

ICWA LETTERS

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Institute of Current World Affairs
THE CRANE-ROGERS FOUNDATION
4 West Wheelock Street
Hanover, NH 03755

WM-17
EUROPE/RUSSIA

Whitney Mason is an Institute Fellow studying and writing about Turkey's role as nexus between East and West, and between traditional and secular Islam.

Sex and the Sexes in The Islamic Republic

By Whitney Mason

When I first met 26-year-old Tara Etefagh, at around 6 o'clock on a brisk October morning in Tehran, little would I have imagined that her regular hiking companions call her "the yellow creature." Like every woman in Iran, Tara was covered from head to toe in a loose garment that hid two things that the Islamic scholars who rule the country believe would pose a clear and present danger to society — the shape of her body and her hair. It was only when she and her friends Mo and Bobak and his dad Pir and I had driven an hour north of the city and hiked for another hour into the rugged Elborz mountains that Tara threw off her legally mandated uniform and I saw she was wearing a yellow baseball cap to complement her yellow knapsack, boots and scarf. "I don't know any other girl like her," Mo and Bobak told me with pride and affection in their voices as we watched her clambering up the steep scree above us. Tara often led the group, practically running up hill. After ten hours of hiking, including climbing to a 3,500-meter summit, Tara beamed with happiness and was skipping down the trail until we caught sight of families strolling along paths on the valley floor. Tara slowed to a walk, took her hat off and pulled the brown cloth over her head. "I hate this part," she said to me, wrinkling her nose in distaste.

A month after I'd returned to Istanbul, Tara sent me the following e-mail message:

Hi Whit,

It's 1:00 a.m. and I'm "burning the midnight oil" just like you. Tomorrow is holiday because of Imam Ali's [the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed, considered by Shiites to be God's vice-regent on earth] death and we're going to go to mountain.

This Friday we couldn't go to mountain because in the morning as we were going to join the group, the committee [the Komiteh morality police] arrested us (my sister, a 19-year-old boy and me). You can't even imagine — they sent us to the prison for 4 hours, but we gave them our ID cards and the document [the deed] of a house, so they let us out for night and the next day we were sent to the court being unaware of our guilt. They didn't tell us what the problem was — whether because of being with a boy 3 to 7 years younger than my sister and I, or because of not wearing a long uniform. We spent a lot of money giving bribe, so at last we were acquitted. In the court the judge said that "In your file, it's written that you were wearing 'Tourists' Clothes'. What kind of clothes are they?" And we said him that we were just wearing light-color clothes, Red, Yellow and Green.

Of course, I didn't tell about this matter to Bobak, Mo..., and other friends because here it's considered bad for a girl to go to prison. Because

no one will believe that we were not guilty, every one will think that we had done something wrong.

Any way, sorry for being too talkative, but I thought perhaps you can understand us and feel how miserable we are. The judge said "Since you are a girl, you can't go to mountain with boys."

And I said to him that going alone is too dangerous & impossible.

He said: "So it's better you sit at home than go to mountain, because imagine you're falling down the mount, so the boy is oblige to take your hand and help you and that's a big sin."

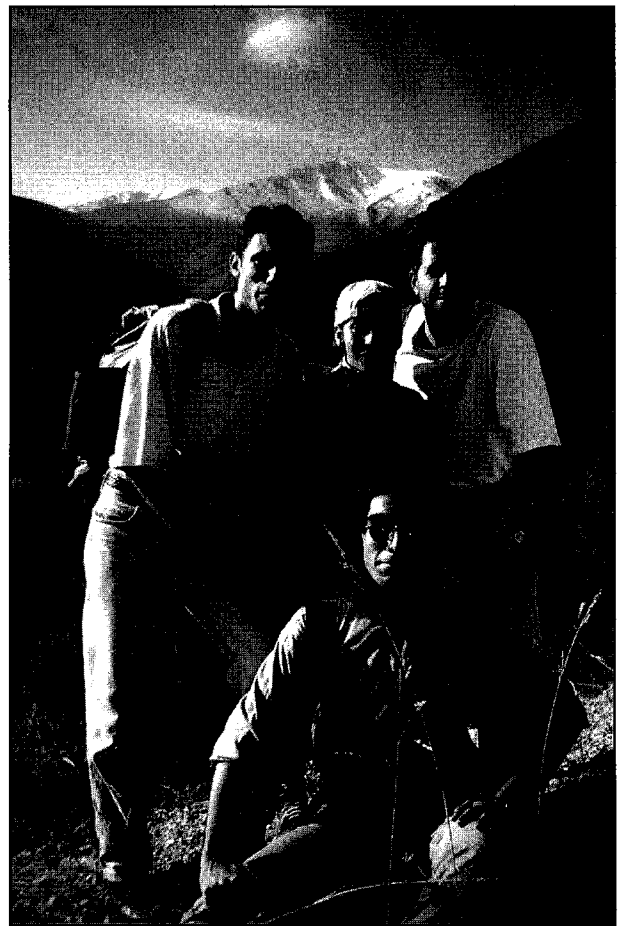
I said: "Well, it's better than falling and dying." All of a sudden he got outraged, and I said "No, no, I was just joking."

Yours truly, Tara

After five weeks in Iran, what I found most shocking in this troubling story was that Tara felt she couldn't tell Bobak and Mohammed. The three spend virtually every weekend and holiday together, trekking. The boys themselves are self-declared atheists and scathingly irreverent about the Islamist regime and most of Iran's mores. If Tara couldn't trust these young men to take her side, Iranian women were in even worse shape than I'd imagined.

For centuries Muslims and Christians have had a morbid fascination for what each regards as the other's barbaric attitude toward women. Probably the best-known fact about Iran in the West is that women must hide their hair and bodies. But in recent years a number of western journalists covering Iran, most of them women, have noted that in many respects the lot of Iranian women has actually improved since the Islamic Revolution.

"As the revolution celebrated its twentieth anniversary, almost a third of government employees were female — a major achievement when Iran was compared with the religious Arab monarchies across the Persian Gulf... Various Iranian ministries employed 342 female director-generals. And 5,000 women ran in Iran's first local elections in 1999. More than 300 won, several taking among the highest vote counts. Professionally, growing numbers of Iranian women had also become lawyers, doctors, professors, newspaper and magazine editors, engineers, business executives, economists, coaches and television newscasters. By 1999, Iran had 140 female publishers, enough to hold an exhibition of books and maga-



Free in the mountains: (clockwise from top right: Omid, Tara, Me, Ali)

zines published by women. In the arts, they'd become painters, authors, designers, photographers and movie producers, directors and stars — and winners of international awards in all three. In education, Iran was cited in 1998 as one of the ten countries that had made the most progress in closing the gap between boys and girls in the education system. More than 95 percent of Iranian girls were by then in elementary school. Over 40 percent of university students were women — compared with 28 percent in 1978. And more than a third of university faculties were female."¹

These statistics represent real, tangible progress. But during my visit I was struck by the depth and breadth of the belief that women constitute a species entirely separate from and weaker and less valuable than men. In 1926 a western observer in Iran said, "There is a tremendous gulf between the women of Cairo and Constantinople and the women of Tehran, even those of the very highest positions."² In 1936 Reza Shah outlawed the veil and required women to wear modern, western dress as had Ataturk some years earlier in Turkey. In 1963 the Mohammed Shah extended to women the right to vote.

¹ *The Last Great Revolution* by Robin Wright, pgs 136,137.

² *Roots of Revolution*, Nikki R. Keddie, pg. 92

Ruhollah Khomeini, then a mid-level cleric in the shrine city of Qom in south Tehran, condemned the change as an attempt "to corrupt our chaste women."³ During my five weeks in Iran, the only "progressive" reform of gender legislation being discussed was eliminating the obligation to get a father's permission for a girl to be married below the legal age of nine.

Family court

Nowhere is the inequality of Iran's battle of the sexes more obvious than in Tehran's Family Court. Fittingly, the concrete three-story building faces another crucible of tradition-bound commerce, Tehran's huge bazaar. Between the building and the sidewalk, in a kind of unwallled gazebo, scribes sit at simple desks writing out petitions in Persian legalese. Inside the door men and women are divided for separate security checks, before meeting again, sometimes for the last time, to mount the stairs to begin their meek assaults on the ramparts of Iranian justice.

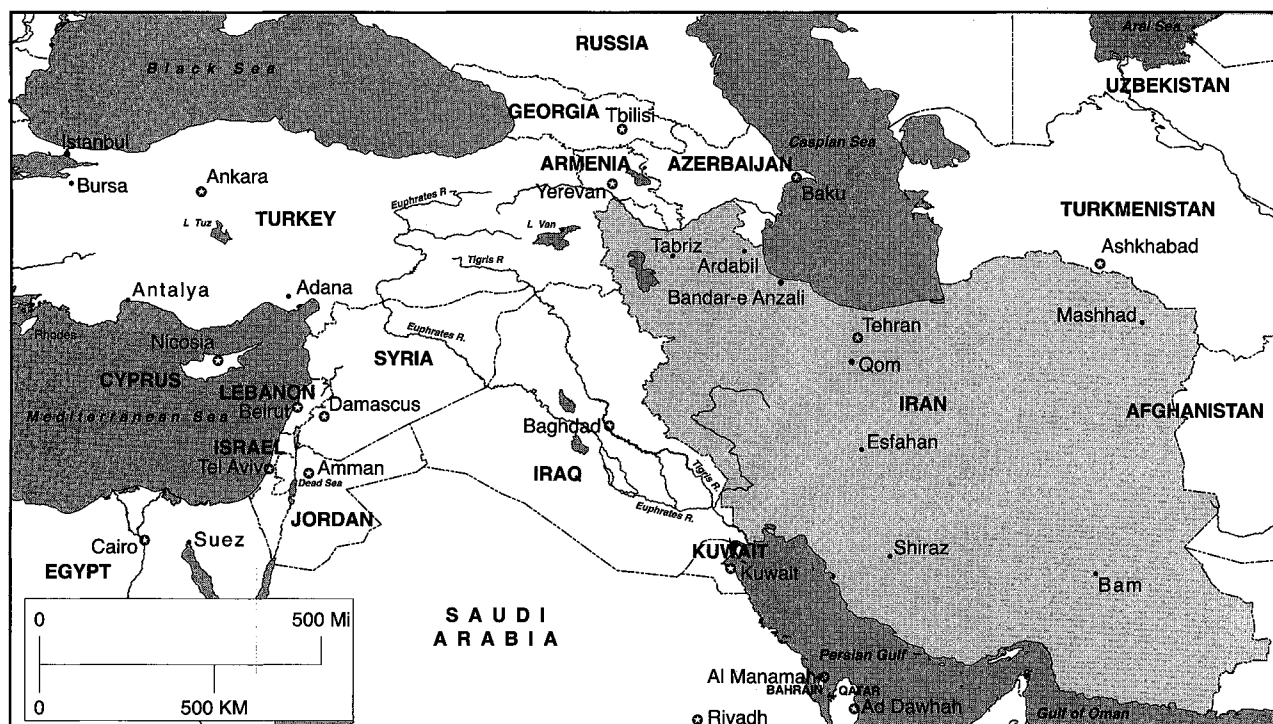
Doors open, male clerks carry stacks of files from one office to another, surrounded by harried, importunate women and sullen men. "The women are asking for their files," explains my hostess, Fatimah, the cousin of a friend in Istanbul. "If they can get them now, they can move the process along quickly. If not, their cases can be delayed for months just because the clerk in one office hasn't bothered to send their file to the next stage in the process." Fatimah should know: she's been coming to this building at least a couple of times a week for about eight years, trying, still unsuccessfully, to make

her ex-husband pay child support, the dowry he promised in writing, and to return half of a private business they created together which she says he stole.

The entire legal system, based on Islamic law as interpreted by the mullahs — the Shiite scholars who rule Iran — is skewed against women. According to Iran's Islamic legal code, if a person kills someone accidentally — in a car crash, for instance — he must pay seven camels, the equivalent value in sheep, or 7 million tuman — about \$9,000. For killing a woman, he is liable for just half that amount. A woman's testimony is likewise worth half that of a man's and a daughter inherits half as much as her brothers.

A provision unique to Shiite law allows Iranians to have a "temporary marriage", or *siqeh*, which is basically a license to have sex. Any man can have a *siqeh* any time; a woman must be either divorced or widowed.

Fatimah and I walked up and down the halls as she explained the milling crowds around us and poked her head into offices and courtrooms, looking for officials she knew who might be willing to talk with us. Finally she spotted a man she knew, ushered me into his office and explained that I was an American doing research for an academic dissertation. A senior clerk with responsibility for the flow of paper and cases in one courtroom, the man regarded me with a cool, ironic smile. Fatimah explained that he was not your usual court official: in his spare time he was a thespian and had even appeared in some films. With several estranged couples hovering around his desk, the clerk agreed to



³ The Reign of the Ayatollahs, Saul Bakhash, pg. 24.

answer some questions about the divorce process:

- Both the plaintiff and the defendant have to find a representative — who must be a man over 40. In an uncontested case, both representatives show up with the husband and wife. In a case that's contested, virtually always by the man, the two representatives meet alone with the judge to try to mediate the dispute.

- Child custody goes automatically to the father after the age of two for boys and seven for girls. The only extenuating circumstance considered is actual abuse by the father. The strength of the bond between parent and child, a crucial consideration in custody cases in the US, is *not considered at all*. If the father is working or traveling all the time, for instance, he will still be awarded custody of his children and be expected to get a (female) relative to care for them.

- If the husband refuses his wife's request for divorce, the woman must prove one of the grounds for divorce stipulated in marriage contracts, including impotence, beating and lack of financial support. In practice, if the husband objects, he can delay the process for years. After filing for a divorce, getting a court appointment takes one or two years; if the husband doesn't show up for that date, the hearing may be rescheduled for a year or two later.

- Property settlements must be finalized before divorce, with disastrous consequences for women. Since the man's agreement is effectively required to get a divorce, he

can refuse to grant it unless a woman forfeits all her property rights, including the dowry promised in the marriage contract and officially payable on demand, the woman's share of any community property, and child support for any children whom the man declines to take custody.

While Fatimah translated the clerk's answers to my questions, he quickly addressed a few words to the other distressed-looking couples crowded around his desk, who were asking him what they should do next. There was one pretty girl standing with a handsome boy, both of them with pleasant expressions on their faces and the quick, elastic bearing of youth. I wondered why they were divorcing and asked Fatimah to ask the girl. Without batting an eye at this transgression of her privacy, the girl cupped her hand over her mouth and whispered that her husband was an opium addict. Just a few feet from her husband and the clerk, she explained quietly that the boy had said that if she promised to say they just couldn't get along and not to mention the drugs, he would go along with the divorce. Luckily for her, she said, she discovered the addiction before consummating the marriage and thus losing much of her attractiveness to another potential husband. After leaving the courthouse she would go to a forensic clinic to establish officially that she was still a virgin.

Before sending the young couple on their way to the next office, the court clerk said to the girl: "Go appreciate having your husband, because after your divorce you'll discover that men in Iran are very rare." She turned to us and rolled her eyes.

Out in the corridor, Fatimah and I were accosted by a woman we'd seen across the clerk's office. She had a sad, homely face and her eyes were red with tears. If I wanted to understand the situation of women in Iran, she told me, I should listen to her story. She'd been married for 18 years. For three years she'd been petitioning the court to order her husband to give her a small monthly allowance for necessary expenses, like going to the dentist. If he wouldn't give her money, she wanted him to allow her to work at home as a seamstress. She had a certificate to work as a seamstress, she said with a pitiful flash of pride, and was ready to earn her own money. But her mother-in-law, who lived with her and her husband and children, always persuaded her son not to grant the permission. When her kids — age 4, 14 and 18 — said they would testify on her behalf, the husband threatened them — sometimes even chasing them around the house with a knife. With this, the poor woman burst into tears. "I just wanted to talk to someone who might understand," she said. "If the court doesn't give me satisfaction soon, I'm thinking of killing myself in the courthouse to make my point." Stupefied and impotent, I watched as the woman turned away and disappeared into the crowd of black shrouds.

Fatimah spied another friend, a female assistant judge, and repeated her introduction. Before the Revolution women served as full judges, members of the Senate



Veiled for eternity: As this death notice shows, the most strictly observant women remain faceless unto the grave.

and the *Majlis*, Iran's parliament. During the drafting of the constitution for the Islamic Republic, Khomeini himself had added a provision barring women from serving as judges or governors. Women who'd worked as judges under the Shah became court clerks with a commensurate reduction of pay and benefits. The friend's plump, lively face poking out of a tightly pinned black chador, she explained that female assistant judges were introduced five years ago. She was one of about 30 women in a class of 100 who studied law for four years at Tehran University, the most competitive in the country. As a woman, she received the same salary as a male judge of equivalent experience, but she was not allowed to become a full judge and wield ultimate authority. The court clerk had explained the reasoning to me: "Women are too emotional and empathetic to be full judges. If a woman came into a court and cried, a female judge might start crying too. If the plaintiff was laughing, the judge might begin laughing."

The female judge believed that women will again be allowed to serve as full judges, a move supported by some progressive mullahs who argue that no woman judge would be infallible, but no male judge is either. But even now, despite her limitations, the female judge said she thought her presence benefited women because they felt more comfortable talking to another woman. She also thought that women were more flexible and creative in coming up with remedies. A few weeks before, for example, a woman had complained of beating and sexual sadism. The male judge, with 44 years experience, said there was nothing he could do unless the man was declared insane. The female assistant suggested sending a social worker to assess the couple and then sending the woman to a forensic clinic for a physical exam. And the head judge agreed.

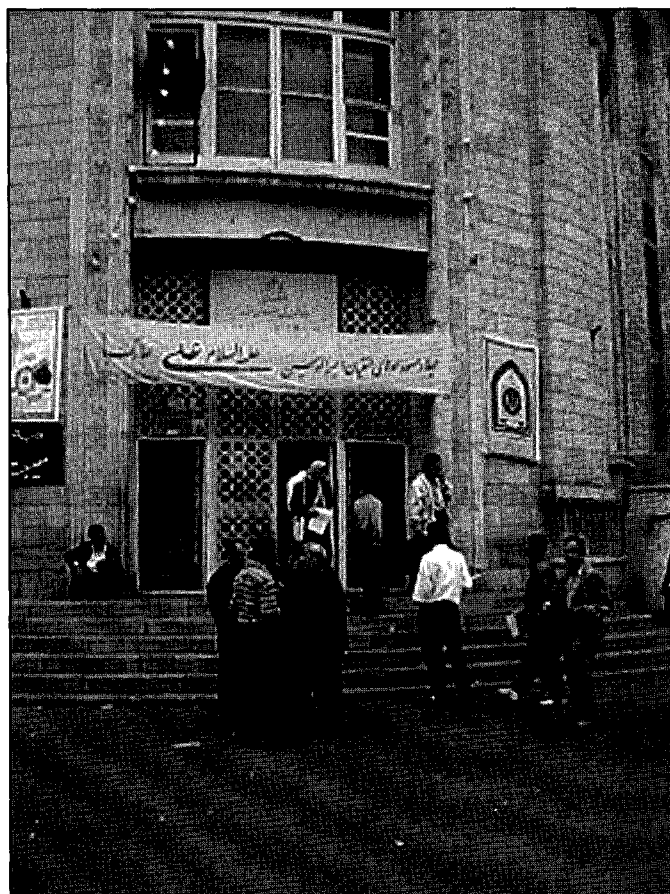
At this point the judge looked over at me and pointed at my collarless shirt buttoned to the top. "You look like Hizbullah!" he said with a hearty laugh.

I asked him what he thought about his female deputy. "In terms of understanding the situation, following the file, and rendering judgment, she's invaluable."

"If he didn't say that, he knows I'd kill him," joked the female magistrate. And no wonder: She writes all the decisions. The man just signs them.

Hejab

The most conspicuous sign of women's unequal position in Iran is the strict dress code known as *hejab*. Contrary to popular image in the West, the practice of veiling comes not from the Koran but from the Byzantine and Sassanian cultures. After the practice became widespread in the Muslim world, two vague verses in the Koran were cited to give it legal force. Still, until recently veiling and se-



Family court: The building across from Tehran's bazaar attracts a steady traffic of fed-up women and reluctant, obstructive men.

clusion were limited to upper-class urban women.

Indeed, one Iranian suggested to me that Iranian cultural attitudes toward sex and women are more conservative than those of Islam itself. (Manicheanism, a dualistic religion that arose in 3rd-Century Persia, professed that this world belonged to the forces of evil and held the life of the flesh in the greatest contempt. Adherents were encouraged to be celibate.) This thesis was supported by a conversation in the Armenian Church of Saint Mary in the Caspian seaport of Bandar-e Anzali. In the pews on the right sat two young women, and on the left side a middle-aged man who introduced himself as Aram. Rahele, 23, a student of graphic design, told me she hated *hejab*, especially in summer. "I sweat like crazy," she said, demonstrating how she fans face and neck with a fold of her scarf. "That's one of the main reasons I'd like to leave," she added, joking that I could put her in my suitcase. Rahele didn't want to get married until she was 29 or so. "I know some Iranian girls who've moved to Australia and lived with someone for years without being married."

I asked what she thought of that.

"It's great," she said with a mischievous smile.

Aram, the middle-aged man shook his head. "A girl's



Rahele, right, asked me to put her in my suitcase to go to the U.S., largely because she hates having to wear the headscarf.

virginity is sacred in Iranian culture," he said gravely. "A girl can never be with a boy before marriage."

Given their difference in age, this may not seem surprising; but Rahele is Muslim, Aram an Armenian Christian.

Through my guide, I told the girl that of course I supported her right to choose to wear *hejab* or not, and to decide when and if to marry. "That may work in the West," said Aram. "But you can't impose your ideas here in Iran."

There was no question, of course, of me or any other Westerners imposing their views about women on Iran, as secularized Turks do on their traditional countrymen and women. Clearly, *hejab* is a traditional part of Iranian culture and some women would choose to wear it, as they had despite official discouragement under the Shah. The question in my mind was how many Iranian women felt, as Rahele did, that the *hejab* was an unwelcome imposition they would never accept without coercion. Throughout my five-week stay in Iran, I asked every woman I met how they felt about having to hide their hair and figures. From the sampling of responses below, I'd guess fewer than half of Iranian women would wear *hejab* if given the choice.

* * *

In the King's Garden in the desert oasis of Mahan, I ran into four girls — students of electrical and industrial engineering, statistics and economics — whom I'd first met a few days before at a teahouse in the middle of the bazaar in the city of Kerman. Standing in relative isolation next to a gurgling fountain, they told me, like Rahele, that they all hated *hejab*. Iranian men, they said, consider women second-class citizens and fathers rule the roost at home. One said that her par-

ents have an egalitarian relationship.

"Yes," said another, "but that's rare."

"It's true," her friend replied, "I'm lucky."

To my surprise, they all said that they consider themselves good Muslims. "What's practiced today in Iran is not real Islam, but a system the mullahs created for their own benefit," said one. All said they're desperate to get out of Iran. One said she'd like to study abroad then return to Iran to contribute to modernizing the society, as had Dr. Hesabi, a protégé of Albert Einstein's who founded Tehran University. The others weren't thinking that far ahead.

* * *

On an overnight train from the shrine city of Mashad on the Turkmenistan border to Tehran, my guide and I shared a compartment with a couple whose daughter had considered going to Australia for university. She asked a family friend who'd been living in Australia for years what life in Australia would be like for her as a Muslim. Would she be able to wear a headscarf? Her friend said she would be free to wear anything she liked, but that after a few weeks she wouldn't feel a need to wear a headscarf because she'd see that men didn't stare at her.

"We were horrified," the woman told me, looking the part. "To think that in the West men don't even have enough interest in women to bother to look at them!"

* * *

My wife Amanda and I are sitting on a bench in Baghe Eram, the Garden of Paradise, in Shiraz. A young guy with a pony tail and two girls approach us and shyly begin to talk in broken English. The guy plays football and wants to become a professional. His hero is the Italian star, Roberto Baggio. Our guide sneers at the young people and makes it clear that he didn't want to interpret between us. With minimal English and rude gestures, the kids convey that they despise the mullahs and the *hejab*. The boy says conservatives give him a hard time for his ponytail, too.

That night Amanda and I pass hundreds of women huddled outside a mosque to celebrate the first revelation of the Prophet Mohammed. In their black chadors, Amanda says they look like a flock of crows squawking on the nude branches of a dead tree. We walk on to the Shah-e Cheragh, the mausoleum of the brother of Imam Reza, the eighth descendent of Ali, whom Shiites regard as God's vice-regent on earth. Amanda's minimal *hejab* is not deemed sufficient for these holy precincts and she is forced to don a full, black chador. She picks up a bolt of black polyester from a booth near the entrance and a couple of giggling women help to drape it over her until only her indignant eyes are showing. Thus shrouded,

Amanda is permitted to come with us into the men's section of the mosque where she catches some hateful looks from worshippers. In place of the clean, lovely tiles found in normal mosques, the interior is entirely covered in little mirrors. Blindingly reflecting dozens of powerful fluorescent lights, it looks as if it were designed by Liberace.

* * *

My guide's family illustrates most of the spectrum of attitudes toward veiling in front of guests at home, where it is optional. When I first met his wife, who's quite religious, she wore a full beige chador and held a bit of cloth across the bottom of her face. Their 22-year-old daughter, on the other hand, wore jeans and a T-shirt and nothing on her head. Their older daughter, a pretty 28-year-old married to a professor of pharmacology and mother of two kids, always wore a token headscarf in front of me — along with figure-hugging pantsuits.

* * *

In Esfahan, on our way to Naghsh-e Jahan, Massoud, Amanda and I were stopped by police. A sour-faced colonel explained the problem: Amanda's *hejab* wasn't up to scratch. Because it was quite warm out, she was wearing one of my dress shirts, which hung down to her knees, loose pants and a headscarf. We'd seen many tourists dressed similarly and the ensemble had received the hotel manager's stamp of approval. But the police colonel threatened to yank Massoud's official guide's I.D. because the shirt didn't quite cover the place in Amanda's billowy trousers where the bend of her leg indicated her knees must be. Though Amanda was showing no skin, except for her hands and throat, as allowed by Iranian law, the colonel adjudged, perhaps from first-hand experience, that merely being able to tell exactly where a woman's leg bent was enough to conjure up visions of pretty little feminine knees that would drive the most pious Iranian man to sin in his thoughts.

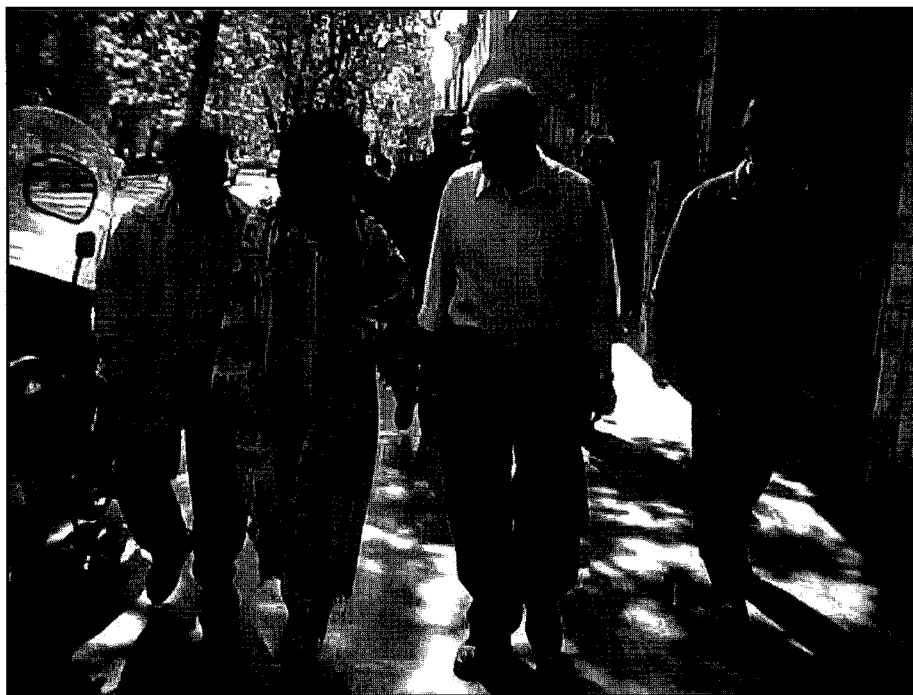
Massoud managed to save his license by telling the policeman that he was imposing a standard much stricter than that applied in the rest of the Islamic Republic and that if he pursued the matter Massoud would complain that some cowboys in Esfahan had decided they were better qualified to interpret Islamic law than the highly educated Islamic jurists who ran the country. Still, Massoud told us we were lucky to have been stopped by a policeman who was amenable to reason rather than the young Islamist Jacobins known as *Basiji*, or Revolutionary Guards. Before we ran into one of them, we hurried to buy an irreproachably shape-hiding outfit for Amanda. Since it was Friday, nearly all the Esfahan's merchants were adhering to the Koranic command to shutter their shops and go to the mosque for noon prayers. We finally found a place selling beige smocks with bright Achaemenian motifs. For the rest of our time in Esfahan, Amanda was the star of the town. People stared at her as if she were a movie star. We heard several women say it looked "*ghasheng-e*", beautiful. Our guide supposed people considered it very daring and admired how the shape of the outfit conformed to the letter of *hejab* law while the bright print violated its spirit.

* * *

Outside Hasht Behesht, a former summer palace in Esfahan whose name means "eighth paradise", we had tea with a family of about a dozen people, mostly women. The grandmother had married at 9, still the legal age for marriage in Iran. Though devoutly religious, she had gone to the mosque just twice in her life. "If I went all the time, I wouldn't leave room for others," she explained with a mischievous grin. Despite the quip, these people were the most conservative I'd met in Iran: they all said they prayed three times a day, as compromise from the standard five allowed by Shiite law, and all declared themselves delighted with *hejab*. How reliable the younger girls'



A fresco of an unveiled woman adorns the wall of a 17th-Century palace in Esfahan: Iranian current dress code is not reactionary, but a radical innovation.



All over Esfahan, people started to turn at Amanda and said she looked beautiful in her brightly-colored hijab.

sexual repression had caused an epidemic of depraved behavior among young people. "A huge number of girls are becoming prostitutes," he said.

"Isn't the prostitution caused more by divorce laws unfavorable to women and the economic crisis than sexual repression?" I asked.

"But often the girls don't even expect to earn money for it, they just like to have sex with different people," Bobak said with a voice full of sorrow and wonder.

I pointed out that prostitution means having sex for money and that having sex for pleasure was not only fundamentally different, but something widely approved of, within limits, throughout the

claims were, given the presence of their elders, is unclear.

Sex

Apart from a couple of swingers who bragged to me in a Tehran internet café about using heroin and invited me home for a drink of illicit spirits, even the most liberal young people I met in Iran have internalized the idea that sex is something dirty and shameful, particularly for girls. While mountain climbing with my young hiking friends, I asked Bobak whether he had a girlfriend. He told me he had had a serious girl friend until two months before. They would arrange to meet and to talk on the phone by sending coded messages to one another's pagers. Then one evening the girl's parents had listened on the other line and discovered the relationship, whereupon they forbade her ever to see him again. Bobak called and pleaded with her parents to let them meet one last time to say good-bye. They refused, saying it would damage the family's honor.

"Were you very serious?" I asked.

"Oh yes, we were like brother and sister," he answered.

I was confused. "But I thought you were lovers," I said.

"We were lovers too, but I mean we really loved each other."

Later, as we neared the remains of a Zoroastrian temple called the "Daughter's Castle" on the 3,500-meter summit of a rocky mountain, Bobak complained that

West. The normally talkative Bobak fell quiet for the rest of our ascent to the Daughter's Castle.

The Persian word for "daughter", *dokhtar*, also means "virgin"; the word for "woman", *zan*, also means "wife". In other words, the language itself doesn't allow for a female human being not to be under the authority of a man: first her father and after she's been defiled by sexual intercourse, her husband. On a cold, windy terrace garden overlooking the old entrance to Shiraz, Amanda, Massoud and I accepted an invitation from three women to join them for a cup of tea. Maryam, 32, from the oil-rich province of Khuzestan on the Iraqi border, had lost her husband at the front and both children at home when an Iraqi shell hit their house. She had no job and no apparent means of support; Massoud guessed she was a prostitute. Though there are no reliable figures, many Iranians told me prostitution is rampant. Another woman, with her five-year-old son in tow, was also a widow but was luckier: at 19, she was still young and pretty and she was remarrying a doctor. On January 11, police mounted an unprecedented raid on 29 brothels in Tehran's affluent northern suburbs, arresting 85 madames and pimps, who may be subject to jail, fines and whipping.

* * *

Over a goodbye dinner with Mo, Tara and Bobak — perhaps the first any of them had had in a nice restaurant — I steered the conversation back toward sex. "The obsession with a woman's virginity treats sexual experience as if it's a single point of no return," I said, "when in fact it is a continuum of experience, like our experience of other spheres of life, with its experiments and discov-

eries, disappointments and joys.”

The three young Iranians looked at me in silence. “Even for us who are open-minded,” said Bobak, “it’s hard to imagine experiencing sex that way. Rationally we know you’re right, but still...”

Considering the totalitarian repression of sexuality in Iran throughout their lives, the kids’ reaction shouldn’t have surprised me. On our way to the restaurant, we’d looked for a phone to call for directions. Tara walked into a shop and I’d started to follow her. “Hey! You can’t go in there,” the boys had told me. Thinking they were pulling my leg, I’d again started to enter the shop. They caught my arm. “Seriously,” they said, “that shop sells women’s underwear [among other things], so men aren’t allowed.”

* * *

Even on older Iranians who remember life before the Revolution and may even have lived and had romances in the West, the sexual repression of the last 20 years has left a deep mark. One day my guide Massoud, who’d spent from 1968 to 1973 in the U.S. as a handsome young Air Force officer, and I sat down in a grungy tea house in a gritty neighborhood in southern Tehran. After a strong

cup of tea and a few puffs of apple-flavored tobacco from a water pipe, Massoud got that excited leer on his face that indicated he was going to talk about his favorite subject, women.

“Hey,” he said conspiratorially, “look at that sexy girl over there with horny eyes.”

Surprised, I looked in the direction he’d nodded, scanned the entire café and saw only a few scruffy men, like us, sitting on wooden platforms drinking tea and smoking. “I don’t see any girl,” I said.

“Over there,” he said, pointing.

I turned my head in the direction he indicated. At first I had no idea what he was going on about. Then I saw the “sexy girl” that made Massoud’s eyes dance: a cheap plaster lamp, maybe two feet tall, in the form of a dancing girl.

“Massoud, that’s a *lamp*,” I said, with an expression of what I hope he understood was genuine concern.

“When you’ve been around nothing but veiled women for 20 years,” said Massoud, “that lamp does look sexy.” □

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FELLOWS AND THEIR ACTIVITIES

Shelly Renae Browning (March 2001- 2003) • AUSTRALIA

A surgeon specializing in ears and hearing, Dr. Browning is studying the approaches of traditional healers among the Aborigines of Australia to hearing loss and ear problems. She won her B.S. in Chemistry at the University of the South, studied physician/patient relationships in China and Australia on a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship and won her M.D. at Emory University in Atlanta. Before her ICWA fellowship, she was a Fellow in Skull-Base Surgery in Montreal at McGill University's Department of Otolaryngology.

Wendy Call (May 2000 - 2002) • MEXICO

A "Healthy Societies" Fellow, Wendy is spending two years in Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, immersed in contradictory trends: an attempt to industrialize and "develop" land along a proposed Caribbean-to-Pacific containerized railway, and the desire of indigenous peoples to preserve their way of life and some of Mexico's last remaining old-growth forests. With a B.A. in Biology from Oberlin, Wendy has worked as a communications coordinator for Grassroots International and national campaign director for Infact, a corporate accountability organization.

Martha Farnelo (April 2001- 2003) • ARGENTINA

A Georgetown graduate (major: psychology; minor, Spanish) with a Master's in Public Affairs from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton, Martha is the Institute's Suzanne Ecke McColl Fellow studying gender issues in Argentina. Married to an Argentine doctoral candidate and mother of a small son, she will be focusing on both genders, which is immensely important in a land of *Italo/Latino machismo*. Martha has been involved with Latin America all her professional life, having worked with Catholic Relief Services and the Inter-American Development Bank in Costa Rica, with Human Rights Watch in Ecuador and the Inter-American Foundation in El Salvador, Uruguay and at the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Gregory Feifer (January 2000 - 2002) • RUSSIA

With fluent Russian and a Master's from Harvard, Gregory worked in Moscow as political editor for *Agence France-Presse* and the weekly *Russia Journal* in 1998-9. Greg sees Russia's latest failures at economic and political reform as a continuation of failed attempts at Westernization that began with Peter the Great — failures that a long succession of behind-the-scenes elites have used to run Russia behind a mythic facade of "strong rulers" for centuries. He plans to assess the continuation of these cultural underpinnings of Russian governance in the wake of the Gorbachev/Yeltsin succession.

Curt Gabrielson (December 2000 - 2002) • EAST TIMOR

With a Missouri farm background and an MIT degree in physics, Curt is spending two years in East Timor, watching the new nation create an education system of its own out of the ashes of the Indonesian system. Since finishing M.I.T. in 1993, Curt has focused on delivering inexpensive and culturally relevant hands-on science education to minority and low-income students. Based at the Teacher Institute of the Exploratorium in San Francisco, he has worked with youth and teachers in Beijing, Tibet, and the Mexican agricultural town of Watsonville, California.

Peter Keller (March 2000 - 2002) • CHILE

Public affairs officer at Redwood National Park and a park planner at Yosemite National Park before his fellowship, Peter holds a B.S. in Recreation Resource Management from the University of Montana and a Masters in Environmental Law from the Vermont Law School. As a John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow, he is spending two years in Chile and Argentina comparing the operations of parks and forest reserves controlled by the Chilean and Argentine governments to those controlled by private persons and non-governmental organizations.

Leena Khan (April 2001-2003) • PAKISTAN

A lawyer dealing with immigration and international-business law with a firm in the Washington, DC area, Leena will study the status of women under the "Islamization" of Pakistani law that began in the 1980s and continues to this day. Born in Pakistan and immersed in Persian and Urdu literature by her grandfather, she is a Muslim herself and holds a B.A. from North Carolina State University and a J.D. from the University of San Diego.

Whitney Mason (January 1999-2001) • TURKEY

A freelance print and television journalist, Whit began his career by founding a newspaper called *The Siberian Review* in Novosibirsk in 1991, then worked as an editor of the *Vladivostok News* and wrote for *Asiaweek* magazine in Hong Kong. In 1995 he switched to radio- and video-journalism, working in Bosnia and Korea for CBS. As an ICWA Fellow, he is studying and writing about Turkey's role as nexus between East and West, and between traditional and secular Islam.

Jean Benoît Nadeau (December 1999-2000) • FRANCE

A French-Canadian journalist and playwright, Jean Benoît studied drama at the National Theater School in Montreal, then received a B.A. from McGill University in Political Science and History. The holder of several Canadian magazine and investigative-journalism awards, he is spending his ICWA-fellowship years in France studying "the resistance of the French to the trend of economic and cultural globalization."

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Phone: (603) 643-5548 E-Mail: ICWA@valley.net
Fax: (603) 643-9599 Web Site: www.icwa.org

Executive Director: Peter Bird Martin
Program Assistant: Brent Jacobson
Publications Manager: Ellen Kozak

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