

SILENT NO LONGER:
IRANIAN MEMOIR AS ISLAMIC FEMINISM

by

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A thesis submitted to the

Graduate School-Camden

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts

Graduate Program in

English

written under the direction of

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Camden, New Jersey May 2012

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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This thesis explores Iranian memoirs as an Islamic feminist space. It details a brief history of Iran 1900-present, an exploration of Islam and its importance to women's rights and the development, and lack thereof, with reference to women's roles in Iranian society throughout the past 100 years. The work argues that these memoirs create a space, much like western autobiographies, in which women can tell their stories and therefore create a history of their own through the pages of the memoir. This thesis assesses the differences between eastern and western feminist thought through examining the burgeoning discipline of Islamic feminism. The importance of understanding women's roles in Islamic society through the lens of Islamic feminism, which is inherently more culturally sensitive to Iranian culture, is the foundation of this work. By exploring the memoir as a platform for Iranian female expression the goal of this work is to expound upon the definition of memoir, to allow the memoir to be seen as academic within the discipline of literature.

Each section of this thesis explores parts of the history and development of Iran and its women. Breaking down women's rights into public and private space, the interaction of men and women, education of women, historical development of the rights of women, the defining characteristics of Islamic feminism, what makes these memoirs

literary in nature and finally dealing with the three memoirs in the all aforementioned contexts. Concluding the thesis with the argument that these memoirs allow Iranian women to become a part of history in their own context, and to hold onto the Iran that they love through their own words and memories in the pages of their memoirs.

Autobiography or life writing is a well-known and loved form of literature in western culture. Mankind seems to long to be known for our deeds, to make certain we tell our own story and if possible be assured that story is available for public view. As we well know eastern and western culture vary greatly in history, religion and way of life. This cultural variance can be seen in how historically people in Iran have chosen to communicate, or not communicate, their stories. It is “through narrative traditions and conventions of a culture [that] shape the writing of its history, biography and autobiography” (Hanaway, 59). The history of Iranian culture as told on the page is changing. In a country run by fanatic religious clerics, freedom of speech is a whiff from the past and the future looks more and more bleak as time progresses. Its citizens look to a history overrun with hardships, but also a history that embodies art, love and creativity, and in the not so distant past, a movement forward for its citizens, most notably women, even during the reign of the repressive dictatorship of the Shah, who fell from power in 1979.

This history is one in which Iranian women play a large role. In a largely oligarchic social structure Iranian culture is not suited to the autobiographical and even less so for women. The focus has been in the past to keep personal matters, especially women’s concerns, within the realm of the household to make sure to “ ‘save face’”... and to “maintain respect and self-respect...to conceal the truth and deflect intrusions” (Milani, *Veiled Voices*, 2-3). As Farzaneh Milani points out:

Women’s textual self representation cannot be divorced from her cultural representation...in a sexually segregated society where access to her world and words is rather limited – in short, in a society where the concept of honor is built around a women’s virginity, the token of her inaccessibility – autobiographies with their self-displays and self-attention cannot easily flourish. (6)

The genre of the memoir has opened new literary space for women to express their experiences within a format that lends itself to a more fluid form of self-expression; thus the “memoir is a distinctive space for autobiographical writing. As a meta-textual account – a reflection on the self in process and in history – it offers the possibility of incorporating ‘immediacy’ and more authentic truth into life narrative” (Whitlock, 133). As readers we learn from these women’s lives, and more specifically as western readers we learn about a culture limited in the past by censorship, and now forging a new path – an extension of the autobiography in the memoir, as the memoir has a tendency to have fewer concrete historical details and be more focused on a specific person’s individual experience.

What we are seeing now is the manifestation of what has been evident for century’s throughout Iran and around the world, repression produces dissent and Iranian women are expressing their discontent through their stories in the form of the memoir. The memoir provides an outlet for women who are, in a phrase as coined by Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, attempting to “write back” to the west and, more importantly, write back to Arab ‘patriarchy.’ “They are fighting the image through which both west and Arab male chauvinists have depicted them” (13-14). Iranian women are fighting similar feminist battles that western women have been fighting for centuries, but are doing so within a new type of feminism specific to the east-Islamic feminism. By extension, the memoir has become a markedly activist space for Islamic feminists to express their experiences as women; consequently their writings are an essential and illuminating representation of Iranian women and Iran’s progress with respect to women’s rights in a pre and post-1979 revolutionary culture. In the three memoirs

detailed in this thesis, Daughter of Persia, My Life as a Traitor and Lipstick Jihad, we see Iranian women use their own stories to induce awareness of the treatment of Iranian women, the importance of Islam, Islamic feminism and Iranian culture; by thrusting these issues into the limelight on the world stage, the memoir has become a space that fosters the seeds of Islamic feminism through allowing women to claim literary authority by telling their stories.

The Revolutions: A Brief History 1900-Present

In the west we are confronted with images of only one Iranian revolution, the 1979 fall of the Pahlavi Dynasty of the Islamic Republic of Iran. But “the carpet pattern of Persian history has many such sharp, twisting corners” (Farmaian, 47). The three memoirs studied here all deal with the history of Iran in varying degrees. Daughter of Persia deals with a pre 1979 revolutionary history, as the writer Farmaian was living in Iran at the time. Farmaian is both realistic and critical of the political history as she sees it unfold throughout her childhood and young adult life. She also comprehensively deals with her parents’ history in Iran, which culminates with the historical sections of her memoir being very comprehensive in scope and well-rounded in focus. With regard to My Life as a Traitor Zarah Ghahramani is dealing with a post revolutionary time period in Iran, where she also was born. Within her critique of Iranian society she details growing up in the Islamic regime and recounts her feelings of exclusion and longing for a broader existence that is not possible under the current political power structure. Ghahramani notes that when thinking about her childhood, her “fugitive childhood – left me with a longing to create a proper childhood for my own children ... may they never feel inclined to wear black ... may they keep their faces exposed to the world all day

long” (32). Ghahramani uses more personal feelings as an individual, unlike Farmaian who brings a detailed account of various viewpoints of the history of Iran into her memoir. Lipstick Jihad, however, bridges these two works in terms of a personal and global focus. As Azadeh Moaveni is an American Iranian the reader garners a dual viewpoint from her memoir. She recounts her parents experience in Iran in a pre revolutionary period until they fled Iran in “1979, the year of the great catastrophe that tossed our lives up into the air, scattering us haphazardly like leaves in a storm” (Moaveni, 7). Moaveni also includes her own experience living and working in a post revolutionary Iran. As she is a writer by trade there is an inherent critical nature to her critique of Iran, but also a deeply rooted love of Persian culture and past. All three of these memoirs include varied, but important portions of Iran’s past and present. They also write of hopes for Iran’s future, and help this process of development through recounting their own Iranian past.

Looking more closely at history of Iran we note the leader of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, who was a radical cleric who virtually overnight undid the progress Iran made from the early 1900’s through the fall of the Shah in 1979, specifically regarding women. The Ayatollah reversed a law implemented under the Pahlavi regime and made the Hijab (or “Islamic Dress,” as defined by Haleh Esfandiari) once again mandatory for women as one of his first acts of power, thus reinforcing his fervent desire to control women under his new regime, those in power “[in] the Islamic Republic from the beginning were intensely concerned, even obsessed, with the need to control women and to define in the broadest sense women’s role in society” (Esfandiari, 20). As Sattareh Farman Farmaian notes in Daughter of Persia “Iran has always been a country where

misplaced fortune finds those who have no say in their own destiny” (25), and Iranian women are those who have had little or no control over their own destiny throughout the recent Persian past. In order to more fully grasp this radical shift, we must be mindful of Iran’s history. Pre- and post- 1979 revolution in Iran’s history is of the utmost importance in understanding how Iranian women had their own type of revolt before and after the revolution. As Zarah Ghahramani points to in My Life as a Traitor how “grief has deep roots in our Persian past. The depth of our grieving has to do with the importance of love in our culture... love is the most important thing to grasp when you study Iranians. And this has been true even in Persia’s Islamic period” (Ghahramani, 29). This revolt takes its cues not wholly from the west, but from an Iranian past of gender development through the increase of personal freedoms and the deeply rooted love of being Persian.

The late 19th and first three quarters of the 20th century has been defined as an “awakening” by various scholars for the Iranian populace. In Daughter of Persia Farmaian notes her father “suffer[ing] in his lifetime from several political upheavals” (10). Beginning most markedly in 1905-06 with the call for less power of the aristocracy, there developed a set system of laws as well as a “voice of the people” (Esfandiari, 21) present in the government. A new constitution was implemented that recognized the equality of all Iranians, with a few caveats for women (not voting or being elected to parliament). While this constitutional era, also known as the Constitutional Revolution, did not indicate any real change for women it did set the wheels in motion for women to organize and to struggle for increased rights, “A women’s movement emerged during the Constitutional Revolution of Iran (1906-11), which was the first major bourgeois democratic revolution of the developing world” (Mojab, 128). Women began schools for

girls; they began to write and publish newspapers and magazines of their own and did all of this with “little support of men or the government” (Esfandiari, 22), thus demonstrating that women could create change in Iranian society without the help of the male establishment.

These women who began the women’s movement in Iran came from middleclass families who had been educated at home. As Farmaian points to in her memoir, for her growing up and learning that “ ‘hard work is a virtue – no one heaps up treasure without hard work. When you grow up, you will realize that education is everything!’” (14). The schools were private but still outside of the home which was frowned upon by the clergy in this time, the clerics “preached against girls’, even though completely covered, venturing outside their homes only to attend school...but harassment, persecution, and threats of banishment did not deter the pioneers of the women’s movement” (Esfandiari, 22). The first school for girls established by the government was in 1918 and was followed by a training college for teachers, one each for men and women, in 1919. The government thus became involved in providing education for women but segregated the sexes so as to remain in control of their interactions. In 1925 Reza Shah Pahlavi came to power, just in time to contend with many recently educated women pushing for women’s rights. Pahlavi was an autocrat who was intent on modernizing Iran based on the model of Ataturk in neighboring Turkey. Women were major beneficiaries of his reformists’ policies because Pahlavi was concerned with transforming Iran into a progressive and modern nation, “Reza Shah’s education policy supported the founding of girls’ schools, and he banned the veil. He wanted Iran and the Iranians to look Western and modern –

men, too, had to wear Western dress” (Axworthy, 226). As Sattareh Farman Farmaian points out:

Reza Shah, however, was determined to change this image of a shiftless nation in which the sons of Darius the Great, their age of glory forgotten, wallowed in medieval superstition, indolence and poverty, letting the Russians and British treat them with contempt. The King wanted progress, and to him, progress meant a secular Western-style society furnished with solid accomplishments that you could see and touch and measure. (53)

The Shah wanted progress, and his movement toward a more secular society was one that was overwhelming to Iran. Until the Shah took power, the Mullahs (Islamic religious leaders) had been the most powerful men in the nation. Reza Shah Pahlavi “began moving to weaken the clergy...by passing new legislation that took control of civil justice away from them and Islamic law” (Farmaian, 53). In a society that was so heavily reliant on clerics for guidance this movement toward a more secular society created a sense of tension, especially within conservative circles of the Iranian world.

One of Reza Shah’s main goals in his campaign to modernize Iran was to bring back “Iran’s luster in the world’s eyes...prompting him to adopt a brand of nationalism” (Farmaian, 73). The Shah made his power more concrete with the building of roads, schools, factories and even hotels and casinos to bring in tourism “for the first time in Iran’s history, the central government was becoming physically able to exert real power over the vast and wild areas of rural Iran” (Farmaian, 52). The Shah needed to fund these projects. At that time the law allowed the British to take the majority of the oil wealth that belonged to Iran in the form of concessions. Reza Shah made a move to “reduce the influence of foreign powers in Iran” (Farmaian, 83) by cancelling the 1901 oil concessions, which gave Iran a feeling of standing up to the superpowers in the west.

Sadly the effort to regain more control over Iran's oil wealth soon was "outflanked by geopolitical reality" (Farmaian, 84), and this was "a terrible loss of face for the Shah. The British had shown that they were Iran's real masters. Iranians, bitterly disappointed, blamed the king for the nation's weakness and called him a British stooge" (Farmaian, 84).

Reza Shah was fighting many conflicting battles in his struggle to modernize Iran. Struggling against the West taking advantage of Iran in oil concessions, while also wanting his country to be more modern, fighting with powerful mullahs and clerics, and taxing the public heavily to furnish his building projects led to his eventual downfall. The final straw was a law that the Shah passed in 1936, which outlawed the wearing of the veil. One of his principal reasons to abolish the veil was to work toward a more Western-style society therefore "Reza Shah and his lieutenants also concluded that the education of women and their integration into the work force and into active society required the abolition of the veil" (Esfandiari, 24). This dress policy shift had several effects on Iranian society. It opened doors for women to move into larger sections of the workforce, women's education increased and "newspapers and magazines printed articles, and the state-run radio broadcast programs promoting the idea of the 'new' Iranian woman" (Esfandiari, 25). Women's organizations became more prevalent; the Oriental Women's Congress met in Tehran in 1932 to discuss changes in "family law, reform of Islamic law pertaining to women, adult literacy programs for women, and female suffrage" (Esfandiari, 25). Younger generations of Iranian women embraced this new way of life, but not the older generation of Iranian citizens did not.

Both men and women of the older Iranian generation found the laws concerning women and the veil to be repugnant. To those who were devoutly religious appearing on the street without the veil:

was tantamount to letting them go into the street naked, to failing to protect their honor and chastity. ... The clergy strongly opposed the measure and preached against it. Yet Reza Shah ordered the government to implement the law by force if necessary, and women who appeared veiled on the streets had their Chadors or scarves torn away by policemen. (Esfandiari, 25)

Individual women found themselves not shielded by this veil which they relied on to keep their honor outside of their home; “When my mother had learned that she was to lose the age-old modesty of her veil, she was beside herself. She and all traditional people regarded Reza’s order as the worst thing he had yet done” (Farmaian, 95). This law, along with many problems concerning taxation and a failure to secure more money from oil revenue from the British coalesced and forced Reza Shah to abdicate his throne in 1941. He was succeeded by his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, who for the first ten years of his reign was a great friend to women and the development of women’s rights in Iran.

The new Shah no longer enforced the banning of the veil and consequently women had a choice in their manner of dress. The clergy regained additional power but were careful to tread lightly with regard to women, who had spent time outside of the home working and would be more of a threat if put back into the normative subservient pre-Reza Shah Pahlavi era position. Women were active with regard to oil nationalization, and the new Shah even appointed women to senior government positions. And yet, with all of this female empowerment women still did not have the right to vote. The clerical community was against women having this right, and “they equated female suffrage with the collapse of public morality” (Esfandiari, 27). While highly aware of the religious

implications of giving women the vote, Mohammad Reza Shah decided to allow women to participate in the voting process, in local elections at the very least. All of this happened in another revolution called “The White Revolution,” in which the Shah threw his support behind a group of reformers who stood for literacy, reforms of electoral law, and more representation for workers. This revolution fortuitously led to the empowerment of Iranian women. Finally in 1963 the Shah announced that “he was granting women the right to vote and the right to be elected to parliament” (Esfandiari, 28).

After the 1963 referendum women gained the platform they had been looking for in Iran: a place to voice their concerns, a place to gain ground as equals with men. Six women were elected to the Majlis and two were appointed to the Senate. Women were named ministers, duty ministers and female divisions of the police force, and other high-level corps incorporated women into their ranks. More and more women were being educated both in Iran and abroad and they could then fill a whole host of jobs. Virtually overnight women were becoming influential in the workforce. The problem with the fast-paced nature of this change was not evident right away, but it “generated deep social, economic, and political tensions, but these tensions did not become evident until the late 1970’s” (Esfandiari, 29). One of the most important effects to come out of the 1963 referendum happened in 1967 with the development of the Family Protection Law. For countless years the laws concerning the family were based on a very loose interpretation of Islamic Law which left men with most of the power in the marriage relationship in terms of divorce, custody, multiple wives, as well as prohibiting women to travel on their own. The Family Protection Law allowed women to find some power within the structure

of the marriage. The implementation of the Family Protection Law only happened because of the employment of the female members of Parliament “speaking for the ‘silent’ women’s community, [female parliamentarians who] stressed the inequality of the laws” (Esfandiari, 29). The enactment of the law created a sizeable amount of exposure for Iranian women and prompted the government to host the conference of “The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in Tehran” in 1965. This conference “not only adopted resolutions relating to women worldwide; it also focused international attention on the activities of Iranian women” (Esfandiari, 29). By focusing the attention of the world on Iranian women’s issues, the role of the WOI (Women’s Organization of Iran) took greater shape and had a more focused message. The WOI focused on “women’s total equality under the law” (Esfandiari, 32), much like western feminist organizations. The change we see making its mark here in Iranian society is equality was argued as being able to co-exist with the tenets of Islam; it was predominantly emphasized that “Islam was compatible with demands for equality between men and women” (Mojab, 127). While women were fighting for rights to equality they also were fighting for their right to be devout within the confines of the laws of Islam, and to examine these laws as not being destructive to devout Muslim women. This “White Revolution” did not just focus on women it was also about human development, as pointed out in *Daughter of Persia* “at last, I thought, the government was beginning a major human development campaign, a program to not only build roads but people!” (Farmaian, 250).

The WOI looked to the west for feminist movements as well as looking at women’s rights in other Islamic countries. Western feminist ideas were reshaped and

“reworked for a traditional society like Iran” (Esfandiari, 33). By 1972 Islamic reformers were not working against Islam but trying to work with the religion, to show that Islam can be compatible with certain structures of feminism and with the changes that had been made to the traditional Iranian societal structure. But with fast change comes a large portion of backlash, against female emancipation, against adopting western dress and western attitudes, and especially against the Shah for becoming what many saw as an ostentatious leader who was flaunting his opulent oil wealth while a large portion of his countrymen and women could barely feed their families:

The sudden infusion of huge amounts of oil revenue after the 1973 oil price explosion caused severe economic dislocations in Iran. The country experienced rapid inflation, shortages, high rates of rural migration, a housing crunch and shantytown growth in urban centers, overcrowded schools, and an overburdened infrastructure. The salaried middle class and the working class felt squeezed even as huge fortunes were made by importers, developers, contractors, industrialists, and those with connections to the royal court. (Esfandiari, 37)

Those who were helping to build this new Iran were building a world in which they would have trouble participating. The country was becoming increasingly westernized, to the dismay of many. There was an almost “delirious admiration for things Western” (Farmaian, 263), and this was a problem in Iran because the glue that held the society and families together had a great deal to do with “propriety and filial obedience” (Farmaian, 263). With this westernization of Iran these basic tenets of generations past were being changed overnight. Thus the seeds of change were planted - the seeds of a pious revolution.

This new revolution would be by religious leaders, who would promise the people a reversion to the old ways. As the country had been overrun with western ideas and images, religious leaders wanted to revert to the old and thus familiar ways thus

bringing a stronger sense of the east to Iran. This reversion to religiosity came about in many small ways at first:

At Tehran's leading technical university, male students demanded Western music not be played in the cafeteria and called for separate cafeterias for men and women. There was a marked increase of mosque attendance among students... On University campuses, an increasing number of women appeared in scarves, either because they felt more comfortable with their heads covered or as a sign of protest against a government associated in the minds of its opponents in the west. (Esfandiari, 37)

To use the laws of Islam to move to a more conservative society would, in many ways, seem logical for a world where a large portion of citizens would be familiar with these laws. Specifically for women, who had in the past used Islamic Law to argue for women's rights. This movement reconstructed a platform contending that no harm could come of using Islamic laws to enforce a more conservative and economically fair society.

Mohammad Reza Shah fell in 1979 and the Islamic Republic of Iran came into being. The leader of this revolution was a cleric named Ayatollah Khomeini who took little time to change nearly a decade of advancement, for women most markedly. Important laws enacted under the previous leadership were quickly abrogated, the Family Protection Law was abolished and the hijab was once again made mandatory. The first draft of the constitution of the Islamic Republic "appeared at the opening session wrapped in a black chador" (Esfandiari, 39), signaling the way in which women were taking striking steps back from the progress made in the past 80 years. The new constitution only devoted 4 of its 175 articles to women and "they only spoke of a woman's role within the context of the family and within the framework of Islamic law and principles" (Esfandiari, 39). Women did retain the right to vote but were barred from becoming judges, thus taking them out of the realm of those who can truly create change.

Punishments, cited as Islamic punishments, were revived; women could be stoned if they committed adultery, and lashings could occur if hair was shown beneath the hijab or for other infractions of Islamic dress. Parliament even went so far as to ratify a part-time work law “which allowed women to only work half-time in order to devote themselves more fully to their husbands and children” (Esfandiari, 41). But unlike in the past, women now knew what it was like to be a part of the workforce and to have options outside of the home. These women had been educated in Iran and outside of it and would not go quietly back to a life of silent desperation. In fact, the way in which women came to act after the revolution was not surprising if one knows the history of the country, women historically actively sought out a voice “this thirst for education, employment, legal protections, economic security, and participation in the social and political life of the country that women were to display with such intensity did not occur in a vacuum” (Esfandiari, 20). Interestingly, since the 1979 Revolution “Iranian women have been subject to one of the most restrictive dress codes in the Islamic world, yet partly in consequence, Iranian families have released their daughters to study and work in unprecedented numbers” (Axworthy, xii). Where the government did an about-face on policy concerning forward movement of the development of a nation and of women, Iranian women and their families took up the cause and became their own careful revolutionaries, in life and in the pages of their memoirs throughout recent history.

The Qur'an and its Relevance to Women:

A major focus in all three of the memoirs studied in this thesis is, of course, religion. With the importance placed on a secular pre-revolutionary Iran and an extremist

Islamic regime in a post 1979 revolutionary Iran it is only natural that a large portion of these memoirs to deal directly with Islam and its influence on the memoirists lives as Iranian women. The ability to read and decipher the Qur'an is fundamentally tied to Iranian women's development and is exercised through these memoirs.

Iranian women brilliantly used the law of the Qur'an in order to argue their case to seek individuality in Iranian society, much like Zarah Ghahramani does in My Life as a Traitor "I have been reading the Quran for the last two days. One passage says, 'Respect your women even when they are walking past you in the street because they are God's gift to the earth'...I want my Islamic rights" (139). Fatema Mernissi speaks of her generation of women only having one way out of the traditional order as an "escape from the widespread contempt for women that characterized the traditional ordering of society"(159), and that was education, "Only the university and education provided a legitimate way out of mediocrity" (Mernissi, Islam and Democracy, 159). Women are now claiming the ability to move forward their own destiny, with the acquisition of an education. By insisting on being educated women become more masters of their own fate and begin to create a world in which women have a voice and are to be heard and to:

claim...their right to God and Historical tradition... Our [women's] liberation will come through a rereading of our past and a reappropriation of all that has structured our civilization. The mosque and the Koran belong to women as much as do the heavenly bodies. We have a right to all of that, to all its riches for constructing out modern identity. (Mernissi, Islam and Democracy, 160-161)

This right to constructing a modern identity is tied with the education of women, because in this education women are able to assert their independence in a more meaningful manner. Women can now read and therefore interpret the Qur'an, and other texts to argue

for their rightful place in society, rather than being silenced, they will have Qur'anic arguments that will bolster their Islamic feminist standpoint.

Attention in the western world has been on Islamic societies and Islamic extremist groups who take the Qur'an and its teachings out of context and thus moves the focus from the true religion to its fringe elements. We see Islamic Law taken to the furthest extreme in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and it is of the utmost importance to understand that this is not the fault of the religion, but of those who are imposing the law and their own interpretation of it. "[They] believe that a reinterpretation of Islam, together with lobbying, will eventually pave the way for granting women equal rights with men...[they] demonstrate inconsistencies in the law, and argue that the present legal system conflicts with Islam's 'affectionate spirit' and its respect for women" (Mojab, 135). What is explored in the following pages is what the Qur'an actually states in terms of women's rights and their equality with men. This is most important when looking at Iranian female memoirs because the vast majority of power those extremist clerics in power in the Islamic republic of Iran wield over women is tied to interpretations of the Qur'an. Therefore the writers of the memoirs studied here have become a part of a new generation who are able to interpret the Qur'an for themselves; in specific to the following Qur'anic passages that have been overlooked in the past for the benefit of the male power structure.

While there are extremist elements in Islamic nations throughout the world, these do not represent the Qur'an. In fact it can be argued that more often than not such extremist nations, such as current day Iran, are taking large portions of the Qur'an out of context for their own purposes:

Ordinary Muslim women do not often practice the kind of Islam promoted by Islamist movements, mosques, schools and Qur'anic courses, while the growing numbers of 'liberal' British and American women who revert (convert) to Islam often say they do so precisely because it gives women rights and has less tolerance of the commercialization of sex and the sexual objectification of women. (King, 297-298)

Looking at the Qur'an in with reference to women's roles, we must take into consideration that it is not Islam, but certain nations that are depriving women of rights. Even now the name "Islamic Republic of Iran" is seemingly intent on making the treatment of its oppressed female population correlate with Islamic Law, and thus facilitates negative commentary on Islam. Miriam Cooke notes that these women, in our case the three memoirists, are:

refusing the boundaries others try to draw around them so as better to police them. They are claiming that Islam is not necessarily more traditional...nor is it any more violent or patriarchal than any other religion. They are claiming their right to be strong women within this tradition, namely to be feminists without fear (60).

In fact, the Qur'an speaks directly about the equality of men and women. Abdur Rahmn points to the fact that "we must view the noble and natural Islamic conception of women's equality to man in her free will, nature, spiritual responsibility and ability to raise herself to high planes of virtues, consciousness of Allah (taqwa) and honor, as stressed in many verse of the Holy Qur'an" (King, 295). In taking a closer look at a few verses from the Qur'an we can garner a more holistic view of the word that Allah meant for his people; all of his people. To begin, let us examine 4:195:

O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty toward Allah in Whom ye claim (your rights) of one another, and toward the wombs (that bare you). Lo! Allah hath been a watcher over you (Word-by-Word Grammar, Syntax and Morphology of the Holy Quran).

It is explicitly stated in this verse that men and women come from one another, from the same soul. There is a strong implication here of equality, in terms of men and women having the same origin. We even see the idea of being careful toward individual duty to Allah and a reference to the wombs that bore you. This section of the Qur'an is about reverence and respect for women, and their role as life giver. With that in mind we look at another section of the Qur'an, 9:71:

The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those - Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise (Word-by-Word Grammar, Syntax and Morphology of the Holy Quran).

In this section men and women are outlined as allied to each other, not enemies of one another as some in the west would have the public believe. This verse implies that men and women are seen as a unit, that both men and women are meant to serve Allah together and not as separate entities, even within marriage men are meant to see women as a part of Allah's creation, as he is the maker.

This notion of being allied to one another is also seen in 4:19:

O you who have believed, it is not lawful for you to inherit women by compulsion. And do not make difficulties for them in order to take [back] part of what you gave them unless they commit a clear immorality. And live with them in kindness. For if you dislike them - perhaps you dislike a thing and Allah makes therein much good (Word-by-Word Grammar, Syntax and Morphology of the Holy Quran).

This Qur'anic passage clearly expresses the idea that women must be treated with respect, as they are made by Allah. By that logic and by this verse we see that to treat a woman

without kindness is to treat Allah without the same kindness and by extension women must treat men with this same kindness as well.

As in many cultures and religions, there is a hierarchy between men and women and no one portion of the Qur'an has been argued over in terms of the treatment of women more than 4:34:

Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance - [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand (Word-by-Word Grammar, Syntax and Morphology of the Holy Quran).

This is the most contentious verse in the Qur'an in terms of western feminist thought, as we immediately read the first line, "Men are in charge of women," and no subject is nicely buttressed at the end with "strike them." In an attempt to understand how this can be seen as not strictly anti-female we will turn to Rachel M. Scott's article who in turn quotes Ibn Kathir, who contends that " 'men excel over women and are better than them for certain tasks.' Thus, a man should be a woman's 'maintainer, caretaker and leader' who can discipline her 'if she deviates'" (Scott, 61). If read in a certain way, this verse can suggest that this action by men is merely to safeguard women, and one can look at it in terms of historical context; when the Qur'an was written men were in fact the primary breadwinners and therefore were the individuals taking care of the women. As women moved into the workforce and became breadwinners themselves in pre-revolutionary Iran, breadwinner status then changes the outlook on the section of the Qur'an altogether. Scott quotes Falzur Rahman, who "agrees that 'men are in charge of women,' but argues

that this is because they must support women. Thus it is a function rather than an inherent superiority, and this functional authority can be further contextualized” (Scott, 62). Thus this function becomes defunct in terms of men having power over women when women move from the home into the public sphere as they did in Iran pre-1979 revolution.

Muhammad ‘Abduh has argued that the Prophet stated, “ ‘the best of you would not beat their wives’ (which) amounts to a virtual prohibition” (Scott, 62). As a stated prohibition from the Prophet this therefore suggests that good men would not hit their wives, thus, in practice abrogating the implied command.

In a broad sense there are also many sections of the Qur’an that deal with women’s issues, in a manner that in fact was far ahead of its time as compared to the west. In 2:236 there are outlined provisions for divorced women, while in the same time frame in the west a divorce would have been unheard of, let alone a divorced women being provided for. Notably, rules pertaining to women and their property, ownership and inheritance also exist in 4:24 and 4:11. The fact that these rules exist speaks to the importance of women that the Qur’an imparted. Rachel M. Scott points to the fact that Muslim feminists around the world contend that “no verse of the Qur’an can really have an oppressive androcentric intent; such an intent comes only from male dominated interpretative tradition” (60). These forward thinking portions of the Qur’an serve to protect both men and women in terms of marriage, property and life in general.

Falzur Rahman argues that when interpreting sections of the Qur’an one must be historically and culturally sensitive, “The Qur’an is the divine response, through the Prophet’s mind, to the moral-social situation of the Prophet’s Arabia” (Scott, 64). Therefore we must use logic when reading the Qur’an, rather than to take some of these

verses verbatim. Rahman and many other Qur'anic scholars argue that we must “extract general principles and long-range objectives from the specifics of the Qur'an, and from that, general principles can be extracted ‘to be formulated and realized now’” (Scott, 64). We must take the Qur'an and look at it with eyes of our time, as we must do with any holy book or set of rules. When the west perceives an Islamic nation as a nation who is oppressing women it is more than likely that the religious leaders in that nation are reading the Qur'an not in an informed way but through only a literal lens. In order to fully understand Islam one must look toward theorists of Qur'anic doctrine who are not literalists but read with an open and historically informed perspective, like the Islamic feminist thinkers of our time.

Feminism: Western, Eastern, Islamic and Iranian

The general purpose of feminism, that holds true from west to east, is to achieve rights for all women “gender signifies not male and female bodies but masculine and feminine social roles that shift dramatically throughout history and across geographical settings, gender is therefore associated with nurture and with a demonstrable malleability over time and place” (Gilbert and Gubar, 294). Equality is the primary objective of feminism, but the concept of feminism varies from one culture and historical context to another.

I propose to consider how western feminism differs from the development of feminist ideals in the eastern world, how Islam affects what feminism is in the east and what it can become. As these three memoirists have created an Islamic feminist space in their memoirs it is important that we understand the some definers of Islamic feminism:

Islamic feminism is not a coherent identity, but rather a contingent contextually determined strategic self-positioning. Actions, behaviors, pieces of writing that

bridge religious and gender issues in order to create conditions in which justice and freedom may prevail... The label Islamic feminism brings together two epithets whose juxtaposition describes the emergence of a new, complex self-positioning that celebrates multiple belongings. (Cooke, 59)

Daughter of Persia, Lipstick Jihad and My Life as a Traitor detail how all three authors use their religious identity in concert with their identity as Iranian women to define themselves inside and outside of the home. The memoirists, and we, must address how economy is tied to feminism and what then ties eastern and western feminism together, as this idea of equality bridges the gap between east and west. Lastly looking at Iranian traditions with regard to the feminine and feminist thought through the past to present and what women's voices in current day Iran are doing for the voice of feminism in an oppressive extremist regime environment in The Islamic Republic of Iran.

Economic development also plays an important role, as most feminist movements begin in the middle and upper classes; those are the classes who have the resources and access to information outside of their immediate homes. In Daughter of Persia we see just such an example, as Farmaian comes from an incredibly wealthy family with a progressive father "in those days about ninety-five percent of Persian adults, and nearly all women were illiterate. But my father, who always did exactly what he wanted to do... had long entertained the highly unorthodox notion that education made women better wives" (12). Without the forward thinking of her father and the education afforded to her by her status we may never have had Farmaian's memoir as a reference point of the progress of Iranian women.

When a nation begins to develop, with that development often comes social stratification, this is when we most markedly see the development of social reforms. As pointed to by Haideh Moghissi:

Feminist consciousness and women's struggle against gender discrimination in any society demand a certain level of socio-economic and political development. Much of women's suffering in third world societies relates to a low development of material production and the persistence of pre-capitalist social and economic structures that restrict women's access to the society's resources. Therefore, economic and social development are the main preconditions for women's emancipation. (37)

The development of Iran from the early 1900 through the Islamic revolution is a perfect example of this economic explosion having a positive effect on the lives of marginalized portions of society, particularly women. Of equal importance it is essential to understand the effect of not only economy but also religious culture on this type of development, "Deeply entrenched social norms and values inform patriarchal religious and cultural structures and practices that change more slowly and painfully" (Moghissi, 37). Social norms are not simply dictated by socio-economic conditions; they also are deeply rooted portions of social norms that are guided by religion as well as other traditions.

When looking at Iran we must take into consideration Islam and its effect on the development of the nation and of women's rights. As noted in the previous section on Islam the Qur'an and Hadith can be interpreted to promote equality of the sexes, but as with any religion it is how one reads the religious texts that will have the most influence. According to scholars there are two types of Islamic feminism. Firstly the "dominant voice of feminism, which affiliated itself, albeit generally discreetly, with the westernizing, secularizing tendencies of society...promoted feminism that assumed the desirability of progress toward Western-type societies" (Ahmed174-175). And secondly the "alternative voice...[which] searched for a way to articulate female subjectivity and affirmation within a native, vernacular, Islamic discourse – typically in terms of general social, cultural, and religious renovation" (Ahmed174-175). In terms of what Islamic

feminism means for Iran in particular we must look to both of these definitions. Women in Iran pre-1979 revolution had to work with what the Shah saw as progress, a more westernized society, so they were more a part of a movement of a secular type of feminism. Secular style feminism was not particularly popular and also not necessary to achieve rights for women.

Iranian women now are trying to work within the framework of Islam, and in essence their cultural and religious heritage, to create a niche for women's rights without giving up their traditional norms. As Mojab notes "The term 'Islamic Feminism' is used more specifically to refer to the activism of a relatively small number of Iranian women who seek the amelioration of the Islamized gender relations, mainly through lobbying for legal reforms within the framework of the Islamic Republic" (130). When thinking of feminists in terms of what we see in the west versus what feminism has become in the east one has to take into consideration that the goal of Islamic feminism is not to become western, but to find a voice within Islam that creates a space for women, a new feminist space that looks like Islam even in dress "the heroines of feminism are the not young things in their mini-skirts. They are women the age of grandmothers, gray-haired and with quavering voices, but whose remarks are full of vitriol...(they) asserted respect for the individual as its basic article of faith" (Mernissi, Islam and Democracy, 160). These women are working within their culture and religion to find a voice without misplacing their identity as Islamic women of faith. There is a school of thought that "Islam (is) compatible with demands for equality between men and women" (Mojab, 127). We see here that feminism is more malleable than other theories, and it must be to incorporate such variances in women's needs across the globe.

In Iranian society the feminist school of thought about not giving up Islam has led to working with the Islamic government, thus some of its “boundaries are drawn by the state, which...is not willing to move in the direction of democratization of gender relation” (Mojab, 137) a process which has been argued not to work unless there is a separation of gender, law and religion. According to Shahrzhad Mojab “the architects of the Islamic state prioritized the Islamization of gender relations because ‘women were the markers of the boundaries of the Islamic identity’” (137). But countering this idea that Islam is being used against women requires reliance on our research in previous sections of this work, that the Qur’an can be interpreted from perspectives that can, or cannot, seem oppressive to women. The regime in Iran seems intent on using suppressive interpretation and thus “many (women) remained firm, both as women and as believers in the faith. It was only as devout Muslims that women could counter the demands made of them by the Islamic Republic” (Afshar, 5). Only by remaining true to faith and working within it can Iranian women work toward a more gender egalitarian society.

While Islam has an obvious influence on feminism in the east, in Iranian society it must be remembered that Islam “affirmed the idea of the individual as a subject, a free will always present in the world, a sovereign consciousness that cannot disappear as long as the person lives” (Mernissi, The Veil and the Male Elite, 121). Men however, as having had the majority of the power in society until this law in Islam came to fruition, were less than pleased with this development: “men continued to try and suppress the egalitarian dimension of Islam. These men who came to Islam to enrich themselves and have a better life, were caught by surprise by this dimension of the new religion... The change in the status of women affected them all” (Mernissi, The Veil and the Male Elite,

126). But while men tried to continue their control of power, and by extension women, all women had to do was “pore over the yellowed pages of our history to bring to life A’isha’s laughter” (Mernissi, The Veil and The Male Elite, 115). While men attempted to keep power to the male section of society, women read the Qur’an and were able to prove they had power through Islam, which is an integral governing body of Iran. Power through Islam would prove to be a problem as formal education was not something readily available for women in Iran until recent times. But what was available was the household of women working together to understand their problems as a whole. Early feminists in Iran used this power of gathered women to their advantage “Early Iranian feminists insisted upon the inseparable links between democracy at home and democracy for Iran, and the interconnection of national liberation and women’s liberation” (Moghissi, 33). So while men were confining women to the home in order to keep a social order associated with male power, women were using the home as a place to instill both democratic and early feminist ideals amongst their sisterhood of confined wives. The reader sees this most markedly in My Life as a Traitor, where Ghahramani is aloud to act one way at home and a completely different way in the public sphere:

In school, I was taught that my greatest loyalty must be to God, then to the father of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini, and to the nation itself. I was taught about demons as well as about God. Americans were demons...At home, Americans were not such demons...freedom and tolerance were valued. A girl was as important as a boy... and Iran, my country, was captive of sinister, inflexible people, who saw the world in black and white, no color permitted.” (10)

While political and personal opinions outside of the home had to be curtailed, inside of the home managed to remain a world where women and men were equal for Ghahramani.

Thus an eastern style of feminism was born, in homes across Iran and throughout other Arab countries. We need to explore some of the differences and similarities within

eastern and western feminism. In the first three decades of the 20th century in the Arab world “feminism became visible intellectually, then organizationally and politically” (Ahmed, 174), and we see this most markedly in Iran and Egypt. As noted above there were two schools of thought associated with eastern feminism, one “campaigning for women and the nation in Islamist terms” and the other “campaigning for women’s rights and human rights in the language of secularism and democracy” (Ahmed, 196). One of the most influential pioneers of women’s rights was an Egyptian woman named Malak Hifni Nasif who was “a staunch defender of ‘Eastern women’ against ‘Western attacks’” (Ouyang, 176). Nasif stressed that western women came to the east and imposed their own view of women’s rights on the east. These western feminists were projecting themselves and their culture onto the lives of eastern women, “ ‘Western’ discourse necessarily reflected the values, priorities and aspirations as well as changing backgrounds of post-industrial revolution European men and women” (Ouyang, 179). Western scholars forced their own cultural viewpoint on eastern women and consequently a lot of importance was placed on women in the public sphere, “Western middle class, post industrial revolution ideology of both American and European Woman, who advocate the necessity for women to play an active role in the public space, above and beyond her role in the designated ‘private space’ of the home” (Ouyang, 175). Western scholars visited eastern nations to learn about women, but did no more than impose on them their own set of feminist ideals. Like Moaveni experiences when she returns to the states, “on this Manhattan street, wearing a veil was the equivalent of going bear-headed in Tehran. Suddenly I wasn’t invisible anymore. Peoples eyes actually skimmed over me, instead of sliding blindly past, as they’re supposed to do on a crowded

urban sidewalk” (171). The difference between east and west could not be more personified than in dress. In trying to fit in in the east the veil allows that, and the veil in the west a loud indicator of a woman’s difference from the western norm. While these eastern women were working toward finding their own version of feminism, still under the umbrella of equality but working within the cultural confines of their nations and religion, western theorists came to look down upon the east without looking at the cultural implications of the different parts of the world.

There is a tie of eastern and western versions of feminism that goes further than just the idea of gender equality; it is the concept of achieving citizenship and a modern identity. Women in the east and west maintain the idea of being a part of the citizenship of their country, and citizenship can be culturally contingent without diverging from the same idea of feminism. Women in the west more clearly associate this citizenship with the ability to be part of the public sphere and thus they create equality this way, while women in the east wish to define their female freedom through the lens of Islam:

[Iraninan women’s] liberation will come through a rereading of our past and a reappropriation of all that has structured our civilization. The mosque and the Koran belong to women as much as do the heavenly bodies. We have a right to all of that, to its riches for constructing our modern identity. (Mernissi, Islam and Democracy, 160-161)

This seems to be the main divergence and similarity all at the same time; eastern women want to work within Islam as they feel they have a right to be a part of their religious customs as equals, while western women want the same right to modernity and citizenship but rarely within religious confines. Nonetheless the focus for both eastern and western women remains on finding a modern identity, one of equality and a balance of power:

Those who define power in terms of participation in politics insist that Woman's absence from political office is proof of her victimization, even at home, while those who think public influence emanates from the home, argue that despite Woman's seeming marginalization, she, in fact, wields considerable power in society. (Ouyang, 179)

What has come of the early work of Iranian and Arab feminists is a framework with which newly liberated modern Iranian women could work in during the first 75 years of the 20st century. How these ideas were applied is something that has had a lasting impact even in a post-revolutionary Islamic State.

Memoir As Autobiography

These memoirs are the stories of three women, who for the love of their religion, country and family worked within the often-oppressive system of government in Iran to find a way to express their life stories. They are not traditional literary women, or even, as some would define it, women of note. But this does not make their stories any less compelling or important. These three women stepped from behind the protective walls of their fathers, nation and dress to tell the world about their lives. In the case of Iranian women their stories of female struggle simply do not fit into the mold of the western form of a stricter autobiographical format and therefore the less rigid memoir form serves as the most appropriate vehicle for their tales. It must be noted that autobiography has been, what Milani calls "conspicuously lacking" (Veiled Voices, 4), explaining that women's traditional role in Iranian society is the root cause for this marginalization and that "propriety demands the omission of women...her life story untold" (Veiled Voices, 4). It is important to note the cultural component of life in Iran in understanding the difficulty these women would encounter to write their memoirs. It is not just women, however, that

lack autobiographical writing; this literary form is distinctly absent from the whole of Iranian culture:

Numerous factors help explain why Iranian authors might not gravitate toward biographical research... traditional, culture-specific attitudes of conservatism and circumspection have been chiefly responsible for the dearth of biographical writing in Persia. In other words specifically Iranian concerns about the reaction of family, friends, neighbors, and society at large play a not insignificant role in the attitude of writers when it comes to telling the story of a writers life. (Hillman, 34)

One cannot untie culture from formats of expression. This is a place where eastern and western culture differ greatly. In western culture people are expected, if not encouraged, to become individuals. As William L. Hanaway notes “autobiography is more of a cultural form than literary genre capable of being transplanted and flourishing in non-Western literary traditions. Autobiography owes a great deal to post-Renaissance thought about the worth of an individual” (Hanaway, 61). In eastern culture and specifically in Iran, there is great focus on the family and in terms of women “the feminine ideal of silence and restraint...her cloistered selfhood seem to be major obstacles to the full development of female public personal narratives” (Milani, *Veiled Voices*, 6). For Zarah Ghahramani the idea of being vocal outside of her homes protective walls was one that took root early on “I turned six in 1987. I had learned two languages, learned about two worlds” (10). The focus on the self is limited if not non-existent for Iranian women, thus the very idea of an autobiography is difficult to imagine.

The few female autobiographies that are part of Iranian history are written by famous women and have a rhetorical quality to them which lends itself to a life already lived in the public eye “Most of these autobiographers were famous...for one reason or another their lives had already been uncovered, exposed, publically talked about...they

are devoted mainly to the defense of a political career, a religious cause, a notorious life” (Milani, Veils and Words, 221). While these women were writing to a public which already knew their story, the women who are writing memoirs now are the common women, women whose stories mirror those of the untold masses of Iranian women for centuries. These women are bringing to the forefront their life stories and by extension telling the world what it is like to be a woman in an everyday Iran, rather than Iran through the exclusive lens of the elite. “Iranian women, whether veiled or not, at home or in exile, are writing more than ever before. They are telling their stories, describing their reality, articulating the previously unarticulated” (Milani, Veils and Words, 234). These women are making their lives part of history, recording their stories of everyday life, which by certain definitions is a marker of the difference between autobiography and memoir, “Helen Buss’s definition of memoir (2001) distinguishes it from autobiography on the grounds that memoir writers seek to make themselves part of public history” (Whitlock, 135). By writing these memoirs Iranian women are stepping out from the preconceived notions that many have about them and asserting their independence through literature.

What we see most markedly in these women’s lives is the duality of their existence, what they must do to survive, to express themselves, and how this takes on new meaning during and after the time of the Shah. In the three memoirs explored in the pages that follow each of these women have a point in time when they decided to tell their story. For Sattareh Farman Farmaian, Daughter of Persia, this point came early in her childhood “Someday, I vowed, I’ll show them all – women are not nothing ... I’m going to do something with my life. Just let them watch! One day I’m going to prove that

a woman can be somebody, too” (Farmaian, 91). She knew from the outset that she would prove herself to be important regardless of her gender, and in writing her story Farmaian proves to the world that she is important. In Zarah Ghahramani’s work My Life as a Traitor she is working within the Islamic regime, differing from Farmaian who writes during the time of the Shah. Ghahramani is not as sure of her goals to write her story, but when confronted with unimaginable horror in Evin prison she does not shrink back into the female mold as prescribed by the Islamic Republic. Ghahramani embraces her experience by telling it to the world, in direct opposition with what the regime would want. Azadeh Moaveni, in Lipstick Jihad, writes her memoir from the perspective of the diaspora having grown up in southern California as a child of Iranian parents, who goes back to Tehran to find her roots. And in concert with pursuing her past she confronts her own story of being an Iranian woman and finds the strength to commit it to the page. As a journalist by trade Moaveni was in Iran to research, but finds her own story of being Iranian American more appropriate to impart to audiences that may garner something from her insights as a western born Iranian woman.

Their experiences are quite different, as Ghahramani grew up knowing the power that the clerics held over her and her country and yet she decided to be politically active, which lands her in Evin prison. While in Evin Ghahramani sees herself as weak “these are the tears you weep when you discover that your fear of pain is stronger than your convictions” (Ghahramani, 41). In prison and tortured by the guards, Ghahramani questions her strength, but when released she writes her memoir and thus takes back control over her life by telling her story, the memoir as narrative allows for story telling

and “it is though narrative that facts or experiences are organized and given meaning in any respective reality” (Hanaway, 59).

In all of these memoirs we see women simply not acquiescing to the status quo anymore. Whether that be during the time of the Shah or in a post revolutionary period “Iranians’ threshold for dissimulation and constriction sank, and people simply began acting differently... writers and intellectuals wrote vicious satire and stinging commentary, ‘as if’ they were permitted to criticize the regime” (Moaveni, 62). This is what happens when people are pushed to the breaking point, and these three women use their memoirs to help the public better understand how they came to find their literary voice. For Sattareh Farman Farmaian there was a realization as a young girl that education was the key “I realized what I seemed to have known forever: that I must have more education, that whatever else happened to me, to serve Iran and its people was my destiny” (113). Farmaian wants not to leave the country she knows and loves, but to become an educated woman, so she can then help those in need. She learns and wants to impart the notion that “we could not depend on powerful protectors and benefactors, only on ourselves” (Farmaian, 199). Farmaian is the first in her generation to look to the future as one that she can take part in, and she pursues an education to make a future for herself and to then help the Iranian people as well.

In Zara Ghahramani’s generation the Shah has fallen and the Islamic regime is fully in place. Like Farmaian, Ghahramani also realizes the importance of education and reading, “the liberty of language had found its way into my heart” (Ghahramani, 78). This liberty found through literature instills in her the idea to write her way to freedom, in subversion through literature “this is the way great literature is most subversive – by

allowing the reader to see what subjects, what experiences, great writing favors. Once great literature has thrilled you deeply, you cannot imagine those who created it rejoicing in injustice, employing their pens to make sonnets that celebrate hypocrisy” (Ghahramani, 123). Having ideas different from those of the regime and writing about them is what gets Ghahramani into trouble, “They cared about my ideas. That’s why I am here. They care about what I say and what I write” (231). Rather than being scared off from writing about her experiences, Zarah is only further empowered by her experience in Evin to tell the world of the corruption of the Islamic Republic of Iran, thus using the subversive power of the press to tell her story through memoir. As Julia Kristeva notes “The great moments of twentieth-century art and culture are moments of formal and metaphysical revolt” (419), and this holds true through the twenty-first century as well, as these brave female memoir writers use their stories to comment on the happenings in Iran.

Storytelling has long been an important form of discourse for Iranian women; “writing now...is indeed a historical imperative for Iranian women. It not only pulls the women story tellers out of anonymity, it also proclaims voice, visibility, the mobility afforded by and through writing, and the right of access to writing” (Milani, Veils and Words, 199-200). These three memoirists struggle to find a way to craft their identity through the memoir “characteristically their writings...bear the mark of an impassioned desire to resist injustice, right wrongs, [and] survive” (Ahmed, 183). For Farmaian and Ghahramani, both born in Iran, these memoirs of survival is evident in how they live their lives in Iran from birth, but differently for Moaveni, her struggle with identity is twofold. She grew up in southern California where she found herself “[not] reflected anywhere – not on television, not on radio; we didn’t even have our own ethnic slur” (26). The

representational quality of the memoir therefore creates a haven for many types of Iranian women, to create their identity and to tell their stories.

Literary Quality of Memoirs

The memoir is often overlooked when academia thinks of a great work of literature. The genre has become, in recent history, a vehicle for many to simply put on paper whatever individuals deem important for the public domain. Unlike the autobiography which has been a part of literary criticism for some time, the label memoir lends itself to a less academic focus:

The recent expansion of self-representation and attention to trauma is driven to publishing concerns about valuable and marketable commodities as much as the reconception of language, agency, and the human subject following post structuralism: ‘There goes Derrida; here come Oprah’ [effect]”. (Whitlock, 132)

Certain memoirs, however, must be given more serious consideration for the subject matter they impart; such is the case with the three memoirs studied in this work, Lipstick Jihad, My Life as a Traitor, and Daughter of Persia. The content of these three memoirs provide vivid, detailed accounts of the personal experiences of women under a repressive regime, making these three memoirs stand apart from other memoirs. The information imparted in these three memoirs is of vital importance to understanding women in Iranian history, Persian culture and Islamic feminism, all of which have current and far-reaching global import. Further, the content and subject matter found in these three works is rarely found elsewhere. The repression of women has disallowed the female voice, and these three women and their works provide readers with an accurate understanding of the treatment of women in Iranian culture without censorship by the repressive Iranian regime. In fact, the memoir genre makes these heavy topics more approachable to the

general populace; therefore the importance of these works of literature should not be overlooked.

Looking at each of these three works it is important to note their individual literary quality. With regard to My Life as a Traitor Zarah Ghahramani skillfully weaves her story of imprisonment and torture with literature of the Iranian past to further bolster her life story:

Who could imagine Hafez and Rumi and Sa'di being moved to write great poetry on the subject of the girl whose hair was exposed to the sun... This is the way great literature is most subversive – by allowing the reader to see what subjects, what experiences great writing favors. Once literature has thrilled you deeply, you cannot imagine those who created it rejoicing in injustice, employing their pens to make sonnets that celebrate hypocrisy... It is certainly true that highly accomplished writers are capable of revealing vile prejudices in their work, but great literature, by its nature, does not endorse the degradation of humanity (Ghahramani, 123).

By incorporating great writers such as Hafez and Rumi into her text Ghahramani gives greater credibility to her memoir. She is referencing her work here as literature by saying the nature of great literature is not to “endorse the degradation of humanity” and her memoir is the very opposite of such an endorsement; it calls for the freedom of the Iranian people. She uses the example of Rumi and Sa'di as laughably writing great poetry about a woman's hair being exposed, marking the unimportance of these rigid rules enforced by the Islamic Republic. She also then notes how the great thinkers of the Persian past would consider it ludicrous that these are the pronounced issues of present; problems like the exposure of a woman's hair that land innocents, like Ghahramani, in prison.

All three memoirs are a call for freedom from oppression, and a common thread found in each is the history of Iran's education of its women making each text more than

just memoir, but also a call to Iranians to give women their right of education, and thus freedom. Education so women can read and understand these great thinkers, so that they in turn can write a memoir, or any type of work, as modern Iranian women like Ghahramani, Farmaian, and Moaveni have done so skillfully.

In Daughter of Persia Sattareh Farman Farmaian stresses the education she received and education she then imparts to her students throughout the work. What is interesting to note is her father Shazdeh's role in educating his children. While it has been noted in present day Iran that women are seldom educated, or expected to use any education they do receive, Farmaian's visionary father saw the importance of education for his sons *and* daughters:

We Iranians, who value the family above all else and spend our whole lives within its hot, protective walls, know that from it we derive our very being, our deepest and most meaningful sense of self. Through it we define who we are, to the world and to ourselves. As long as the family is intact, secure, and complete, we know that we are somebody instead of nobody...on that day this was what Shazdeh felt too...He had begotten us, educated us, taught us the meaning of duty and justice. We were his masterpiece, his poem, the great work of his life.
(Farmaian, 93-94)

Shazdeh's educated children were his great masterpiece and by this he created the ability for Farmaian to create her great masterpiece in Daughter of Persia. In this highly creative Persian culture we note the importance placed on family ties, and how, especially in Farmaian's case, her father helped to mold her ability to convey her story through her upbringing as an educated woman, which was very much outside of the norm for Iranian women of the time.

Farmaian also uses the words of great Persian poets to explain her story. Like Zarah Ghahramani, Farmaian too is moved in her life by the words of Sa'di:

Over the last several years I had often reminded myself of a poem by Sa'di that I had memorized for Shazdeh as a child. It went, 'Although the love of country is required by the Prophet,/one should not live in misery/merely because one was born in a certain land.' Seven hundred years ago, I told myself, Sa'di had said that I must not tie myself to one place – that I must find something wider and more interesting than just marriage and the andarun. Sa'di, I felt, has been someone like me: he needed to leave the confinement of home and see the world alone...I always imagined that in this poem he was giving me his blessing (Farmaian, 145).

What is most interesting here is that Farmaian uses the words of Sa'di to give her strength to leave her home to pursue her dreams of an education and a life outside of the traditional Persian role women play. Farmaian's father also quotes Sa'di in her memoir to encourage education; he quotes Sa'di as saying " ' A nation becomes more beautiful through its learned men.' " (15). Like Sa'di, Farmaian's memoir outlines what is possible for Iranian women to achieve. She has created a work that has the same effect that the great poet Sa'di had for her, thus making this memoir one that has great literary importance.

As we have explored, Lipstick Jihad is a bit of a different memoir in regards to its writer. Azadeh Moaveni was born in the United States of Iranian parents, so her experiences living in Iran are those that are colored with a western lens. Nevertheless, this point of view is an important one in considering how women function and define themselves in a culture such as Iran, where the very idea of defining yourself as a woman is a challenging one. Moaveni also uses other writers to explain her feelings of isolation and confusion, but she uses a modern thinker, in this instance Simin Behbehani, the national poet of Iran and a woman:

'In your presence I see the green of my wings,/ like the image of grass the feathers of a parrot paint in the mirror,/ In the lines that define your being I seek a hedge/to protect the green clove from being trampled./ I grow in your consciousness like a vine,/with my hair covering rooftops, doorsteps and fences.'

To be a young woman in the Iran of the Islamic Republic involved a certain degree of uncertainty over one's identity... The regime fed young people such contradictory messages – women were liberated but legally inferior; women should be educated but subservient; women should have careers but stick to traditional gender roles... Constructing a coherent personality out of all the chaos was a formidable task. That's why my generation of Iranians was called the lost generation (Moaveni, 179-180).

This definition or defining idea that women seek, that Behbehani wants to protect with a hedge to “protect the green clove from being trampled” is the identity that young women are trying to develop under the current regime in Iran. As an outsider looking in Moaveni is able to astutely understand the confusion felt by her generation of women. Behbehani also sees this confusion as she is from an older generation (born in 1927), and has seen the changes in Iran from the fall of the Shah to present. Like the two previous memoirs, My life as a Traitor and Daughter of Persia, incorporating these literary giants to augment their assertions in these memoirs gives further literary authority to these works. We must consider the three memoirs and what ties them together through the authors' gender, women's issues, Islamic faith and Persian history. Ultimately what these three memoirs offer is an intimate, intellectual, and profoundly disturbing portrait of the issues and obstacles Iranian women face, as only Iranian women can share.

Duality of Islam

An enduring topic within all three of these memoirs is the idea of Islam and how it plays a major role in the everyday lives of these female authors. Even more interesting is how the Islamic Republic has interpreted Islam after the revolution, by taking a peaceful religion and using it as a backdrop for the persecution of its citizens. What has become one of the major purposes in the idea of Islamic feminism is to use the true tenets of Islam to refute the clerics' interpretation of Islam for their own purposes:

Inside Iran, secularly oriented women resist and challenge restrictive laws imposed in the name of Islam. Religiously oriented women discuss issues from within the Islamic tradition itself, and the society at large seems to accept these imposed in the name of Islam. Religiously oriented women discuss issues from within the changes with more ease and openness... there is, in fact, a coming together of different groups discussing radical issues within the strict confines of Islam. Women challenge androcentric ideology through Qor'anic passages. Boundaries previously set by religion are being crossed without necessarily causing offense. This desegregation of traditional women, this new perception of their roles, status, and aspirations, have created a highly charged atmosphere (Milani, Veils and Words, 233).

In Daughter of Persia Farmaian's mother, who has an even older set of cultural ideals than Farmaian herself, states it plainly, "God forbid that the mullahs should come to power," she said after a moment. "Religion should remain religion" (Farmaian, 306). The general feeling is clear – religion and state should if at all possible remain separate. But as with any revolution the promises made by those who wanted to garner power were just what the people wanted to hear certain promises "when the Islamic Republic is established, there will be no more injustice, the constitution will be restored, the government will take care of you instead of exploiting and oppressing you, and you will have all you need for nothing" (Farmaian, 312). The promise was different from the reality. The people of Iran are a large, devout, and Islamic society who became acutely aware of the reality of the Islamic Republic very quickly after the fall of the Shah, "whose idea of Islam, I asked myself, was this" (Farmaian, 348). Farmaian questions the convoluted version of Islam the new government uses to detain her for "crimes" against the new Islamic regime.

Similarly in My Life as a Traitor Zarah Ghahramani notes the irony attached to the fact that her detainer uses Islam to keep her in prison and yet violates so many Qu'ranic laws during her time at Evin "what I want to say is that it is also illegal for him

to touch me. I want to hiss at him that these rules seem to apply only when it suits him” (Ghahramani, 41). The rules are seemingly bendable, but only for those men in power. While detained, the only reading material Ghahramani had access to was the Quran, “I have been reading the Quran for the last two days. One passage says, ‘Respect your women even when they are walking past you in the street because they are God’s gift to the earth, to give birth and to make you happy.’ I want my Islamic rights” (139). This is a testament to an essential note, which we have been seeing throughout these memoirs, that The Islamic State of Iran is bending the rules of Islam to suit its needs, and thus makes a false pretense of being a truly Islamic nation-state. As noted in *Lipstick Jihad Iran* “had been transformed into a battleground of wills between Iranians and the Islamic system” (Moaveni, 57).

The will of the state and its clerical leaders and the actuality of what Islam teaches are two divergent things. While the clerics are using laws stated in the Quran to uphold their laws they are also toying with interpretation of the Quran to suit their purposes, “Under the Khomeini model of *velayat-e faqih*, upheld by the hard-liners, the state was Shiite, the leader was cleric, and both were accountable only to God” (Moaveni, 75). Whereas the reformers, which is the camp into which these three memoirists fall, “sought a system characterized by democracy, with an executive as leader, accountable to his constituency” (Moaveni, 75), what was set in place after the revolution was nowhere near what the reformers wanted. The misinterpretation of Islamic religious law (sharia) has led to what Azadeh Moaveni calls “misery and repression” (75) these laws “stripped women of an array of rights – travelling alone, divorcing with ease, retaining custody of children – and produced a judiciary ruled by chaos and brutality” (Moaveni, 75). Sadly, it

has also been noted that before the revolution “many Iranians made jokes about mullahs, but in times of injustice the people regarded them as their spokesmen” (Farmaian, 54). With the transition of power from the Shah to the clerics after the revolution, the clerics’ severe interpretation of Islamic law, faith in mullahs and religious clerics diminished throughout Iran. As Sattareh Farman Farmaian notes in Daughter of Persia, “the government was endangering religion” (253).

The consequences of these actions by the new Islamic regime have been and are being felt today. One of the goals mentioned frequently by Azadeh Moaveni is that of the reformers that “if they [the reformers] managed to amend the Constitution, their thinking went, they could abolish or dramatically curtail the power of unelected clerical bodies that ran the country” (38). The point here is that “the leaders weren’t taking Iran forward” (Moaveni, 174), in fact what happened after the fall of the Shah was a huge backward step in the development of a nation, the development of social programs and in particular the independence that was once so delicately afforded to women. Interestingly though, Moaveni notes that while the struggle for continued development in Iran is a burden carried by the Iranian common people “Iranian society was evolving from the bottom up... while the mullahs on the top remained the same” (105). This burden was too much for some women to bear who consequently chose to take their own lives “the intolerable disappointment generated by growing up with heads full of dreams and desires that have so little chance of being fulfilled” (Ghahramani, 83). The more common people in Iran are the ones attempting to make change, and this change lands Zarah Ghahramani in prison and eventually for all memoirists detailed here, in exile, “fated to be at home nowhere” (Moaveni, 246).

Men, Women and the Duality of Existence

We now have seen that women's lives are traditionally excluded from the literary tradition in Iran. By putting pen to paper women are taking back some of the control that was lost in the post-1979 revolutionary Iran:

With a distinctly female voice, these writers challenged and rejected the dominant value system of their culture. Increasingly interested in the individualized, unrestrained portrayal of relationships between men and women, they often trespassed the verbal territory allotted to women even within the confines of the private. (Milani, Veiled Voices, 9)

Women were known as what Sattareh Farman Farmaian calls "zaifeh" or the weaker sex, "as frail in mind as in body, incapable of making important decisions" (30). This idea of a weaker sex is what Farmaian blames for earlier generations of women "behave[ing] as though the proper condition of females were of near invisibility" (77). Reasons for these women having little or no power abound in these memoirs, and they are unequivocally always tied to their gender.

In My Life as a Traitor Ghahramani is painfully aware of the fact that her being in prison is tied to two things: her connections to a man who is politically active and "the other half is because I'm a woman" (137). The double standard for men and women in Iranian culture is a prevailing subject throughout these memoirs, Moaveni's Iranian mother "thought it regressive and awful that Iranian culture valued women through their marital status, and rated their respectability according to the success or failure of their marriage" (Moaveni, 21). One can imagine that it is more than difficult by these standards to begin to construct an identity, when as a woman one's entire status and identity are wrapped up in who and if you marry, coupled with the chaotic nature of a pre

and post revolutionary state. As Moaveni so eloquently puts it, “constructing a coherent personality out of all the chaos was a formidable task. That’s why my generation of Iranians was called the lost generation. And that’s why for women...a search for self, a search to anchor a self adrift” (179). This search for the self is one that leads women to the blank page. They are able to tell their own stories through the memoir and as pointed out by Farzaneh Milani in Veils and Words:

By textualizing personal experience, by saying ‘I’ in a written and public text, this choice shows a reverence for and fascination with the individual. It bespeaks a growing need for a literature of a woman-self in which woman becomes both the object and the subject of scrutiny. In short, whether the self is uncovered, discovered, or re-covered in these life-narratives, they all testify to a frantic search by women for autonomy and public self-expression (227).

Milani calls for women to become the change they want to see, not to abandon the country they know and love, but to learn how to work within the stringent lines of demarcation set forth by the men in power. As pointed out in Daughter of Persia, Farmaian calls for women to “*change* these things – stay and show what you, an Iranian woman, can do for this country” (218). Farmaian is a bright light striving to prove to Iranian culture that “a woman could serve the country as well as a man” (Farmaian, 234).

What these women are doing by telling their stories is trying to prove that the disparity between men and women in Iran is unjust and bigoted. Even punishments in prison prey on the idea of femininity, “He pulls my scarf from my head, takes handfuls of my long hair, and chops them with the scissors... The shearing takes the humiliation I’ve experienced in this room to a deeper level. I’m like an animal in the hands of a man” (Ghahramani, 70-71). But rather than letting this humiliation take away her femininity

Ghahramani chooses to write her story, to tell the world of her experience as a woman and by extension challenge the current situation through the written word.

The station of women in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as we have noted, is one with serious gender boundaries. These boundaries are rooted in tradition and not Islamic Fiqh (jurisprudence), but these gender boundaries are rules upon which the regime was built. According to Shahrzad Mojab “the building of the Islamic state depended upon the negation of the very idea of gender equality. The connection between the control of women and state building was frequently stressed by Khomeini and other leaders” (137). In the regime’s new order women had become ever more ‘zaifeh’ according to the new leadership, “in this revolutionary new order I was merely a creature” (Farmaian, 343).

This battle for gender equality is an ever-present one:

Women have been, are, and will continue to be the target of intimidation and violence, whether from regimes in power or opposition movements...it is still going on in Iran today...the reason is simple: women are the only ones who publically assert their right to self-affirmation as individuals...they constitute one of the most dynamic components of the developing civil society. (Mernissi, 157)

The reason women must assert their right to affirm their individuality in Iran more than in other cultures is that culturally for generations men have seen women as the lesser of the sexes. Even when the Shah was in power and there was some progression toward female independence yet the general consensus about women was one of dismissal, “ ‘She is a woman. A woman will be nothing’ ” (Farmaian, 90). Rather than stay silent women are using the memoir to assert their belief that they have power and control through literature.

Public Versus Private

As we have come to see over the course of exploring Iranian culture through the lens of these three memoirs the road to finding one's voice especially a female voice in Iran has not been an easy one to tread. The very nature of being an Iranian woman is an existence made up of various dualities that create a world of rules for public and private lives. The severity of difference with which these women must live inside and outside of their homes has in turn had a great influence on how they could come to write something so personal for the world such as a memoir, when in the past the very thought of a woman writing was unheard of "In the history of Persian literary writing women always spoke softly, literature being a man's world. In Iran it was natural that a man's words be thought of as an extension of himself in public...since public life was a man's domain" (Hanaway, 55). As noted by Farmaian "the 'outer' quarter, or public quarter where my father lived, was the realm of men. It reflected the greater world beyond, which was also a realm of men" (6). The public world has been the domain of men and women have been expected both in the past and present to some extent, to remain without literary voice, but with the publication of these memoirs the public domain is changing.

As when looking at any culture one must be sensitive to what is the norm and as Farzaneh Milani notes in Veiled Voices, "Women's textual self-representation cannot be divorced from her cultural representation" (5), in a world where "a woman's proper name is improper in public. Disclosure of her identity is an abuse of privacy, while her minimal exposure is the accepted – in fact for long the ideal – the norm" (Milani, Veiled Voices, 5). Women were thought to be the frailer sex and therefore to be kept away from public view for their protection, but after the fall of the Shah this outside world became one of real danger for women; a world where one had to learn this duality of existence:

I had to grasp new things that came along in our indoor lives (our ‘real’ lives, so to speak) while at the same time getting used to outdoor innovations. The state expected that I would understand things in the way it prescribed, while my family, especially my father, urged on me an alternative way of seeing the world. On top of this dual understanding, I was expected to keep one way of seeing the world private, spoken of only within the family home, while the second understanding was to be public, a way of advertising my loyalty to the state. (Ghahramani, 9-10)

As a child, this was a life Zarah was willing to learn, as obedient children do, but she states explicitly that “with the passage of years, the time comes when the child, now a woman, will wish to speak up more on behalf of one world than on behalf of the other” (Ghahramani, 10), and this is precisely what causes her imprisonment. One can see the incongruity between these two worlds, one in which there is freedom and equality and the other where there is no questioning authority. Growing up in these two worlds only breeds dissension, “I knew that all was not right when liberties I enjoyed at home vanished the moment I walked out our front door. A habit of questioning took root in me” (Ghahramani, 21). This habit of questioning would then lead Zarah to the prison cells of Evin, but mercifully also out of prison where she would use her inquisitive mind to step away from the cultural norm and tell her story of persecution.

This paradoxical norm to act differently in public than in private is further bolstered by the concept that as a woman you are nothing “ ‘Pray that your father lives forever, for when he dies, we and all these people will be nothing” (Farmaian, 5). To find a voice at all, let alone to do this when life has been comprised of the idea that you are nothing without a male protector as your public voice, is a great achievement. To step from behind the way one is expected to work in the outside world, the inner and outer worlds collide, “one can keep a great discord between the inner and the outer, between the façade and the background. But a mask worn for too long becomes another face, a

second nature” (Milani, *Veils and Words*, 213). These memoirists are discarding this other mask, this second nature of repression to don a new mask of exile and tell their stories. In shedding this mask these women are pushing the limits of what is allowed, and they putting on a new mask in terms of dress “The stark contrast between how one looked in public and private faded” (Moaveni, 43), women could now incorporate color into their wardrobes rather than just wearing the black chador as before. With this incorporation women could not only embrace their faith but also personalize their existence in public through dress.

A woman’s dress in public and private is one of the very things the western world regards as a hindrance to the development of women’s rights in Islamic nations, particularly in nations such as Iran, that enforced the full covering of the body in public, known as the chador or burqah. This is yet another example of a cultural difference that has led to a misunderstanding of two divergent worlds. Interestingly, in a pre-revolutionary Iran the Shah was adamant on becoming a more secular nation state that he outlawed the veil to seem more western/secular in style, yet this was a largely unpopular move, “when mother had learned that she was to lose her age-old modesty of her veil, she was beside herself” (Farmaian, 95). What is often not understood by western society is that women wear the veil voluntarily in most cases. While the dictation of what to wear in the public realm is something with which one can take issue, the very idea of outlawing that garment which has religious significance is equally as horrifying. Depending on the time period you are looking at in Iranian history the chador takes on differing meanings. For example, at the fall of the Shah “women who had felt humiliated

by the Shah's dress code put back on chadors and flaunted them in the streets, reveling in the freedom to wear what they wished" (Farmaian, 128).

Repression simply produces the need to express oneself, in these cases with or without the chador or veil. Julia Kristeva posits, "it is the necessity of a culture of revolt in a society that is alive and developing, not stagnating" (420). These revolts by women, who wish to make known their opinions has created and continues to create a developing society. In present-day Iran there is a bit more leniency with regard to the color of one's dress, but even mild restrictions placed on women creates a culture of revolt, "I realized the conceit of 'Houssein Party'. Each one held a flickering candle in her palm, and had tucked underneath scraps of paper bearing her phone number; a great deal of preening went on, and lucky fellow 'mourners' were slipped numbers as they passed" (Moaveni, 58). These women are working within the system, revolting by subverting the intended purpose of the gathering.

Fatema Mernissi argues that the veil does not hamper the pursuit of knowledge, and Leila Ahmed contends that the women who choose to unveil were "women pre-occupied with fashion, they were not motivated by a desire for liberty" (180). What became the real debate was not for the academic community to dispute the veil, but to "give women a true education and raise them soundly and rectify how people are raised and improve your moral character...then leave it to her to choose" (Ahmed, 180-181). The substantive issue then is not the veil itself, but allowing women to make their own choices concerning dress, and to not feel pressured to unveil simply because western society sees the veil as a sign of patriarchy. Many Islamic feminists currently choose to

veil due to religious convictions, not because men force them to veil, and the veil was the case as well at the birth of the discipline:

It was the symbol of how everything had gone horribly wrong. How in the early days of the revolution, secular women wore the veil as a protest symbol...and then had it imposed on them by the fundamentalist mullahs who hijacked the revolution. (Moaveni, 170)

The veil has turned into a symbolic piece for women, with which they can externally voice their opinion of how they choose to live their lives as Iranian women.

The clarity with which these memoirists delineate between internal and external lives within the Islamic Republic is of pivotal importance. The contention between inside and outside lives, whether covered by walls or veils, reveals the problem of restrictions placed on movement of women. The very nature of the memoir breaks this mold and uncovers what women really want from their homeland, which is to have choice and to be free to express themselves in whatever manner they deem so appropriate.

Conclusion

Hope and reality are often divergent notions; this was just such the case in the revolution of 1979 in Iran. The hope was that the promised Islamic society would make change for the better: “ ‘Everything will be different now. This Ayatollah is going to come back! Corruption will no longer exist, we will have compassion and justice, the poor and destitute will be taken care of – we will be a new people, a truly Islamic society!’ ” (Farmaian, 321). This idea of a new society in which the less fortunate would be taken care of is what the revolution was based upon, but as we now know these are the people whose hopes and dreams were so quickly crushed by the corruption of the new regime. The revolutionaries framed their governmental takeover as one filled with

Islamic tenets of faith, fairness and love but embraced Iran with hostility and crushing militant notions of gender disparity. What the common person wanted from the revolution was clear “before, their hopes had been frustrated, their aspirations denied, but this revolution was their liberation from a dull, shabby existence, a ticket to a new life in which anything might be possible” (Farmaian, 328). But what happened in post revolutionary Iran was far from the freedom that the revolution promised:

The ironic lesson of the Constitutional Revolution, later repeated in the 1979 Revolution, was that women’s political activism did not guarantee subsequent improvement in their social and legal rights. If anything... [it] entrenched female subordination and gender inferiority in the law. (Moghissi, 29)

Rather than accept the reality of their situation Iranian women are taking a stand through the form of the memoir, making it their own feminist space by explaining the realities of the situation for women in their homeland.

These writers use the space of the memoir to question the inhumane treatment of women in Iran:

Why am I shocked at each new violation? Is it because I actually believe what the constitution says about the rights of its citizens? That no citizen can be snatched from the street, locked up, denied legal representation, compelled to make confessions? Because that is exactly what my country’s constitution guarantees – freedom from arbitrary arrest and coercion. (Ghahramani, 38)

These accounts of their own experiences and violations of personal freedom further the cause of survival. As Milani points out, “storytelling [is] also a strategy for survival” (Veils and Words, 178); the survival of women’s stories gives credence to the movement for change in Iran. The hope of Iranians, both at home and abroad, is captured by Azadeh Moaveni in Lipstick Jihad “ deep in the heart of every Iranian expatriate lurks a hope for another revolution, one that would reverse the catastrophe of 1979 overnight, swiftly and

bloodlessly topple the mullahs, and return our country to us” (37). The hope is that with a new revolution some of the advances that the Shah’s era brought about would return and women would no longer have to write their stories in exile, but could return home to the country, religion and life that they so love:

For me...justice was the right of girls like myself to exercise their powers and abilities and talents without interference from the clergy...I wanted to be free to walk down the street with the wind in my hair. I wanted to go to the movies all by myself if I felt like it. I wanted to choose my occupation from as extensive a list as could the boys I knew. From the beginning, politics for me was personal but not exclusively so....My freedom to walk down the street with the wind in my hair wouldn’t have meant a thing unless all Persian girls could do the same. It’s not about creating privilege. How can liberty be a privilege? (Ghahramani, 76)

But what the regime has created is a culture of privilege for men and one of repression for women, and by expressing their disgust with regard to this repression in their stories in the form of a memoir these women gain control over their own destiny. They become part of the discussion rather than a background in their world. All they are asking is to be a part of society, and these memoirs are a step toward their inclusion.

What has been a consistent problem for women is the feeling of being excluded, from decision making for themselves, the state, and from society outside the home. A leading characteristic of these memoirs is the idea of overcoming the feeling of nonexistence/unimportance that the regime of current day Iran imbues for women, “‘But you aren’t here are you? No one is here.’ Then he laughs more freely because of the appalled expression on my face” (Ghahramani, 88). Ghahramani’s place at the moment of this revelation is in Evin prison, where in fact she is faceless in a world ruled by men. But this symbol of Evin, the outright statement of Zarah “not being there” rings true in the lives of so many voiceless Iranian women, who are now using the pages of memoir to

create a voice for themselves. In breaking with tradition women then “become writers and thinkers and take a stand against the reigning dogmas of the culture, including a male dominance” (Ahmed, 188). And in becoming these writers women are able to become a part of the story of their respective societies. Women are now prepared, as Fatema Mernissi puts it, to “take off” and that “women have decided to listen no longer to what the khutaba (sermons) they have not had a hand in writing...they have always known the future rests on the abolition of boundaries” (Mernissi, Islam and Democracy, 152), and this is their moment.

These memoirists are taking a stand for their country, their religion and their very lives by telling these stories. All three, Zarah Ghahramani, Azadeh Moveni and Sattareh Farman Farmaian, commit their lives to paper to make certain the lives of women are not forgotten in the pages of history. They write to show what once was their beloved “Iran has been disfigured, and we carried its scraps in our pockets” (Moaveni, 246). They write so people know what Iran has been and can be, and what its women have achieved and will continue to achieve through Islamic feminism on the page. They write to tell the world that they have not willingly abandoned their beloved homeland, but as the Iranian poet Sa’adi wrote “ ‘Although love of country is required by the Prophet,/ one should not live in misery/merely because one was born in a certain land’ ” (Farmaian, 145). Thus these women leave Iran so they can fulfill their dreams, and yet they are so connected to Iran that they continue to write their stories to keep the memory of their country alive and the thought of it as able to change in the hearts and minds of their readers. These memoirists become the duality they see in their own country; they are comprised of two worlds – the worlds of pre and post 1979 revolutionary Iran – and bring to light the

importance of women's voices in the fight against any repressive regime, in this case the repressive regime in what is known now as the Islamic Republic of Iran, or as these memoirists would lovingly call it, Persia.

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MORGAN D. RAUTZHAN**EDUCATION****Rutgers University – Camden, MA 2012**

English Literature

Bucknell University, BA, 2006

English Literature, Minor Anthropology

STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE**University of Sussex, 2011**

Studies in Modern Literature

Temple University Rome, 2005

Italian Cultural Studies

The American University in Europe, 2003

European Union Studies

WORK EXPERIENCE**Rutgers University – Camden NJ, September 2010- September 2011*****Research/ Editorial Assistant – Dr. Holly Blackford***

Worked with Dr. Blackford on a variety of projects, including research for various articles. Assisted with research and manuscript preparation for Dr. Holly Blackford's book *The Myth of Persephone in Girls' Fantasy Literature*, Routledge 2012.

Books to Borrow...Books to Buy - Lewisburg, PA/New York, May 2007-August 2010***Assistant/Anthology Editor***

Worked with nationally syndicated columnist to examine, collate, and organize 21-years of weekly columns to create an anthology of the respective work as well as editing editorials to fit individual sections of aforementioned anthology. Developed creative layout for materials to be included in the collection. Organized all travel arrangements, budgets, and other details for sales appointments, lecture series and other public events across the US to promote the column. Acted as liaison with newspaper editors, book publishers, and libraries across the country. Coordinator of **Children's Reading Initiative** to promote literacy in youth through organizing numerous book drives, read-aloud sessions, and donating children's books. Assisted in the column's companion website, **Greatest Books for Kids** (www.greatestbooksforkids.com) with content, layout, publicity and social networking to promote website.

Reed Business Information – Oak Brook, IL June 2006- April 2007***Account Representative – Construction Equipment Magazine***

Worked with publishers and editors to ensure the advertising and editorial ratio resulted in a cohesive, profitable monthly magazine. Increased advertising sales 10% with new accounts and maintained over 1,200 clients.

SKILLS

Computer Skills:

MSWord, MS Excel, MS PowerPoint, MS Project, MAC OS and Windows OS,
Photoshop, Internet Research

MEMBERSHIPS

Hudson Union Society – Member, August 2011 – Present

American Historical Association – Member, November 2010 – November 2011

Alpha Chi Omega – Member, September 2004 – Present