 1995), p.39. A leading Muslim intellectual notes that Gellner's *a priori* judgement is contradicted by the fact that Iran's triumphant revolutionaries did not establish a Shi'i Caliphate or Imamate but

a republic – ‘for the first time in Iran’s long history ... with popular elections, a constituent assembly, a parliament (where real debates take place), a president ...’: Sadiq al-Azm, ‘Is Islam Secularizable?’, in Elisabeth Özdalga and Sune Persson, ed., *Civil Society, Democracy and the Muslim World* (Istanbul, 1997), pp.17–22, at p.19.

40. Fraser, ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere’, p.70.

41. ‘*Rowshan-fekri-ye dini va mas’aleh-ye zanan*’ (Religious Intellectualism and the Woman Question), *Rah-e Now*, 1 (16), 17 (Mordad 1377), pp.32–3.

42. Farhi, ‘Religious Intellectuals’.