

Copyright Notice:

This paper is being made available on the web on the basis of trust and integrity. Feel free to quote with due credits. If you read and/or quote this text, please e-mail me at [gita \[at\] ping \[dot\] ca](mailto:gita[at]ping[dot]ca). Thank you.

BETWEEN PARALLEL MIRRORS

FOUCAULT, ATOUSSA AND ME, ON SEXUALITY OF HISTORY
AN ESSAY ON PAPER

and

OF SHIFTING SHADOWS
A NARRATIVE ON CD-ROM

BY

GITA HASHEMI

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES YORK UNIVERSITY,
CANADA, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MAGISTERIATE OF ARTS IN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

COPYRIGHT 1999, GITA HASHEMI

ABSTRACT

Between Parallel Mirrors is an interdisciplinary thesis that consists of two free-standing, yet interconnected, textual bodies:

Body One, *Foucault, Atoussa and Me, on Sexuality of History*, is a critical essay that looks at Michel Foucault's lesser-known writings on the 1979 Iranian Revolution from a feminist re-visionary political/historical/theoretical/narrative perspective. The essay problematizes Foucault's seemingly 'neutral' analysis of the power relations at work in the Revolution in an effort to foreground the category of gender, the sexual dynamics of power, and women's subjectivity as the space of active/productive resistance against male domination.

Body Two, *of shifting shadows*, is an interactive multimedia non-linear narrative programme delivered on CD-ROM. The narrative is a factual/virtual account of the Revolution, the history that gave rise to it, and the layered displacements that it caused, told by four personae who emerge as multiple to re-merge as one.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

OF SPACE AND TIME: INTRODUCTION	1
BODY ONE: Foucault, Atoussa and Me, On Sexuality of History	4
PART ONE: We “Other Readers”	5
PART TWO: A Conducive Hypothesis	9
Layer 1: Going to Iran, 1978	9
Layer 2: The Revolution, 1977-8	11
Layer 3: The Other Opposition, 1978	14
Layer 4: The Other Repression, 1978	15
Layer 5: The Introduction, 1998	16
Layer 6: The Other Confrontation, 1978-79	16
PART THREE: Scientia	19
Layer 7: Discourses and Silences, I	19
Layer 8: Discourses and Silences, II	19
Layer 9: The Persian Diary	21
Layer 10: The Present Absence	23
Layer 11: A Discourse Revisited	23
Layer 12: Ideas vs. Historical Experience	26
PART FOUR: The Deployment of Politics	29
Layer 13: The Orientalist and His Silences	29
Layer 14: The Post-Modern Prophet and the Martyred Muslim Ideologue	31
Layer 15: Fatemeh, Foucault’s Ideal Woman?	33
Layer 16: The Wall	34
Layer 17: The Vote and the Veil for the Male	34
Layer 18: The Echo	39
PART FIVE: Right of Life and Power Over Body	40
Layer 19: Iran, 1999	40
Layer 20: Rights and History	42
Layer 21: To Leave M. Foucault	44
Appendix: Translations	45
Bibliography	47

BODY TWO: of shifting shadows

Winner of 2001 Baddeck International New Media Festival and a highlight of SIGGRAPH 2001 Art Gallery.

Read more: <http://strictlypersonal.net/shifting>

In distribution through:

Vtape (Toronto, CA) <http://www.vtape.org>

Agence Topo (Montreal, CA) <http://www.AgenceTOPO.qc.ca/vitrine>

Dia Center for the Arts (NY) <http://www.diabooks.org/diabooks/item.jsp?itemID=5440>

OF SPACE AND TIME: INTRODUCTION

1.

Audre Lorde starts “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action” as follows:

I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. That speaking profits me, beyond any other effect. I am standing here [...] ¹

I am bracketing her voice with mine quite consciously.

Trinh T. Minh-ha introduces *Woman, Native, Other* with this:

This is the world in which I move uninvited, profane on a sacred land, neither me nor mine, but me nonetheless. The story began long ago... ²

Now I am standing here attempting to introduce a story that I have been weaving for three years. Conscious of the eye of the reader, unweaving, seeking ... disassembling the body of my text for truths its flesh must be made of, for veins running the length of its existence, for the heart of its matter...

... the heart of the matter is always somewhere else than where it is supposed to be. To allow it to emerge, people approach it indirectly by postponing until it matures, by letting it come when it is ready to come. There is no catching, no pushing, no directing, no breaking through, no need for a linear progression which gives the comforting illusion that one knows where one goes. Time and space... ³

And truth...

2.

Between Parallel Mirrors is an interdisciplinary thesis that embarks on an active exploration in the spaces of history populated by gendered (and raced) bodies, where the seeking-speaking-acting “I” bumps into other actors whose voices echo in the halls of recorded, remembered, relived and imagined time. Taking the 1979 Iranian Revolution - of world politico-historical significance, and the event that some consider to be the first of the post-modern revolutions - as the matter of gestation and the point of gesticulation, this thesis consists of two free-standing, yet interconnected, textual bodies:

Body One, *Foucault, Atoussa and Me, on Sexuality of History*, is a critical essay that looks at Michel Foucault’s lesser-known writings on the 1979 Iranian Revolution from a feminist political/historical/theoretical/narrative re-visionary perspective. Situating these writings in the context of his ‘middle-period’ theories of ‘power’ and ‘subjectivization’ - specifically as developed in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* - the

¹ Lorde, p. 203.

² Trinh, p. 1.

³ *Ibid.*

essay critiques his unproblematized use of notions such as ‘political spirituality’, ‘collective will’ and ‘radical shift in subjectivity’ in what he portrayed entirely as an exercise of power from below. The essay attempts to illustrate that his seemingly ‘neutral’ methods of analyzing power relations, coupled with his mistaken readings of the Iranian socio-political history, led to his failure in recognizing the glaringly gendered and deeply sexual aspects of the Revolution’s politics and particularly the religious leadership that ultimately dominated it. The essay juxtaposes a *performative* narrative approach with a more conventional critical style in order to question and destabilize the field of relations - the space of production - of *power* and *knowledge* - still dominated by androcentric hegemonic practices - as a step toward reinserting women’s *subjectivity* into political, theoretical and historical interpretations of the social *events* that so drastically affected women’s lived *experience* and their *rights* in Iran prior, during and after the 1979 Revolution. Here the *narrator* seeks to return the *gaze* that once rested upon her body without seeing it, the *gaze* of the quintessential *Other* of the “Muslim Woman”, the “European Man”: Claiming as heritage the history of indigenous woman-centered and feminist struggle against male domination over women’s corporeal and social bodies in Iran, the narrator finds her own *voice* as the courageously *subjective* voice of another woman, Atoussa H., once silenced, now penetrates through the walls of time and formal history to unveil Foucault the ‘man’ and the ‘orientalist’.

When the narrator of the essay finally decides to leave M. Foucault, she goes for a walk by the lake. On her way she hears the voice of a homeless woman, displaced and dispossessed, like the narrator herself when she first arrived here as a refugee. The voice and the silence surrounding it trigger the narrator’s memory, taking her to a virtual space-time in which she multiplies as shadows of herself:

Body Two, *of shifting shadows* is an interactive, multimedia, non-linear narrative programme delivered on CD-ROM. Told by four personae, BITA, MINA, GOLI, and AUTHOR, the narrative gives a factual/virtual account of the 1979 Revolution, the history that gave rise to it, and the layers of displacement that it brought to many lives. Framed by the inevitable windows through which they must be read, the four personae emerge as multiple and re-merge as one: They seek in the reader’s act of reading the consciousness that can connect their fragmented and mediated existence, the remediation that can embody their virtuality. Written text, voice narration, video, photographs and animation loops are combined to construct forty-eight poetic/narrative scenes that draw on personal memories and reflections and ‘journalistic accounts’ in reconstructing and re-interpreting ‘history’, ultimately to undermine the restrictive boundaries of Truth as ‘objective’ and Knowledge as ‘formal’ and ‘disciplinary’. The programming allows the reader to ‘navigate’ the narrative in linear and/or lateral paths as s/he chooses so that no two readings of the narrative follow exactly the same paths. This enhances the elements of *uncertainty* and *impermanence* in the act of reading, thus opening larger *gaps* which must be filled by the reader during the process. The narrative does not have a fixed closure as both the linear and the lateral paths loop permanently. The closure comes when the reader decides to leave.

To produce meaning, both bodies rely on the reader’s active attention to silences and articulations, absences and presences, virtualities and materialities of the text. As in any other interpretive and/or performative text, these dualities have a structural functionality here.

Together, the two bodies mark a stage in a practice that has taken as its aim to connect the spaces in which “I” exist... “I” traverse... Spaces which multiply the “I”, lines drawn, boundaries perpetually shifting. This practice is inevitably inter-

disciplinary, and therefore, what it produces is, as Barthes put it, “a new kind of object”: *A text*.⁴

Personal is poetic, poetic is political, political is personal. This is what I understand to be at the heart of these texts, where personal is the matter, poetic is the space and political the beat in time.

⁴ “Interdisciplinary work is not a peaceful operation: it begins effectively when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down... to the benefit of a new object and a new language, neither of which is in the domain of those branches of knowledge that one calmly sought to confront... There now arises a need for a new object, one attained by the displacement or overturning of previous categories. This object is the *Text*.” Barthes, p. 40.

BODY ONE:

FOUCAULT, ATOUSSA AND ME; ON SEXUALITY OF HISTORY

My room has a window opening to the west. Beyond it is a wall. Two mirrors hang on the south and north walls. Reflecting my desk. My computer. And me. In perpetuity. When I sit at my desk the eastern wall is behind me.

In the summer, when the southern window is open, I can often hear The Poet on King Street murmuring unintelligible verses punctuated by the occasional question addressed to the passers-by. Its vital insistence reverberates in the walls of time dividing the short distance from the street to the second-floor window. Spare change for food? Even in my sleep.

The window is closed now. It is cold. 26.11.1999. I am alone between parallel mirrors. And the walls that reflect each other. As do the towers of books and the rubbles of paper scattered around my room. Toronto stands waving behind the two Golden Arches and the Maple Leaf hanging from the flagpoles across the street at the entrance to the parking lot.

A photograph is pinned on the south wall between two windows: A woman standing beside herself, her bodies transparent to the tall dry weeds surrounding her. Her four eyes directly meet the caressing gaze.

PART ONE: WE “OTHER READERS”⁵

By now one might be too late to admit that reading Foucault’s first volume of *The History of Sexuality* puts one, as a feminist, in a challenging position. This is to mean that one finds herself in a position from which one can challenge Foucault on certain grounds according to one’s own feminism, rather than meaning that one’s feminism is challenged by Foucault. Reading as a feminist requires a critical assessment of the material presented from a clear political standpoint from which one must always fix one’s eyes on that pinnacle of feminist goals, liberation of women, while one repeats to oneself, like a mantra, that foundational ‘woman question’: In what way this or that theory, notion or approach, tactic or strategy can further *my* practical struggle for liberation? Of course one is justified to bring one’s politics into one’s reading of any book, let alone in reading Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* which not only in its choice of engagement with subjects of sexuality, power, life and death but also in its linguistic rhetoric and use of literary motifs is essentially a political treatise. From this position, which is theoretical precisely because it is political, one might challenge Foucault, as many have done, on at least four major grounds:

1- In the proposed study of sexuality as well as the analytics of power, Foucault’s clear choice to ignore the concept of ‘gender’ as a matrix of analysis is a dangerously deep fault a feminist cannot easily jump over. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, neither sexuality nor the power deploying it seem to be gendered even though, according to Foucault himself, the bodies and sexuality(ies) of women were among the prime targets of power’s disciplinary discourses, institutions and mechanisms. Concerned with the kind of analytics of power that can account for male domination as women’s lived experience, a feminist reader might justly be alarmed at Foucault’s “cautionary prescription” to his reader as he attempts to clarify his methods by setting down his rules. “Rules of continual variations”:

We must not look for who has the power in the order of sexuality (men, adults, parents, doctors) and who is deprived of it (women, adolescents, children, patients); nor for who has the right to know and who is forced to remain ignorant. We must seek rather the pattern of the modifications which the relationships of force imply by the very nature of their process.⁶

Assuming, as Foucault does, that one mustn’t look for who has the power and knowledge and who is deprived of it, a feminist reader is left with many orders of things unaccounted for. For example, many, including Foucault himself, have suggested that heterosexuality is an exercise of power - a form of subjectivization - normalized through hegemonic discourses. Foucault gives these discourses a class identity when he suggests that their aim was to maintain class privileges as the “deployment of sexuality” - in the service of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie - came to target the

⁵ The main headings in this essay mimic the headings in the English translation of *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*.

⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 99.

working classes in the eighteenth century.⁷ But, looking at the history as the basis of analysis and action, a feminist who is active, say, in the struggle against violence against women cannot afford, for obvious theoretical and practical reasons, to ignore the fact that in the order of sexuality which rules the sphere of heterosexual relationships, the violence is primarily perpetrated by men against women (and children) *regardless of their class identity*. Foucault's privileging of *class* and ignorance of *gender*, particularly in the fields of power and sexuality, may in fact surprise the feminist reader for it resembles earlier Marxist approaches to the 'woman question', even though, in his attempt to come up with a different model for the analysis of power, Foucault vociferously rejects Marxist frameworks and intentionally avoids the production-reproduction foundational duo, in both the sexual and economic realms.

As many feminists have pointed out, this apparently 'neutral' theoretical zone, in which the discussions of sexuality, power and resistance need not concern themselves with gender identification, is emblematic of politico-philosophical - and academic in general - discourses which have historically marginalized women and cleverly masked the facts about male domination not only in the economic, social, political and sexual realities of the everyday life but also in the very processes and productions of knowledges and the practices that govern this life.⁸ Foucault's philosophical choice to privilege ontological difference over sexual difference in a history of *sexuality* appears to be a repetition of the disciplinary discourses that have privileged the illusion of 'scientific objectivism', precisely the kind of discourses (and the conducts stemming from them) that Foucault's genealogical approach was designed to problematize and critique.

2- Now, a feminist reader concerned with sexual *and* racial dominations, and with the history of colonial and neo-colonial politics and warfare and their effect on women's lives all over the world, may even be more alarmed, continuing to read forth through *The History of Sexuality*, at coming upon another fault. Summarizing his rules for developing an analytics of power, Foucault ends his chapter on *methods* with this:

In short, it is a question of orienting ourselves to a conception of power which replaces the privilege of the law with the viewpoint of the objective, the privilege of prohibition with the viewpoint of tactical efficacy, the privilege of sovereignty with the analysis of a multiple and mobile field of force relations, wherein far-reaching, but never completely stable, effects of domination are produced. The strategical model, rather than the model based on law. And this, not out of a speculative choice or theoretical preference, but because *in fact it is one of the essential traits of Western societies that the force relationships which for a long time had found expression in war, in every form of warfare, gradually became*

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-2.

⁸ One can refer here, for example, to Dorothy Smith's study of academic and institutional sociology in *Everyday World as Problematic*. Interestingly similar to Foucault's genealogical studies to the extent that it investigates the institutions, the practices and the discourses as a methodological primary, Smith's feminist project finds in the *gendered* subject's experience of the everyday the site for production of knowledge.

*invested in the order of political power.*⁹

If the feminist reader is to take the words as *facts*, this “essential trait” denies the historical memory and contemporary experience of many a feminist and non-feminist subjects in the Third World and among the First Nations, Blacks, Jews and Gypsies, to name a few, in the Western world. It also negates the glorious history of modern Western armies and their wars in Europe as well as in Vietnam, Korea, Granada and Iraq, to name a few, as means of furthering imperialist *economic* and *political* aims. The global growth and domination of powers resorting to armies to win national and international *political warfare* - the more recent wars withstanding - surely invalidates Foucault’s postulation in a rather bloody manner. For, if we are to believe our eyes, bodies are lined up as witnesses to question the theory which, in spite of itself, aims to construct yet another universal claim rooted in the specificity of the White European male’s experience of the social/political/historical. This is an error which negates history, if we are to understand history as an inclusive tale, and which history negates. At this point, the feminist reader, aware of concepts of ‘gender’ and ‘race’ - not only as the basis of oppositional discourses but as fundamental constructs in the service of historical dominations - can claim that Foucault’s refusal to concern himself, in any serious manner, with matters of race and gender and colonialism and male domination as the integral ingredients of the Western history and discourses of power and sexuality is in fact a linguistic and conceptual cleansing which shall not produce the kind of analytics to use as the basis of a collective political project for resistance against *all* powers and *all* dominations. His disgendered and deracialized methods of inquiring history, in spite of their genuine insights in the everyday practices, ultimately produce a variation on already familiar themes. At best, they are useful in collective action only to the extent that they can suggest new areas of inquiry or add new layers to old ones. At worst, they derail a political programme by debasing identity as a real - albeit conflictual and problem-ridden - basis for the analysis of and potential resistance against dominations.

3- Foucault’s genealogical account of ‘sexuality’ and its deployment is grounded in a counter-humanist philosophy which challenges the utopian notion of the essentially ‘free’ subject - the subject of modernity - by providing an account of ‘subjugation’ as ‘subjectivization’ in practical socio-political terms: According to Foucault, the subject, in body or in her/his subjectivity, does not and can never exist in exteriority to or autonomous of the disciplinary relations of domination - the cursed power-knowledge ring - within which she is not only born but constituted - disciplined - as ‘subject’. This undermining of the phenomenological and conceptual primacy of the ‘subject’ may alert a feminist reader to another fault in Foucault’s politico-philosophical and utilitarian topography of power and its resistance: If we are thus constituted - as *objects* of dominating power’s communicative, normalizing and disciplinary processes of subjectivation/subjugation - then we are doomed right from the start in our various liberatory projects which, by this conception, are left entirely susceptible to domination and manipulation precisely because their very existence, by definition, is only meaningful as a *reactionary* force. Moreover, this is bad news for feminists: Just as women learned the rules and the terminology of the game and began to establish themselves as ‘human subjects’ - as ‘agents’ demanding ‘choice’ - humanity and all its

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 102. Emphasis is mine.

related concepts got kicked right off the playground. A feminist reader may in fact wonder about the power that is always one step ahead, about its discourses and its mechanisms.

4- Similarly, Foucault's refusal to find any use for a juridical concept of power - or power as exercised through politico-judicial discourse and practice - is a misled and misleading conceptualization - at least in so far as many practical political struggles in modern and post-modern times are concerned - for so much of the dominant and oppositional discourses and practices are grounded in philosophically foundational and politically fundamental, albeit practically contradictory, conceptions of *rights* of humans. For the feminist reader, as an example, precisely the fact that feminist struggle in modern times and especially in Western societies has succeeded to better women's lives, at least in some areas and some regions, by challenging the hegemonic androcentric powers on the basis of *equal rights* may stand as a repudiation of such limiting conceptual framework. Less than a stone-throw away, the lives and struggles of women in Afghanistan, Iran and many other countries around the world is quite telling of the tragic experiences that the elimination of a juridical dimension from any philosophical and political discourse of power and resistance brings to women's lives in all of our male-dominated societies. The hegemonic male domination over women's lives - call it patriarchy or else - spreads over all aspects of our interaction within the social, governed by several discourses including the discourse of law. The laws, formal and informal, define the spaces our bodies can traverse, our share of the economy, and our right to safety, well-being and personal choice. Foucault himself, perhaps as a consequence of the heavy criticism he came under after the publication of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* - or, some may claim, as a result of a certain event in his intellectual role-play as a political journalist - attempted to correct himself by addressing notions of ethics in his later work.¹⁰

Reading *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, this feminist reader - gendered, raced and classed - came to reflect upon the aforementioned matters from a point of view that is situated in a historically specific set of events; events that inflamed Foucault the man just as they inflamed an entire nation, including Atoussa and me. These events, in the totality of their processes, constitute what some call *The Islamic Revolution of Iran*, and others *The Iranian Revolution*, circa 1979:

¹⁰ Of course the problem of the ethics he concerned himself with is in its fundamental dependence on the *individual*, a concept that is, in its modernity, in clear contradiction to Foucault's anti-modern discourse. More about this can be said, but that would require a separate study.

PART TWO: A CONDUCTIVE HYPOTHESIS

LAYER 1: GOING TO IRAN, 1978

Jom'e -ye siah: Meydan-e Jhaleh. Tehran. Masses on the streets. Facing the soldiers. On the one side, the Shah, one of the cruelest "sovereigns" of the time. On the other side, the people. Lines of women in the front. Students shouting. Soldiers firing. Bodies falling. We learn. Soon, we throw molotof cocktails against sub-machine guns. Tires burning. Windows broken. Bodies in morgues. Many bodies. Iran, 1978.

When Foucault first arrived in Iran on September 16th, a military curfew was in effect. Many stores were closed. There was a general strike. Eight days after 'le vendredi noir'. Black Friday. Hundreds, by popular accounts thousands, of bodies carpeting the grounds of le Place du Jaleh.

Foucault arrived at Mehr-Abad International Airport accompanied by Thierry Voeltzel, a young man he had recently met and hired to coordinate a committee formed by Foucault to work on a series of 'on the scene investigations'.¹¹ He had been invited by an editor of the Italian daily, *Corriere della Sera*, to write a regular column for his paper. The situation in Iran was among the hottest stories of the day. Didier Eribon, Foucault's biographer, quotes a passage he had written, by way of introducing a reportage prepared by another member of the committee, to explain his notion of reporting:

The contemporary world is teeming with ideas that spring up, stir around, disappear or reappear, and shake up people and things, this is not something that happens only in intellectual circles or in the universities of Western Europe; it also happens on a world scale, and it happens particularly among minorities that, because of history, have not up to now been in the habit of speaking or making themselves heard... We have to be there at the *birth of ideas*, the bursting outward of their force: not in books expressing them, but in *events* manifesting this force, in *struggles* carried on around ideas, for or against them. Ideas do not rule the world. But it is because the world has ideas (and because it constantly produces them) that it is not passively ruled by those who are its leaders or those who would like *to teach it, once and for all, what it must think*. This is the direction we want these "journalistic reports" to take. An analysis of thought will be linked to an analysis of what is happening. Intellectuals will work together with journalists at the point where *ideas* and *events* intersect.¹²

Foucault carefully prepared for his trip to Iran: His Iranian contact in Paris, Ahmad Salamatian, provided him with news and updates as well as names and addresses of

¹¹ The biographical information on Foucault in this section is primarily taken from Eribon, pp. 281-95.

¹² Eribon, p. 282. Emphasis is mine.

people to contact when in Iran. Salamatian, a Muslim intellectual and activist, later became the minister of Foreign Affairs in the cabinet of Abolhassan Banisadr, the first president of the Islamic Republic and a member of the Council of the Islamic Revolution appointed by Ayatollah Khomeini during his stay in a Paris suburb in the months prior to the downfall of the Shah's regime.

Also in preparation for his trip, Foucault read the works of two prominent French orientalist, Corbin and Massignon, about Islam and the society in Iran.¹³ Upon arrival in Iran, Foucault met with and interviewed opposition figures such as Ayatollah Shariatmadari and Mehdi Bazargan, as well as a number of unnamed military officers and technocrats who opposed the Shah. Shariatmadari, like many other clerics, had originally subscribed to a moderate view promoting adherence to the principles of constitutional monarchy. But by now, in response to the brutal killings of demonstrators, particularly the massacre on Jhaleh Square, he was beginning to align himself with the radical Islamists who sought the overthrow of monarchy and, as they later articulated, the establishment of an Islamic government.¹⁴ Bazargan, a long-time leader of the National Front - a coalition of secular and religious factions - was to be appointed in a few months by the Council of the Islamic Revolution as the prime-minister of the Provisional Government that took over when the Shah's last appointed prime-minister, Bakhtiar - a former political ally of Bazargan - and his cabinet were forced to resign in February, 1979.

Foucault made two trips to Iran during the autumn of 1978. The second trip was in November. In October, he visited the headquarters of Ayatollah Khomeini in Neauphle-le-Château a few times. There he met and spoke with him and his circle of advisors, mostly, like Banisadr, university-educated Islamists and long-time residents of France or other European countries. Eribon reports:

[d]uring a visit to Neauphles with Ahmad Salamatian and Thierry Mignon, Foucault witnessed a minor incident. A mullah from Khomeini's entourage wanted to prevent a German journalist from entering the yard because she was not veiled. Salamatian protested: "Is that the image you want to give of your movement?" the Ayatollah's son and son-in-law intervened, reproaching the mullah for having been too zealous. The German journalist was allowed to enter. During their return trip in the car, *Foucault said how very impressed he had been, while in Iran, to see that wearing the veil was a political gesture: women who were not in the habit of wearing it insisted on putting it on to participate in demonstrations.*¹⁵

Foucault wrote two series of articles that were published in October and November in *Corriere della Sera* in Italian. He also published a condensed version of the first series in *Le Nouvel Observateur* under the title (What Do Iranians Dream of?). In addition to these, the corpus of Foucault's discourse on the Iranian Revolution includes a short response to a letter that an Iranian woman, Atoussa H., had written against his

¹³ Eribon only refers to Corbin, but Stauth mentions that Foucault had also studied Massignon's sociology of Iran (Stauth, p. 274).

¹⁴ Throughout this essay, the term Islamist is used to refer to those political activists who consider Islam as the basis of a political agenda rather than merely a personal faith.

¹⁵ Eribon, p. 286. Emphasis is mine.

views expressed in “A quoi rêvent les iraninens?”, both published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in October, 1979; an interview conducted in spring of 1979 by the French journalists, Claire Brière and Pierre Blanchet, that was published in their book, *Iran: la révolution au nom de Dieu*, an account of the Revolution they had witnessed as reporters; an open letter, published in *Le Monde* in April 1979, to Mehdi Bazargan, by then the Prime Minister of the Provisional Government; and, his last writing on the matter, published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in May 1979, which was a short article with the title “Inutile de se soulever?” (Is It Useless to Revolt?). With the exception of this last article and the interview with Brière and Blanchet, none of his writings on the Iranian Revolution have ever been fully translated and published in English.

LAYER 2: THE REVOLUTION, 1977-8

By mid-1970s, the social and economic failures of the Shah’s modernization projects coupled with the regime’s repressive policies had already prepared the stage for the revolution that was to come. Increased imports in the 1970s had strengthened Iran’s economic dependence on the Western countries. Most sections of the Iranian people had grown deeply dissatisfied with the way things were. The Shah’s promised “Great Civilization” had failed to materialize in spite of the huge oil income; and, for most people, economic difficulties were on the rise. Large masses of displaced peasants and small-farmers - that now occupied the slums on the edges of urban centres - were unemployed or could only find temporary employment as day-labourers. The bazaaries - the merchant class - found it increasingly harder to generate profit in the face of rising inflation rates. Many educated middle-class urbanites were deeply unhappy with the favoritism and corruption that governed the distribution of the oil income, and with their continually decreasing buying power.¹⁶

Politically, in spite of his extravagant displays of nationalism, the Shah’s rule had failed to gain popular legitimation after the 1953 Oil Nationalization Movement was suppressed by a CIA-devised coup d’état. This historical event was still fresh in the memories of many Iranians. The brutal suppression of the nationalist and particularly leftist forces after the coup had led to the belief among the younger generation of activists that the only path to liberation was armed struggle.¹⁷ Many leftist guerrilla groups were formed in the 1960s by activists who had left the National Front and the Tudeh Party - respectively the largest liberal and Marxist-Leninist political organizations and the main political forces motivating the Oil Nationalization Movement - for not having resisted the coup through more decisive action.¹⁸ By mid-1970s these groups,

¹⁶ M. Milani, pp. 93-100. And, Keddie, pp. 160-182.

¹⁷ “*Tanha rah-e rahayi / Jang-e mosalahane*” (*The only path to freedom / Armed struggle*) was a slogan that surfaced in the last weeks before the revolutionary take-over and was spread by masked leftist guerrillas roaming the streets inciting people. *of shifting shadows* includes two looped segments that document popular political slogans roughly organized in the chronological order of their appearance.

¹⁸ The Tudeh Party was particularly blamed because it did not mobilize its large body of cadres - many of whom army officers - for a counter-coup.

particularly the Fadaiyan Khalq and the Mojahedin Khalq, had intensified their anti-Shah campaign to such extent that the regime's censorship apparatus could no longer contain the spreading of their news and the increasing support and identification they gained particularly among the younger intellectuals and students.

However, the appearance of open opposition to the Shah is commonly observed as having been catalyzed by the political climate that was created as a result of the new American administration's human-rights policy enunciated by President Carter, who took office in January 1977. Carter's declarations implied that countries guilty of basic human-rights violations could be deprived of American military and financial aid. Although there were little deeds to back up the words, many opposition figures in Iran took advantage of the new American foreign policy to publicize open letters written in protest against the Shah's regime's gross violations of the human rights. Among these public protests were an open letter signed by three leaders of the revived National Front, Karim Sanjabi, Shahpour Bakhtiar and Daryush Foruhar.¹⁹ The letter criticized the Shah's economic policies and his disregard for human rights, demanded the release of political prisoners and freedom of the press, and called for free elections. In October 1977, a series of ten poetry reading nights in Tehran, organized by the Association of Writers, became a platform for spontaneous protests against the regime and demands for freedom of expression and association and release of political prisoners.

The air is shivering. There are more bodies than the building can confine. Bodies on the streets. Many young bodies. Students and intellectuals. Women and men. The reader's voice is lost, but the incitement is in the air. "Zendani-ye siasi azad bayad gardad!"²⁰ "Ey djalad nangat bad!"²¹ Mobs of men approach. Their hair-cuts show them to be agents. And the sticks they beat us with. "Etehad, Mobarezeh, Piroozy!"²² Bodies in flight, bodies in fight.²³

The Shah's visit to the United States in November, 1977, was met with massive and violent demonstrations organized by Iranian students studying in the US. Carter's return visit to Iran in December provoked similar reactions abroad and even more

¹⁹ Daryush Foruhar and his wife Parvaneh Foruhar were brutally murdered in their home in Iran in 1999. Their murder, one among a series of assassinations of intellectuals and activists that have come to be known as "Chain Murders", is popularly believed to have been commissioned by the more conservative elements among the Islamic Republic's ruling body. Shahpour Bakhtiar, who accepted the Shah's invitation to form a reconciliation government in the last days of his regime, was also murdered in his London home in 1990.

²⁰ "Political prisoner must be freed!" was among the first slogans expressing people's concrete demands from the regime.

²¹ This can roughly be translated as "Shame, shame, despot!" The literal meaning of the word *djalad* is executioner or torturer. The specific reference of the word was to the Shah.

²² "Unity, Struggle, Victory!" was a slogan popularized by the leftist guerrilla groups in the 1970s.

²³ This is based on the witness account of Iraj Rahmani, interviewed on July 3, 1999.

pronounced ones in Iran: The leftist guerrilla organization, Fadaiyan Khalq, planted a bomb in the Iran-American Society; and many students walked out of university classes and clashed with the heavily-armed police and army forces on the streets.²⁴

By September 1978, a sequence of events had led to popularization of the protests and to the emergence of certain Shi'i clerics and intellectuals in leadership positions. On January 9, 1978, theology students in the holy city of Qom staged a demonstration partly in response to the publication of an article in the daily newspaper, *Etela'at*. Believed to have been directly ordered by the Shah, the article insulted the exiled cleric, Ayatollah Khomeini - a vocal opposition to the Shah since the 1940s - calling him a foreign agent. The police confrontation with the demonstrators left many dead and many more injured. This event triggered a cycle of riots in other cities, each riot staged on the fortieth day after the previous one.²⁵ The escalation of street confrontations and the increasing number of the dead and injured fueled the riots and brought more people, particularly students, to the streets.

*MINA's account: Afzali gave me the flyer. University students walking out in protest against the killings. I was ready. I revolted against the Shah on February 25, 1978, at exactly ten minutes to 8 a.m. Time enough to call others who'd be willing to walk out with us. We became eight, four girls, four boys, barely seventeen. Abdi, Afzali, Ashraf, Boheyri, Jamshidi, Najafi, Rastgoo, Simayi.*²⁶

In May, Ayatollah Shariatmadari declared a national day of mourning which was supported by many secular as well as religious political forces and leaders. Student demonstrations and violent confrontations with the police led to the occupation of many major universities by the army and the shutting down of classes.²⁷ In June, a general strike was called by religious leaders to commemorate the anniversary of the 1963 religious riots which were staged in opposition to the Shah's White Revolution and led to the death of many protesters and the exile of Ayatollah Khomeini.²⁸ Secular forces supported the strike in the interest of maintaining the unity of the movement. In September, a few days before Foucault's arrival in Iran, the massacre of hundreds of peaceful demonstrators in Jhaleh Square marked the point of no-return in the escalation of popular sentiments against the Shah.²⁹ In October, Khomeini's arrival in Paris, upon his expulsion from Iraq, brought a new surge of attention to the leadership of the

²⁴ Keddie, pp. 233-34. And, Paidar, pp. 191-92. Two newspaper accounts of these events, including excerpts of Carter's speech in Iran, are documented in *of shifting shadows*.

²⁵ The forty-day interval is rooted in the Shi'i tradition of holding memorial service for the recently departed on the eve of the fortieth day after the death occurs. GOLI in *of shifting shadows* comments on these ritualistic riots as she recalls the Revolution.

²⁶ This account is in MINA's story in *of shifting shadows*.

²⁷ Some newspaper accounts of these events are documented in *of shifting shadows*.

²⁸ More to come later about the 1963 riots. The Shah's White Revolution was a programme which included, among other reforms, the land reform and the enfranchisement of women.

²⁹ Paidar, pp. 193-5; and Keddie, pp. 242-3.

religious opposition. The rise in anti-Shah political sentiments and the violent repressive tactics of the regime had left no room for negotiation, so that by now even the more moderate clerics such as Ayatollah Shariatmadari had begun to line up under Khomeini's flag. Even the seemingly secular leaders, including the National Front's Karim Sanjabi, were forming closer ties with Khomeini:

Nov. 4th, 1978

Violent demonstrations erupted in Tehran as troops fired on students trying to topple a statue of the Shah.

Nov. 5th, 1978

Severe riots broke out in Tehran as demonstrators ransacked and burned government buildings, banks, and stores. The British embassy was attacked and set on fire by the demonstrators, sustaining extensive damage.

...

Sharif-Emami and his civilian cabinet resigned and were replaced by a military government headed by Gen. Gholam Reza Azhari, the armed forces Chief of Staff. Martial law and censorship of the press was imposed by the military government.

Nov. 6th, 1978

In a joint statement issued in Paris, Ayatollah Khomeini and Dr. Sanjabi ruled out any cooperation with the regime and demanded a popular referendum on the monarchy. This was a reversal of a previously held position by Dr. Sanjabi, who had sought a genuine parliamentary process within the framework of a constitutional monarchy. Khomeini called for the formation of a new "Islamic Republic" based on "Islamic criteria".

...

The US. expressed strong support for the military government.³⁰

LAYER 3: THE OTHER OPPOSITION, 1978

PARIS, NOV. 6TH

Le Nouvel Observateur published a letter by Atoussa H., an Iranian woman living in Paris. In the letter, Atoussa H. criticized Michel Foucault's opinions expressed in an article with the title "A quoi rêvent les iraniens?" (What Do Iranians Dream of?) which was published in the October 16th issue of the paper. She wrote:

³⁰ Nikazmerad, pp. 337-8.

Vivant à Paris, je suis profondément bouleversée par les commentaires paisibles que la gauche française réserve souvent à l'éventualité d'un «gouvernement islamique» succédant à la tyrannie sanglante du chah. Michel Foucault, par exemple, semble ému (no 727, du 16 octobre) par la «spiritualité musulmane» qui remplacerait avantageusement, selon lui, la féroce dictature affairiste aujourd'hui chancelante. Après vingt-cinq ans de silence et d'oppression, le peuple iranien ne pourrait-il donc choisir qu'entre la Savak et le fanatisme religieux? Pour avoir une idée de ce que signifierait la spiritualité du Coran appliquée à la lettre par l'ordre moral de l'ayatollah Khomeini, il n'est pas mauvais de relire les textes. [...] Sourate 2: «*Vos épouses sont pour vous un champ, venez donc à votre champ comme vous l'entendez.*» En clair: l'homme est le seigneur, la femme esclave, on peut en user selon son caprice, elle n'a rien à dire. Qu'elle porte le voile, né de la jalousie du Prophète envers Aïcha! Il ne s'agit pas de parabole spirituelle mais bien d'un choix de société. Les femmes dévoilées sont souvent insultées en ce moment et les jeunes musulmans eux-mêmes ne cachent pas que, dans le régime qu'ils veulent, les femmes n'auront qu'à bien se tenir. Il est écrit aussi que les minorités ont droit à la liberté, à condition de ne pas porter tort à la majorité. A partir de quand les minorités commencent-elles à «porter tort»?

Spiritualité? Retour aux sources populaires? L'Arabie saoudite s'abreuve, elle à la source de l'islam. Les mains et les têtes tombent, pour les voleurs et les amants. [...] On dirait que pour la gauche occidentale, en mal d'humanisme, l'islam est souhaitable... chez les autres. Beaucoup d'Iraniens sont, comme moi, désemparés et désespérés à l'idée d'un gouvernement «islamique». Ils savent de quoi il s'agit. Partout autour de l'Iran, l'islam sert de paravent à l'oppression féodale ou pseudo-révolutionnaire. Souvent aussi, comme en Tunisie, au Pakistan, en Indonésie et chez nous, l'islam - hélas! - est le seul moyen d'expression des peuples muselés. La gauche libérale d'Occident devrait savoir quelle chape de plomb peut devenir, sur des sociétés avides de bouger, la loi islamique et ne pas se laisser séduire par un remède peut-être pire que la mal.³¹

LAYER 4: THE OTHER REPRESSION, 1978

PARIS, NOV. 13TH

Le Nouvel Observateur published Michel Foucault's response to Atoussa H.:

Mme Atoussa H. n'a pas lu l'article qu'elle critique. C'est son droit. Mais il ne fallait pas me prêter l'idée que la "spiritualité musulmane remplacerait avantageusement la dictature". Puisqu'on a manifesté et qu'on s'est fait tuer en Iran au cri de "gouvernement islamique", c'était un devoir élémentaire de se demander quel contenu était donné à ce terme et quelle force l'animait. J'ai indiqué, d'ailleurs, plusieurs éléments qui me paraissaient peu rassurants. Il n'y aurait eu, dans la lettre de Mme H., qu'une erreur de lecture, je n'y aurais pas répondu. Mais elle contient deux choses intolérables: 1. Confondre tous les aspects, toutes les formes, toutes les virtualités de l'islam dans un même mépris pour les rejeter en bloc sous le reproche millénaire de "fanatisme". 2.

³¹ Atoussa H., "Une iranienne écrit." The choice to quote the letter in full and in its original French, is informed by the desire to resurrect and preserve the original voice that was once silenced. Please note the Appendix for the English translation.

Soupçonner tout Occidental de ne s'intéresser à l'islam que par mépris pour les musulmans (que dire d'un Occidental qui mépriseraient l'islam?). Le problème de l'islam comme force politique est un problème essentiel pour notre époque et pour les années qui vont venir. La première condition pour l'aborder avec tant soit peu d'intelligence, c'est de ne pas commencer par y mettre de la haine.³²

LAYER 5: THE INTRODUCTION, 1998

TORONTO

As I sit in my room reading between parallel walls, Atoussa's voice, expressing her anger and dismay, forces me to turn to confront my own. Looking in the mirror, I see a familiar face. Alas, it's not one face but a thousand faces. And a thousand voices rise. Thousands upon thousands of voices. And the silence? History and its writers deaf to our voices. In what language must we have dared to express our desire, our irrevocable right, to live free? In what language haven't we been called stupid for daring to say what we think? In what language haven't we been dared for acting for ourselves? In all languages they veiled us: Body and Thought. Public and Private.

LAYER 6: THE OTHER CONFRONTATION, 1978-79

Although the Revolution pulled women to the political scene in unprecedented numbers, this presence was generally marked by a lack of focus on gender-specific demands. Women had for years participated in many areas of the anti-regime struggle, including the armed guerrilla movements and the radical student organizations; but the leadership, as is common also in the West, was dominated primarily by men. Since women's independent organizations had been undermined by or subsumed under the official Iranian Women's Organization - led by the Shah's twin sister, Ashraf, many women who strongly opposed the Shah were reluctant to identify with explicitly feminist causes. During the revolutionary period of 1978-79, many educated, secular and politically conscious women participated in the anti-Shah demonstrations with the assumption that upon victory the Revolution would give them their rights.

But the aggressive Islamic ideological propaganda identified women's liberation - which the Islamists primarily interpreted as the "freedom to wear revealing clothes and make-up" - with Western cultural colonization of Iran. As early as 1975, there were reports of attacks by Muslim zealots on unveiled women on the streets particularly in the provinces.³³ Even before the escalation of public demonstrations, Muslim students had on occasions demonstrated in the universities to demand sexually segregated

³² Foucault, "Reponse de Michel Foucault a une lectrice iranienne." Please note the Appendix for the English translation.

³³ In Summer 1976, during a family visit to Istahbanat, a small town near Shiraz, I and my sisters, wearing jeans and loose shirts, were attacked on the street by a group of young students who threw stones at us, insulting us for being unveiled in public. *of shifting shadows* documents a newspaper report about a similar incidents.

classrooms. As the Islamic tone of the Revolution intensified, so did the pressures and threats on unveiled and secular women; and many women found themselves forced to wear the veil in order to participate in the anti-Shah demonstrations.³⁴

However, or therefore, the first serious challenge to the post-revolutionary state was launched by women on the heels of Khomeini's first offensive on women's rights less than a month after the ascendance of the Islamic government to power. Khomeini demanded on March 7th, 1979, that the Provisional Government fulfill its revolutionary responsibility by banning unveiled women from working in or entering government buildings.³⁵ In the same week, he had also called for the abolition of the Family Protection Act and the dismissal of women judges by the Ministry of Justice.³⁶ The next morning, March 8th, unveiled female government employees were prevented from entering their workplace and instructed to wear a *hijab*. Many women refused to go to work. Many joined forces and staged demonstrations in front of government buildings. On the same day, a feminist-organized celebration of International Women's Day turned into a spontaneous protest movement.³⁷ For days thousands of women took to the streets again, this time against the reinstatement of the veil, the abolition of the Family Protection Act and many other Islamic assaults on women's corporeal and social bodies. In the intensity of emotions and the controversies that they gave rise to, these events paralleled the anti-Shah demonstrations. Women demonstrators chanted slogans such as "*Dar bahar-e azadi, Jay-e haq-e zan khali!*"³⁸

While organized mobs of men attacked the protesting women on the streets of Tehran, Shiraz, Bandar Abbas, Tabriz and other cities, the male-dominated political opposition in Iran, mostly on the left, abandoned women in their fight for their rights. Arguing that gender equality could only be defined as a by-product of socialist and/or democratic systems, and that focusing on women's rights at that moment was secondary and even harmful to the class struggle and to the 'larger' struggle for independence and democracy, the male leadership of many leftist organizations issued orders to their women cadres to not support and participate in the demonstrations.³⁹

³⁴ Keddie, pp. 247-8 and Paidar, pp. 209-11.

³⁵ Some animation loops in GOLI's section in *of shifting shadows* show Khomeini's handwriting and stamp as well as sections of various Islamic texts about the hijab.

³⁶ Paidar, p. 234. The Family Protection Act

³⁷ This celebration of IWD was the first of its kind since the 1953 coup and ensuing repression. Prior to 1953, the Tudeh Party, Iran's largest Marxist-Leninist party, was the primary organizer of IWD celebrations. The 1978 celebration was organized by a coalition of Marxist-Leninist women's groups most of whom were also affiliated with leftist political organizations. Note Moghissi, pp. 139-143 for a breakdown of women's groups involved in the 1979 celebration.

³⁸ "In the dawn of freedom, women's rights are missing!"

³⁹ Note Paidar, pp. 234-6; Moghissi, pp. 139-158; Sanasarian, pp. 124-7. All of these accounts also include analysis of the ideological justification put forth by the two main popular opposition organizations, Fadaiyan Khalq and Mojahedin Khalq, for their lack of support for women's spontaneous uprising. Moghissi also discusses the Tudeh Party's stance on the issue.

Prime Minister Bazargan, a leader of the National Front, responded by issuing a statement in which he said that although he did not agree with compulsory veiling, the women in his own family and those of his cabinet ministers' had always been veiled in accordance with their Islamic faith.⁴⁰ It was also Bazargan who signed the policy letter which indicated that women judges be transferred to other administrative positions in the Ministry of Justice.

BITA's account: *In the room behind me stood a woman, surrounded by many men. Her head was bare and her clothes manly. All the men wore long cloaks and beard and when they talked I could see gold flashing in their mouths. The woman rose her head and looked at me. Her face was broken. She opened her mouth. No tongue. The men were talking. I heard a barking. In unison the men turned away from the woman. I knew God was guarding us. I reached out and touched her hand. It was real. Then the black curtain fell.*

The Islamist forces' response to women's uprising was violent: Mobs of religious vigilantes - *hezbollahis* - attacked women on the streets and in their gathering places.⁴¹ Women demonstrators were subjected to physical and verbal assaults. Many were beaten and stabbed.⁴² They were called "whores", "American agents", "anti-revolutionaries", and threatened by the mobs shouting "*Ya roosary, Ya toosary!*"⁴³ The Iranian National Television did not report these demonstrations at all, although they received wide coverage in the Western press.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Paidar, p. 238.

⁴¹ *Hezbollah* means Party of God.

⁴² Kate Millett's *Going to Iran* gives an account of the street confrontations and events surrounding March 8, 1979. Millett was invited by the organizers to speak in the IWD celebration in Tehran. She and her Canadian colleague, Sophie Keir, were deported from Iran on March 16th.

⁴³ "Either a head wrap or a head rap!" or "Either a head scarf or a head scar!"

⁴⁴ Sanasarian, p. 125.

PART THREE: SCIENTIA

LAYER 7: DISCOURSES AND SILENCES, I

As I sit writing in this room of my own I hear the printing presses. Newswire coming in: More demonstrations in Iran. Everybody rushing to finish the task which is tomorrow's newspaper. There, there. There is the editor: Sitting at his desk, chopping chunks of Atoussa's letter, probably thinking them unimportant, perhaps irrelevant, definitely requiring too much space. Subjective, he (for it is quite likely that the editor is a man) must be thinking. Perhaps she has made stronger accusations, but I'll never know because the letter was not published in full. And here, in this room, I cannot but ponder the power that vested the writer and the editor with the authority to cut her voice, to silence it, to decide what part of what she said could be heard and countered and what not. But this was the kind of theatre that was the Revolution. Men talking. Behind closed doors, in print, on the air waves. Such irony; that a similar silence, segmentation and judgment should befall the Philosopher's voice.

LAYER 8: DISCOURSES AND SILENCES, II

Scholars of Foucauldian thought often comment on the significant shift in conception and tone between his first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, published in 1976, and the later two volumes which were published in 1984. It is said, and is fairly clear, and even acknowledged by Foucault himself in the introduction to the second volume, that his project was completely reconceptualized after the publication of the first volume. Foucault's articles about the Iranian Revolution were produced during the years separating these publications and immediately after he gave his famous lectures on power and governmentality. But, for the most part, they have been covered in veil upon veil of embarrassment, indifference or silence - at least in the literature in English - by the majority of those who should be interested in them either from the perspective of understanding the aforementioned shift in his project on sexuality and his conception of power and resistance or from the perspective of studying the Western understanding and political climate that surrounded the Iranian Revolution. Interestingly, while a great number of his interviews and writings of less political significance have been translated and published in English, of this body of writings about Iran, only one interview and the last article he wrote on the matter have appeared in English.⁴⁵ Foucault's discourse on the Revolution has been labeled either as journalistic in nature or misguided - erroneous judgment and conduct not befitting his incisive intellectual mind - and thus considered as insignificant, or even irrelevant, in understanding his work.

In the available biographies, the events of this period in Foucault's life have been

⁴⁵ Respectively, these are: "Spirit of a World Without Spirit" and "Is It Useless to Revolt?".

treated with - an alert reader may sense - a curious dramatic tone and a more curious embarrassment - intended to incite the good reader's 'forgiveness'. Eribon explains Foucault's Iranian excursion as a reaction to the controversial, even hostile, reception of *Le volonté de savoir*, the first volume of *Histoire de la sexualité*: Foucault needed to get away from Paris and the opportunity presented itself when he was invited to write a regular column for an Italian daily.⁴⁶ Miller recounts the episode preceded by a passage in which he explains Foucault's personal preoccupation with death and his desire for extraordinary pleasures. Foucault came under heavy attack from many sides and among many circles for having applauded the revolution of *mollahs* and *fanatics*. His positive interpretation of the Shi'ite Islam, his utopian concept of "political spirituality", and his uncritical view of "the revolution of bare hands", gave rise to heated and often hostile political debate.⁴⁷ This, according to his biographers, added to his frustration and despondency, but not for long, for he began an "immense new undertaking": The critical interpretation of early Christian literature, a work which was to directly feed the forthcoming volumes of *The History of Sexuality*.⁴⁸

This dismissive treatment has been explained, partially at least, in light of the events that followed the Revolution and the oppressive nature and brutal policies of the Islamic government which came to power in Iran upon the downfall of the Shah's regime in 1979. However, Foucault's articles about Iran constitute the most significant political intervention of his career as a prominent intellectual/philosopher/historian.⁴⁹ It is unimaginable that an intellectual of Foucault's caliber would have engaged so passionately in a political campaign - one that affected the lives (and bodies) of millions of people - only because he was bored or disappointed in his life in Paris. In fact, Foucault was strongly committed to being critically and politically engaged outside the boundaries of his academic intellectual practice. Moreover, Foucault himself remained unrepentant for his views on the Revolution - even after the Islamic government showed its face. In his last article on the matter, he insisted that his analysis of the Revolution was rooted in *his ethics* and *his work*:

My ethics...is "anti-strategic": to be respectful when something singular arises, to be intransigent when power offends against the universal. A simple choice, but a difficult work. It is always necessary to watch out for something, a little beneath history, that breaks with it, that agitates it; it is necessary to look a little behind politics, for that which ought to limit it, unconditionally. After all, it is my work. I am neither the first one nor the only one to be doing it. But I have chosen to do

⁴⁶ Eribon, p. 285.

⁴⁷ Leezenberg cites a number of newspaper reports and states that the hostility went beyond political debate: "in early April 1979, Foucault was even assaulted in the street, according to some observers because of his Iranian writings." This incident does not appear in his biographies. Note Leezenberg, p. 75.

⁴⁸ Note, for example, Eribon, p. 291.

⁴⁹ As Craig Keating points out "Foucault wrote more about the Iranian Revolution than about any other single contemporary political event, including the events of May '68." Note Keating, p. 181. Foucault's other major political involvement was his work on behalf of prisoners and toward abolishing prisons in France.

it.⁵⁰

LAYER 9: THE PERSIAN DIARY

Right from the start, Foucault chose to set a dramatic tone in his “Persian Diary”, his reportage from Iran:⁵¹ Foucault’s first four articles, published in Italian in *Corriere della Sera*, and the comprehensive summary published in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, clearly identified the parameters of his analysis of the confrontation of the forces that shaped the Revolution: Written after his first trip to Iran, these follow a clear thematic line - quite apparent even from their titles - which explain his perception of the power struggle unfolding in the country, and resemble his previous theoretical concerns with resistance and “the will to not be governed”:

The first article - “L’armée, quand la terre tremble” - names the power and its confronting force: The government and the army of the Shah and, facing them, Islam: “dix ans déjà”: All set against the backdrop of the great deserts of northeastern Iran and the ruins of Tabas earthquake. He proceeds, through a cursory analysis of the institutional body of the army, the prevailing influence of American military consultants, and the army’s dominant anti-Marxist ideology, to point out its uselessness and fundamental incapacitation in repressing the uprising as the physical body of the army, the soldiers and officers, come to join the opposition through the realization that

they had nothing to do with international communism, but everything to do with the man in the street, the merchants of the Bazaar, the employed and the unemployed, as if they were their brothers or as they would have been themselves if they had not become soldiers.⁵²

He further notes that the army is “not a key” but a “lock”, and “of the two keys which pretend to open it, the one that seems to be the matching one at this moment, is not the American key of the Shah. It is the Islamic key of the popular movement.”⁵³ And the dead of Tabas and those of the Jhaleh Square rise as witnesses:

The earth that trembles and destroys things can certainly unite the people, but divides the politicians and perceives the adversaries as irreconcilable. The regime thinks that it can circumvent the fatality of nature and make a detour around the great fury of the masses which the massacres of Black Friday have stupefied but not disarmed. It will not succeed. The dead of Tabas are coming to line up with the victims of the Jaleh Square: they intercede with those.⁵⁴

The second article - “Le chah a cent ans de retard” - is a passionate critique of

⁵⁰ Foucault, “Is It Useless to Revolt?”, p. 9. Emphasis is mine.

⁵¹ Foucault’s articles in *Corriere della Sera* appeared under the running title of “Persian Diary.”

⁵² Foucault, “L’armee...” The quotation is translated from Italian by Stauth, p. 264.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

modernization, Pahlavi style of it: He rejects the idea that modernization in Iran has been about progress. In fact, he considers the Shah and his administration to be “a century too late” in their perception of and schemes for progress which Foucault formulates, through the words of an anonymous Iranian political analyst, as “modernization-despotism-corruption”. Here, Foucault gives another cursory history, that of the Pahlavi dynasty as the initiator of such modernization which “sticks to its skin [Pahlavi dynasty’s] like an adhesive”: He mentions Reza Khan’s rise from a low-ranking officer of the Persian Cossack corps to the status of the “sovereign”. And he attacks Reza Shah, the Shah’s father, for imitating the Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal’s nationalist programmes which Foucault calls a “European-style attempt ‘to modernize’ Islamic countries”.⁵⁵ He concludes with an emphatic rejection of such modernization as a programme of secularization and industrialization:

So I ask of you to not speak any more in Europe about the times and difficulties of a sovereign too modern in a country too ancient. What is ancient in Iran is the Shah. Fifty years, even a hundred years behind. He is of the age of predator sovereigns, he carries the old dream of opening up his country through secularization and industrialization. The archaism of today is his ‘modernization’ project, his system of corruption. Archaism is the “regime.”⁵⁶

The third article - “Téhéran: la foi contre le chah”⁵⁷ - and the summary published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* - “A quoi rêvent les iraniens?” - explore the mass demonstrations, their organizational logic and the role of Shi’ite Islam as the ideology of popular mobilization and resistance.⁵⁸ Here he repeatedly refers to the street confrontations and the popularity of religious symbols - functioning as the expressive vocabulary of the movement - and ponders aloud the meaning that permeates the madness of confronting firing guns with bare chests.⁵⁹ Here he also bares his view of Shi’ite Islam: Believing that people were risking death and getting killed for the sake of an “Islamic government”, he attempts to project what an “Islamic government” might look like: Foucault states that the Shi’ite religion gives this “*will for an Islamic government*” a “particular colouration”:

Absence of a hierarchy among the clergy, the independence of the religious order (including economic) backed by those who believe and listen to them, the

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* Translation is mine with help from Sherie Ahmadi.

⁵⁷ Foucault’s original title for this article was “Iran. Dans l’attente de l’Imam”.

⁵⁸ The fourth article, “Taccuino persiano: Ritorno al profeta?”, published in *Corriere* on October 22 (Stauth) does not appear in *Dits et écrits*.

⁵⁹ Foucault’s own words are “bare hands”. The replacing of body parts here is intended as a direct reference to a ritualistic act occasionally visible during the confrontations: There were men, some of them very young, who, being in the front row of the demonstrators, would tear up their shirt to bare their chest. This act was symbolic of their readiness to be killed, ‘martyred’, rather than surrender to force. They sometimes even approached the heavily-armed soldiers, either to provoke them, or to incite them, their ‘brothers’, to join the ‘people’. This reference should be clear to all Iranian readers as the ritual and the phrase that signifies it predate the Revolution.

importance of a purely spiritual authority, the role of a faith that echoes and guides the clergy to sustain this influence - this for organization... 60

LAYER 10: THE PRESENT ABSENCE

Atoussa's voice echoes in this small room caught in the tangle of the east-west and north-south axes: Partout autour de l'Iran, l'islam sert de paravent à l'oppression féodale ou pseudo-révolutionnaire. Souvent aussi, comme en Tunisie, au Pakistan, en Indonésie et chez nous, l'islam - hélas! - est le seul moyen d'expression des peuples muselés. La gauche libérale d'Occident devrait savoir quelle chape de plomb peut devenir, sur des sociétés avides de bouger, la loi islamique et ne pas se laisser séduire par un remède peut-être pire que la mal. Return to spirituality?

LAYER 11: A DISCOURSE REVISITED

A few scholars have situated Foucault's writings on the Iranian Revolution in the continuum of his theoretical interventions - particularly in relation to the notions of power which he had developed prior to 1978 - and critiqued them in that context:

Craig Keating calls Foucault's ignorance of the Iranian history "shameful" but not "purposeful" and adds:

He had never before the Revolution, shown an interest in Iranian history. Rather, Foucault became interested in Iran only because the Revolution appeared to exemplify a mode of resistance that had resonances throughout his work but which he had been developing as the necessary corollary of the conception of power that he had developed in the 1970s, a power which sought to invest the body and its forces and in so doing constituted rather than repressed individuals.⁶¹

Thus, he argues, these articles must be understood in the context of his theoretical project on power and resistance precisely because the Iranian Revolution highlighted many issues about popular resistance and exercise of power from below. Keating asserts that what Foucault was most fascinated with was the "collective will" of the people and the revolution as a "political event", and adds that although Foucault did not perceive "the mollahs" as a revolutionary force, he saw Khomeini as "the focal point of a collective will".⁶² In Keating's view, Foucault's analysis of this phenomenon results from his view that the Iranians were, suddenly and unpremeditatedly, possessed by a "revolutionary force", a view Keating calls "a vitalist theory of resistance".⁶³ Drawing upon *Discipline and Punish*, he explains that in Foucault's conception what

⁶⁰ Foucault, "A quoi ..." Translation is mine.

⁶¹ Keating, p. 188.

⁶² Foucault, "The mythical leader of ..." quoted in Keating, p. 183.

⁶³ Keating, p. 194.

power 'takes aim at' is not the corporeal body, the material aspect, but that "which motivates the body - the force within it, its power, its energy."⁶⁴ Thus, bodies become sites of resistance. And resistances, as conceived in *The History of Sexuality*, are the "irreducible opposite" of the power - that seeks to discipline, to stop "mobility" and "movement" - as they incite "certain points of the body, certain moments of life, certain types of behaviour".⁶⁵ In this Keating sees a particular conception of life as an "inherently mobile, unstable and unregulated force" which is at once the target of power and the source of resistance to it.⁶⁶ In Foucault's writing on the Iranian Revolution, Keating believes, this conception was voiced repeatedly in his appeal to an "irreducible element" - that which transcended the danger present during the street confrontations with the army.

Similar to Keating, George Stauth argues that Foucault's political theory, and its particular application in the context of the Iranian Revolution, should not be isolated from his ever-present concern with "immediate struggle":

In Iran he studied the motives and tools at hand at a moment of people's practical political struggle, but his philosophical ideas remained involved, and his political theory enhances the analysis of such a struggle with his attempt to understand why struggle is sometimes preferable to submission.⁶⁷

Commenting that Foucault's "politics" were misunderstood by his "Parisian colleagues" who criticized him for his views on the Revolution, Stauth believes that three theoretical issues form the undercurrent of his interpretations: First is the question of *physis* and organization, or the bi-polarity of the structures of governance which Foucault had developed in *Discipline and Punish*. The second issue, more specific to the Iranian Revolution, is the "religious spirituality as a technique of power construction from below", or the mutiny of "subjugated and local knowledges" against dominant truth-regimes. Third is the issue of "relative neutrality of power techniques", again, originated in *Discipline and Punish*.⁶⁸ The first theoretical issue shows itself, Stauth believes, in Foucault's utter preoccupation with the "institutional power of the regime" and the "organizational logic of the popular movement".⁶⁹ The second concern appears in Foucault's perception of the phenomenon of 'spirituality' (Stauth calls it the "special Oriental issue") which becomes a mode of "subjectivation of power which has no genealogy and thus escapes the Western framework of forming motivations through new networks of power".⁷⁰ Finally, the concept of "relative neutrality" becomes apparent as Stauth connects it to the "relative meaninglessness of rituals and

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 190. Foucault's word for this motivating force/power/energy is *soul*.

⁶⁵ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, quoted by Keating, p. 190.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁶⁷ Stauth, p. 259.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

mediation” to assert that, unlike how Foucault perceived it, the religious expressions and symbolism of the Revolution had no historical meaning: they were “ceremonial rather than meaningful”.⁷¹

Michiel Leezenberg views these articles as “exercises in contemporary history” and an “interesting complement to his other forays into cultural history” even though the latter exclusively deal with the European events and institutional history.⁷² In his view these articles are fundamentally connected to Foucault’s broader concerns on three grounds: 1) Foucault views both philosophy and journalism as investigating “the nature of the present moment”, i.e. present as a *philosophical event*. For Foucault, revolution completes, and continues, the process of *Aufklärung*: “A journalistic inquiry into a revolutionary event, especially one which so centrally involves the public and political use of religion as the uprising in Iran, thus implies a philosophical commentary on modernity itself.” 2) Because revolt can be seen as radical resistance against domination, Foucault viewed the Iranian Revolution as an illustration of his “criticism of a juridical view of power with its domination- and state-oriented perspective”, a criticism which Leezenberg finds formulated in the first volume of *Histoire de la sexualité*. 3) Foucault’s writings on Iran can be read as a “tentative application of his more theoretical ideas to a contemporary event in a non-Western society”.⁷³ Crediting Foucault for having perceived, early on, the historical significance of the Iranian Revolution as it brought forth Islam as a political force, Leezenberg nevertheless critiques Foucault’s concept of “political spirituality” as being driven less from the events on the streets and more from what he had read in preparation, namely, Ali Shariati’s writings on Shi’ism as well as Corbin’s history and interpretation of Islam in Iran.⁷⁴ He asserts that only by ignoring historical variations can Foucault have come to see in Iran a unified spirituality shared at once by the entire population regardless of their sectarian and social orientation.⁷⁵ Leezenberg finally turns his attention to issues of power, as some of the theoretical underpinnings in Foucault’s Iranian articles, to find a contradiction between his earlier views on the popular demonstrations as manifesting a non-judicial process of power construction and his appeal to “universal rights” and “rule of law” as a “kind of moral rock bottom” in the open letter he wrote to Mehdi Bazargan in which he addressed the post-revolutionary violence.⁷⁶

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

⁷² Leezenberg, pp. 72-89.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 82-3. Among Muslim students and intellectuals, Ali Shariati was probably the most popular and influential contemporary ideologue of Shi’ite revivalism in Iran. Foucault pays homage to him in one of his articles. More to come on Ali Shariati and his possible influence on Foucault.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

LAYER 12: IDEAS VS. HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE

Foucault was there at a moment of birthing, but not that of an *idea*. It was the rebirth of a political power conceived through ideas which were very old. Bypassing the entire history of pre-modern and modern politics in Iran, Foucault's return to the "Prophet" takes place through an idealist vision of Shi'ism clearly contradicting certain historical facts with regards to the political performance of the Shi'i clergy as an institution:

Since 1501, when Shah Esmail Safavi founded a Shi'i dynasty in Iran and declared and promoted Shi'ism as state religion, the Shi'i clerical establishment has consistently played a decisive role in repressing political dissent. Shah Esmail - the king who consolidated a central government to rule the land - a grandson of Sheikh Safi Ali Shah - a leading Shi'i mystic who ran an influential religious school - and a zealously religious man, committed atrocities that found their echo four centuries later in the Islamic Republic. He systematically massacred thousands of the Sunni people and other 'non-believers', and, under the banner of Shi'ism, waged long and costly wars against the Sunni Ottoman Empire. One of the greatest migrations of peoples of Iran occurred during this period when masses of Zoroastrians fled to India to save their lives. His successors kept up his reputation throughout the two centuries that the Safavid dynasty remained in power. It is claimed that Shi'ism as a fundamentalist state's political agenda finds its roots in this era.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the clerics in cooperation with the Qajar king, Nasir al-Din Shah, and his 'progressive-minded' prime-minister, Amir Kabir - soon to be assassinated by the Shah's agents - engaged in persecution and massacre of the Babi followers as 'heretics' and 'blasphemers'. Essentially a messianic movement against the Shi'ite religious doctrine - even though, some believe, deeply rooted in it - the Babi movement - the parent of the current Bahaii religion - was a political challenge to the state and clerical rule, dangerously growing in popularity and militancy.⁷⁷ The Islamic government that came to power in 1979 repeated this history in its systematic and violent persecution of Bahaiis in Iran.

During the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911, many Shi'i clerics sided with the Qajar dynasty, as Janet Afary points out, against the social-democratic and liberal revolutionary forces whose secular vision of governance aimed to radically curb the autocratic power of the monarchy and the religious establishment. The use of the word *mollah* as a condescending term referring to the clerics is rooted in the democratic anti-clerical publications and political cartoons and satires of this period.⁷⁸ In July 1909, a few weeks after the revolutionary forces conquered Tehran, deposed Mohamad Ali Shah, and reestablished a democratic and constitutional government, a revolutionary tribunal executed Sheikh Fazlullah Nuri, the highest-ranking cleric in Tehran. Nuri had succeeded two years earlier, after a long confrontation with the liberals and radicals, to secure the clerical rule by legitimating a council of Shi'i clerics with veto power over parliamentary decisions. In the introduction to her history of the Constitutional Revolution, Janet Afary points out that when Khomeini ascended to power in 1979, he formally declared Nuri "the ideological father of the Islamic Republic and made every effort to rehabilitate him." :

⁷⁷ Amanat, p. 328.

⁷⁸ Among these was the famous Molla Nasr el-Din, a satirical paper with a secular political stance.

Nuri's famous article 2 of the Supplementary constitutional Laws had stated that none of the laws of the Majlis (National Assembly) could conflict with Islamic shari'at laws. Nuri's council of clerics, which was to assure this process, became the foundation for Khomeini's Valayat-i Faqih (Rule of the Clerical Authority) in the Islamic Republic.⁷⁹

In the Oil Nationalization Movement in early 1950s, the Shi'i clerics Ayatollah Kashani - the leading cleric in Majlis, with strong connections to the terrorist Islamic group Fadaiyan-e Islam - and Ayatollah Behbahani - the leading religious authority in Tehran - both actively supported the coup d'état - financed by the Americans and the British and planned by the CIA - which brought down the nationalist government of Mohammad Mossadeq and returned the Shah to power:⁸⁰

On August 19, 1953, a crowd led by the strongmen (in a literal sense) of bazaar in south Tehran and including religious leaders began to move northward and were joined by military forces. Both Kashani and especially the leading Tehran Ayatollah, Behbahani, actively supported the coup... Between the crowd and the army the Mosaddeq regime had no chance, and although the premier escaped he soon gave himself up. He was later tried by a military court, defended himself brilliantly, and escaped the death penalty asked by the prosecution... His foreign minister, Hosain Fatemi, was killed, however, and there were massive arrests, jailings, and executions in subsequent years.⁸¹

By 1978, the Shi'i clergy had for centuries established a distinct institutional hierarchy - similar to its Christian counterpart - that accorded each cleric a rung on the ladder, a rank in the social organization of the clergy and an income commensurate with those.

Many scholars - including Keddie, Moghissi, Paidar, Abrahamian and others - have argued that what gave the Shi'i clergy the upper hand in the struggle for the leadership of the 1979 Revolution was the following: 1) They were the only political voice that had a public podium as the Shah's repressive policies - wide-spread censorship, persecution of political activists, etc. - and strong anti-communist ideology had effectively eliminated all other oppositional forces' popular base; 2) they were closely tied to the bazaari

⁷⁹ Afary, p. 1. The watchdog council, *Shoray-e Negahban*, which is currently the highest authority - after the *Leader* - in the Islamic Republic has even more power than Nuri's council. *Shoray-e Negahban*, composed of high ranking clerics appointed by the *Leader*, not only has the power to veto parliamentary and government decisions, but it also has the power to decide who can run for major electoral positions such as the presidency and the membership in the *Majlis* (National Assembly).

⁸⁰ This was the first time the Shah had been forced to leave Iran. He, his second wife Soraya, and most of his family fled the growing nationalist and anti-Pahlavi sentiments which had found in the struggle for the nationalization of the oil industry a vehicle for other democratic and popular demands. Interestingly, the Shah's twin sister, Ashraf, is credited for brokering the American aid which brought the Shah back to power. Ashraf - by many accounts the stronger and more 'manly' one of the twins and the one who 'should have worn the pants and the crown' and who would have ascended to the throne had she not been a woman - describes this episode in great details in her often-neglected memoir *Faces in the Mirror*.

⁸¹ Keddie, p. 140.

(merchant) class whose increased dissatisfaction with the economic situation was a strong reason for dissent; and 3) the Shi'i clergy had a solid, untaxed financial source through *khoms*, *zakat* and other religious donations and taxes - imposed on and observed by many believers - that made them independent of the state. To this list one could add the unprecedented attention that the clergy, particularly Ayatollah Khomeini, received from foreign reporters and communication media. The amount of air time that was given to Khomeini by foreign radio stations - which were, for many Iranians, the only source of information, given the strict censorship in the Iranian media - far surpassed the time given to his political allies including the National Front's Sanjabi and Bazargan. As the turmoil accelerated, more Iranians tuned their radios on BBC's Farsi Programme at eight o'clock every evening to hear the news of the day's events as well as the declarations of Khomeini in Paris.⁸²

The attempt here has been to problematize Foucault's non-problematized classification of the Shi'i clerical establishment, an institution with political rather than spiritual aims and authorities, an institution that certainly by 1978 had proven itself, not in the virtuality of an idea or desire but in the certainty of a lived history. Although historically there had been many important political differences among the clergy, in 1978, by and large, they formed a united force, lined up behind the figure of Ayatollah Khomeini, as a result of the escalation of the popular movement, the massacres that ensued, and the apparent certainty that the Shah would not be able to save his regime. Perhaps, as Keating argues, it was Foucault's reading of Shi'ism as a non-hierarchical, esoteric religion, one that is more about spirituality rather than obeying of the code, that led him to hold such high hopes for a different kind of politics: spiritual politics inspired by Islam. But this perception committed Foucault to making a grave error in reading the Iranian history (if it can be said that he had read it at all) and analyzing the role Shi'ism and the clerics had played in it up to that point. Surely, with such politically-charged history, it was obvious that the clerics were concerned with *worldly* power. Religious politics or political religion were not new to the world. Neither was politics of religion. So why did Foucault - risking ridicule and opposition - strongly reject other explanations for the Revolution and opt for 'political spirituality' as the driving force?

At the dawn of history, Persia invented the State, and it gave the formulas to Islam: its administrators served as the Caliph's officers. But from this same Islam Persia derived a religion that provided its people with infinite resources of resistance against the power of the State. Should we see, in this will for an "Islamic government," a reconciliation, a contradiction, or the threshold of something new? ... What meaning is there for the men inhabiting this little corner of earth, whose ground and underground are stakes in world strategies, when they seek, even at the price of their own lives, something that *we* have forgotten, even as a possibility, since the Renaissance and the great crises of Christianity: a political spirituality. I can already hear the French laughing. But I know they are wrong.⁸³

⁸² GOLI in *of shifting shadows* comments on this issue.

⁸³ Foucault, "A quoi rêvent les iraniens?". Translation taken from Eribon, p. 285.

PART FOUR: THE DEPLOYMENT OF POLITICS

LAYER 13: THE ORIENTALIST AND HIS SILENCES

Unbendingly critical of his exalted view of Islam and its role in the Iranian Revolution, Rosemarie Scullion finds Foucault's uncritical assessment of "the emancipatory potential and of the new subjectivity it was to bestow upon the Iranian people" in contradiction with his previous concerns:

Given Foucault's intellectual preoccupation with questions of power and moralizing discourses of corporal constraint, the largely unqualified enthusiasm he expressed for the Islamic revolution in Iran is perplexing indeed.⁸⁴

Drawing on Edward Said's *Orientalism*, she finds in Foucault's writings on Iran the enduring traces of an occidental's orientalist gaze looking at his historically most threatening other, the Muslims. She points out that although Foucault paid attention to provide some "basic" knowledge of the Iranian history and culture, he, nevertheless, remained locked into a highly dramatic view of this history and culture that was driven by his own "post-humanist political desires" more than it was informed by the complex socio-historical circumstances which contributed to the eruption of the mass revolt. Scullion identifies Foucault's "knee-jerk anti-modern stance and totalizing rhetoric" in his first set of articles, published in Italian, as lasting features of his political campaign in defense of the revolution.⁸⁵

She also raises a very important issue - curiously ignored by the aforementioned authors who have commented on this body of Foucault's writings - and that is his highly suspicious silence about women and gendered dynamics of power in the Revolution.

Quite apparent throughout the body of these writings and interviews is the almost-absolute absence of women and the consideration of gender as a category of analysis. As Scullion points out, this is not to say that the subject doesn't come up in his writings at all. But on the few occasions that the issue is raised, in a manner typical of, in Scullion's words, "his general unwillingness to examine the gender implications of the movement's recourse to religious orthodoxy," he cleverly shifts the focus on "related, though distinctly non-gendered" matters.⁸⁶

He refers to women, as a specific group within the Iranian people in revolt, only in two short sentences and three long silences:

1. In "A quoi rêvent les iraniens?", he recounts what a religious authority explains to him as being the principal ideas on which an Islamic government would be built:

⁸⁴ Scullion, p. 16.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18-19.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

No one is to be deprived of the fruits of his labor, what should belong to everyone (water, underground resources) must not be appropriated by anyone. As for freedoms, they will be respected to the extent that their exercise is not injurious to others, minorities will be respected and free to live as they please as long as they do not harm the majority; between man and woman, there will not be an inequality but a difference of rights, since [gender involves] a difference of nature.⁸⁷

He does not question this ‘difference of rights’. He only mentions that, in spite of what often is said about the definition of the Islamic government being imprecise, he finds in it very familiar, “but less than reassuring”, transparency as “these are formulas based on bourgeois, revolutionary democracy ... and you know what they led to.” But he seems to find the reassurance he is seeking when the religious authority responds “the Koran enunciated them well before your philosophers and if the Christian, industrial West has lost a sense of them, Islam will know how to preserve their value and efficaciousness.” And, lest the readers are not reassured, he immediately reminds them of the drama played on the streets of the Revolution:

When Iranians speak of Islamic government, when, under the menace of bullets, they cry it out on the streets, when they reject the name and the transactions of the men of politics, at the risk of losing their lives, maybe they have something else in mind that has nothing to do with these formulae of the everywhere and the nowhere...⁸⁸

And that something else is “political spirituality.”

2. In his response to Atoussa, he remains silent about her specific problematization of the Revolution with regards to women’s (and minority) rights and personal safety. As Scullion points out, he reasserts himself through an evasive maneuver that turns the sharp point of criticism back on Atoussa, the “intolerable”, for rejecting all ‘forms’ and “virtualities” of Islam “*en bloc*.” Completely ignoring to address the specific criticism raised in her letter, he essentially accuses her of spreading “hatred.”⁸⁹

3. Near the end of the interview with Brière and Blanchet, Brière, in reference to minority rights, recalls an encounter with some male Muslim activists during a demonstration as she attempted to board a van carrying foreign journalists. Even though she was wearing a *chador*, the men wanted to stop her from boarding the van because

⁸⁷ Foucault, “A quoi rêvent les Iraniens?”, p. 49. This translation is quoted from Scullion, p. 32.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* Translation is mine with assistance from Sherie Ahmadi.

⁸⁹ Stauth mentions the confrontation between Atoussa H. and Foucault. But his insistence to call Atoussa H. a “Muslim woman”, a claim she clearly rejected herself, and his labeling of her letter as ‘subjective’ - precisely what Foucault had done - betray his male-centered understanding - or lack thereof - of the issues she raised and their significance in pointing out whose subjectivity was directing the revolution and whose body was being subjugated. Note Stauth, p. 276.

she was not wearing opaque stockings and her feet showed through her sandals.⁹⁰ Brière herself fails to analyze this “intolerance”, except in terms of the necessity for the movement to remain a “single unity.” In his response, Foucault too bypasses the gender-specific nature of this encounter, only to reiterate his points about the “collective will” of the people and their desire for “a radical change in ordinary life.” A “double affirmation” which is necessarily based on “institutions that carry a charge of chauvinism, nationalism, exclusiveness” in order to “confront so fearsome an armed power”.⁹¹

4. In the open letter to Mehdi Bazargan - published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* on April 14, 1979 - Foucault appeals to him in the name of “des droits de l’homme” and the “spirituality sought by the *men* who died on the streets during the demonstrations”, and admonishes the Islamic government for the summary trials and executions of some of the previous regime’s officials. Yet he remains completely silent about the attacks on women and the violations of and attempts to redefine their rights in the Islamic society. Significantly, Foucault wrote this letter just over a month after women’s open demonstrations against the pronouncements of the Islamic government. By then it had become clear that women were the first group targeted by the Islamic government’s carcereal, moralizing and normalizing exercise of power.

5. Finally, in his last published utterance on the Iranian Revolution, which is in defense of his previous writings, Foucault only has this to say about women - by way of problematizing the “imaginative content of the revolt” and the “political stage” onto which this content was transposed immediately after the “great day of the revolution”:

On this stage the most important realities mingled with the most atrocious: on this stage met the formidable hope to make Islam once again a great, living civilization with types of virulent xenophobia; world stakes mingled with regional rivalries. And then there was the problem of imperialism and that of the subjugation of women.⁹²

LAYER 14: THE POST-MODERN PROPHET AND THE MARTYRED MUSLIM IDEOLOGUE

In an interview with an Iranian sociologist, Bagher Parham, conducted during his first trip to Iran and published in Farsi only, Foucault mentioned that he had read some books on Islam and Shi’ism. Keating, Stauth and Leezenberg mention these as being Corbin’s and Massignon’s studies of Islam in Iran. But it is quite clear, as both Keating

⁹⁰ *Chador* is one form of *hijab*. It is a large piece of fabric, often in dark colours and shaped as a semi-circle, that covers a woman’s body from head to toe. Black *chador* is the Islamists’ preferred uniform for women. GOLI in *of shifting shadows* appears in a series of portraits wearing a black *chador*.

⁹¹ Foucault, “Iran: The Spirit of a World without Spirit”, p. 223-4.

⁹² Foucault, “Is It Useless to Revolt?”, p. 7.

and Staughton have pointed out that he had also read, or at least was familiar with, Ali Shariati's lectures and writings. These were available and distributed in abundance - in Farsi and in translation into many European languages - by Muslim Iranian students and activists outside the country. The Paris circle - some of whom Foucault knew and received his information from - was particularly active around this time. As the arrival of Khomeini in Paris on October 3, 1978 showed, this circle had an influential role in the shaping of the Islamic leadership and politics of the revolution.⁹³ In "A quoi rêvent les Iraniens?", Foucault paid particular tribute to Shariati:

On the two facing pages of *Le Nouvel Observateur* that contain this article, there are three subheadings: "The king and the saint", "The invisible presence", and "The inventors of the state". The middle one, *L'invisible Présent* - appearing just to the left of a picture of Khomeini sitting calmly on the ground under an apple tree in his Neauphle-le-Château residence - is about Shariati, a contemporary Iranian Muslim ideologue whom Foucault introduces as

a shadow who haunts all of the political and religious life in Iran today: That is Ali Shariati whose death two years ago gave him the place, so privileged in Shi'ism, of the Invisible Presence, the Absence always there.⁹⁴

Foucault then situates Shariati in a stream of leftist and religious thought and actions which also included Massignon and Fannon, the Algerian Revolution, the Christian Left and the "non-Marxist" socialist movements in Europe. He briefly explains that the Shi'ism which is preached and promoted by Shariati is not the same as the "official religion" in power since the seventeenth century, but the Shi'ism of the first Imam (Imam Ali). He praises Shariati for having risked persecution by the Shah's regime through his public addresses in the universities and mosques to students, intellectuals, youth of the Bazaar and displaced people of the provinces.

In his interview with Parham, Foucault, in response to a question asking him to state his views on the role of religion as a political force, distinguishes once again the "two kinds of Shi'ism":

One of the comments that during my recent stay in Iran I have often heard is that Marx was really mistaken when he said religion is the opiate of the masses. I think I have heard this three or four times. Of course my intention is not to start a polemic with Marx, nevertheless I think this sentence of his has to be considered again. I have also heard some of the supporters of "Islamic government" say that

⁹³ In his published memoir, *My Turn to Speak*, Abolhassan Banisadr, the first president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, claims that on his arrival in Paris, Khomeini was in a state of confusion and uncertainty about the events in Iran and the political platform he had to put forth. Banisadr also claims that he, in cooperation with other Muslim intellectuals, prepared Khomeini's daily declarations and press releases. Note Banisadr, p. 21. Keddie also refers to the influence of this group in the formation of the propaganda campaign which gave credibility to Khomeini in the Western media and public opinion: "The apparent democratic nationalist tone of many of his [Khomeini's] statements from Paris was largely due to the advice of his Western-educated entourage there--Banisadr, Ghotbzadeh, and Yazdi. Many revolutionaries knew only these French statements and not the theocratic ideas of his *Hokumat-e Islami* [Islamic government]." Keddie, p. 252. Also note p. 236.

⁹⁴ Foucault, "A quoi rêvent les Iraniens?", p. 49.

Marx's sentence may be true about Christianity, but not about Islam and particularly not about Shi'ism. I have read some books about Islam and Shi'ism and I completely agree with this view because the role of Shi'ism in political awakening, in maintaining political awareness, and in inciting this awareness to revolt is historically undeniable, and this is a profound phenomenon in a society such as Iran's. Of course in some periods there have been ties between the state and the Shi'ite religion, even common organizations. You have had the Safavid Shi'ism, and confronting it, efforts to revive the Alavid Shi'ism.⁹⁵

LAYER 15: FATEMEH, FOUCAULT'S IDEAL WOMAN?

Rather than being a historical reality, Alavid Shi'ism is an ideological construct popularized by Ali Shariati who coined the term. Shariati is by many accounts one of the principal architects of the Islamic revolutionary discourse particularly among Iran's younger generation of Muslim intellectuals and students whose active presence played a decisive role in the success of the revolutionary process. Shariati's revivalist zeal - which reached its heights in the years immediately preceding the Revolution - centered on the idea of a *touhidi* society which presumably existed only for a short time during the caliphate of Imam Ali, the Prophet's cousin and his son-in-law.⁹⁶

Unlike Foucault, Shariati paid considerable attention to the role of women in this ideal society: Shoulder to shoulder with Ali against his political opponents was Fatemeh, Mohamad's daughter, Ali's wife, Hossain's and Hassan's mother. Fatemeh shared the political trials of all the men in her life and was the center of a 'family of fighters'. She was also a chaste, pure, shy and virtuous woman who shouldered her political responsibilities *as* the daughter, the wife and the mother. Dialectically opposed to this ideal image, was the stereotype of the 'modern', 'unveiled', 'Westoxicated' Iranian woman, wearing make-up and mini-joup, completely overpowered by her insatiable consumerism, the prime target of the imperialist West's cultural invasion and economic conspiracy:

These western-made dolls, empty inside, made-up and disguised, neither have the feelings of our own women of yesterday nor the intelligence of western women of today. They are mechanical dolls which are neither Adam nor Eve! Neither wife nor the beloved; neither housewife nor worker. They feel responsibility neither towards their children nor towards people. No. No. No. And no. They are like ostriches [*Shotor-Morgh*] who neither carry any load on the pretext that they are birds [*Morgh*] nor fly because they claim to be large like camels [*Shotor*]. These are a hodgepodge kind of a woman, assembled in local industries with a "made in Europe" sticker.⁹⁷

In his lectures collected and published under the title *Fatemeh Fatemeh Ast* [Fatemeh Is Fatemeh], Shariati identified the source of women's oppression in Iran as "cultural imperialism" which aimed to deprive the Third World nations of their cultural

⁹⁵ Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault", p. 13. Translation from Farsi is mine.

⁹⁶ Keddie, pp. 213-20.

⁹⁷ Shariati, *Zan*, quoted in F. Milani, p. 128.

identity and traditional values in order to better exploit them without the possibility of resistance. As Paidar points out in her analysis of Shariati's discourse on gender, women as the center of the family were targeted for exploitation, according to Shariati, through a double strategy that turned them into sex-objects and uncritical and insatiable consumers. The only way women could free themselves from this enslavement was through their ability and commitment to follow Fatemeh, their Islamic role-model, by wearing the hijab [veil] to combat the image of sex-object, and by changing their values and becoming "active participants in the Muslim community."⁹⁸ Active, but *different*:

[A]lthough Islam is strongly against 'prejudice' against women, it does not support 'equality' for them . . . Nature has created man and woman as complementary beings in life and society. This is why unlike Western civilizations Islam offers men and women their 'natural rights' and not 'similar rights'. This is the most profound word to be said on the matter and its depth and value should be clear to those conscious readers who would dare to think and see without seeking Europe's permission.⁹⁹

This was apparently quite clear to Foucault when he was writing his articles for he made no attempt to problematize the notions of 'natural' and 'equal but different' rights.

LAYER 16: THE WALL

Veil is wall. They have similar purposes: to divide, to confine, to hide and to protect. Veiled bodies are bodies confined and hidden, traversing divided spaces, marred by the stamp of illusive protection. Veil signifies four degrees of separation: the separation of the public from the private, the separation of the body from the gaze, the separation of women from men, and the separation of Islam and the West. It is through these separations and significations that veil operates to establish patriarchal system and colonized identity.

LAYER 17: THE VOTE AND THE VEIL FOR THE MALE

In early 1981, in a speech to a group of women in the holy city of Qom, Khomeini stated that

one of the biggest achievements of the Islamic Revolution was the return of the veil.... If the Islamic Revolution had no other outcome but the veiling of women, this in and of itself is enough for the Revolution.¹⁰⁰

The practice of veiling is not originally Islamic since it existed in the Byzantine and

⁹⁸ Paidar, p. 17 and pp. 179-182.

⁹⁹ Shariati, *Zan Dar Cheshm Va Del-e Mohammad* [Woman in the Eye and Heart of Mohammad], quoted in Paidar, p. 181.

¹⁰⁰ *Perdiss*, no. 14, Farvardin 1, 1360/March 21, 1981, p. 1. Quoted in Sanasarian, p. 95.

Sasanian Empires predating the age of Islam. The practice was adopted and promoted in the Islamic world in the second century after Mohamad's death as an effective tool for segregating women and securing men's domination in the political, economic and social spheres:

[The Qur'anic verse about the veil] introduced a breach in space that can be understood to be a separation of the public from the private, or indeed the profane from the sacred, but which was to turn into a segregation of the sexes. The veil that descended from Heaven was going to cover up women, separate them from men, from the Prophet, and so from God.¹⁰¹

The imposition of the veil on women is often justified through an inverse logic that centers on men: It is because of the male gaze that a woman's body must be hidden to avert improper carnal desire. This is variously explained in terms of woman's 'naturally insatiable sexual appetite' which can bring 'evil' to the community of believers if not effectively checked and controlled.¹⁰² The veil as a means of segregation of sexes provides that effective measure.

Shariati's call on women to return to the veil was in effect a way of desexualizing women, of purifying their souls from "Freudian sexual liberation", so they could participate in the Shi'i struggle.¹⁰³ In preaching the return to the veil, Shariati was in line with the more traditional Shi'i clergy who have consistently worked to repress women's indigenous movements and liberatory struggles to free themselves from, among other forms of male domination, the veil.¹⁰⁴

In fact, the veil, signifying women's bodies and their social and political rights, has been one of the most politically-charged issues in the Iranian history of the past two centuries. But contrary to what Shariati, Khomeini and others represented, unveiling was not a purely Western concept:

In 1848, Fatemeh Zarin Taj Baraghani - more commonly known as Tahere Qurrat al'Ayn¹⁰⁵ - an Islamic scholar and orator who left the restrictions of Islam and her husband's home and became a powerful leader, theorist and strategist of the Babi movement, appeared in the first publicly recorded instance of a woman unveiling as a

¹⁰¹ Mernissi, p. 101. Mernissi problematizes traditional Islamic interpretations of the Qur'anic surats about the *hijab*, and reinterprets the history of the first few decades of Islam in light of Mohammad's political struggles to establish himself and the new faith among the Arab tribes. Note particularly pp. 85-101.

¹⁰² For an analysis of the sexual and erotic conception of women in the Islam, refer to Fatna A. Sabbah, *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious*.

¹⁰³ Paidar, p. 181.

¹⁰⁴ In many other ways Shariati was in opposition to the clerical establishment whom he considered to be in line with the Safavid Shi'ism, the traditional instrument in the hands of the state for stupefying the masses. For analyses of the differences between Shariati's views and those of the traditional clergy note Moghissi, pp. 59-71, and Paidar, pp. 175-182.

¹⁰⁵ Tahere means *the pure*, and Qurrat al'Ayn *the solace of the eye*. These names were given her by two of the male leaders of the movement, respectively the Bab and Rashti. Not surprisingly, few people know her real name.

liberatory political gesture in Iran:

Tahirih, with her face unveiled, stepped from her garden, advancing to the pavilion of Baha'ullah; and as she came, she shouted aloud these words: 'The trumpet is sounding! The great Trump is blown! The universal advent is now proclaimed!' The believers gathered in that tent were panic struck, and each one asked himself, 'How can the Law be abrogated? How is it that this woman stands here without her veil?'¹⁰⁶

The significance of her unveiling is apparent in the mythology created around her historical figure, even during her life time. A contemporary Qajar court chronicler, Sipih, in a tone infused with the eroticism typical of male Islamic discourse on women - concerned with veiling women partly for the pleasure of unveiling them in the privacy of the home and the male imagination - wrote:

She would decorate her assembly room like a bridal chamber and her body like a peacock of Paradise. Then she summoned the followers of the Bab and appeared unveiled in front of them. First she ascended a throne and like a pious preacher reminded them of Heaven and Hell and quoted amply from the Qur'an and the Traditions. She would then tell them: "Whoever touches me, the intensity of Hell's fire would not affect him." The audience would then rise and come to her throne and kiss those lips of hers which put to shame the ruby of Ramman, and rub their faces against her breasts, which chagrined the pomegranates of the garden.¹⁰⁷

During the Constitutional Revolution, many women, who actively participated in and supported the struggle for democracy, found an opportunity to publicly voice their desire to shed the oppressive veil:

For years, unveiling had been a central issue for women's groups. Women used various means to show their discontent with the black veil (Chador). In Shiraz, for example, women had changed the colour of the Chador from black to dark brown, an innovation which ended when they were attacked by a mob in the streets.¹⁰⁸

Since then, the veil had also become a divisive issue that undermined the effectiveness of the indigenous and independent women's movement in Iran:

Some women chose this moment [1910] to wage a war against women's veiling. A group of women appeared in the streets of Tehran shouting pro-constitutional slogans and demanding their freedom from the veil. The sight of these women removing their *chador* created a public outcry not least from [some of] their constitutionalist sisters who dissociated themselves from the actions of 'a bunch of prostitutes'.¹⁰⁹

The struggle against the veil during the Constitutional Revolution was closely tied to the struggle for women's enfranchisement in the context of other demands for

¹⁰⁶ Abbas Abdol Baha, *Memorials of the Faithful*, quoted in F. Milani, p. 86.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Amanat, p. 321.

¹⁰⁸ Moghissi, p. 39.

¹⁰⁹ Paidar, p. 59.

democracy. In the first majlis, when the issue of women's right to vote was raised by a male reformer and supporter of women's movement, the Shi'i clerics shouted him down, accusing him of blasphemy.¹¹⁰

Although by 1920s many women activists had already started to go unveiled in public, particularly in Tehran, the resistance of the clerical establishment to women's demands was so strong that unveiling did not become a reality for the majority of women until Reza Shah launched his anti-veil offensive in 1936 as one of his most important - and politically consequential - strategies for 'modernizing' Iran. But Reza Shah, who was a devout Muslim himself and every bit a traditional man,¹¹¹ did not depart from the traditional male practices in that he made unveiling compulsory throughout the land, enforced coercively through various government apparati and violently by the police on the streets. There were many accounts of women being beaten and forced to remove their veil. Reza Shah's campaign combined with his politically repressive policies in effect put an end to women's independent movement for their rights. By taking the choice away from women, he also prepared the ground for the forced and voluntary revealing during and after the 1979 Revolution.

But the backlash had started long before that. The Shi'i clergy who had been pushed into 'quietism' by Reza Shah's anti-clerical 'iron claws' holding their necks, immediately came back to the political scene after his abdication in 1941 when his 19-year-old son, Mohammad Reza, was put on the thrown by the Allied Forces occupying the country. Ayatollah Borujerdi, the first recognized *marja-e taqlid*¹¹² in many decades, took advantage of the new king's political instability and his fear of the increasing influence of the leftist and democratic organizations - that had found in the post-war climate a new opportunity to come back to the scene - and

reached an unwritten agreement with the young Mohammad Reza Shah. The former [Ayatollah Borujerdi] agreed to support the monarchy and to silence his politically motivated colleagues; the latter promised to relax his father's secular policies and lift the prohibition against the veil.¹¹³

Khomeini, a student of Ayatollah Borujerdi and his personal assistant for years, entered into the national political discourse in 1943 with a pamphlet which denounced Reza Shah on the charge of secularism for many reasons including the unveiling of women:

[F]or closing down seminaries, expropriating religious endowments, propagating anticlerical sentiments, replacing religious courts with state ones, permitting the consumption of alcoholic beverages and the playing of "sensuous music," forcing men to wear Western-style hats, establishing coeducational schools, and banning the long veil (*chador*), thereby "forcing women to go naked into the

¹¹⁰ Afary, p. 121.

¹¹¹ This is according to Ashraf Pahlavi, his daughter, in her autobiography.

¹¹² This is the highest rank among Shi'i clerics, and the term literally means *the source for imitation*. Every Shi'i believer must follow a *marja-e taqlid* whose interpretation of Islam and decrees in all aspects of life are binding for his followers.

¹¹³ Abrahamian, p. 8.

streets.”¹¹⁴

As a result of this climate some women returned to the veil although the form of veiling was different: *Roobandeh* (a mask covering the entire face except the eyes) which was common prior to the mandatory unveiling was now outdated; and many women simply covered their hair with a scarf.

Women’s enfranchisement came about in 1963 as part of Mohammad Reza Shah’s White Revolution. There had been another attempt previously, during Oil Nationalization movement and the premiership of Mohammad Mossadeq, to extend to women the right to vote. But this had prompted another clerical resistance:

Kashani’s opposition to Mosaddeq came into the open by mid-1953 once the latter issued a referendum to dissolve Parliament, drafted an electoral bill enfranchising women, tended to favor state enterprises over the bazaar, refuse to ban alcohol, and declined amnesty to assassins from the Fedayan-e Islam.¹¹⁵

Khomeini intensified his anti-Pahlavi political campaign in 1962-63 by attacking the Shah’s White Revolution, a reformist plan with land redistribution as its central piece, but also including a new electoral law to enfranchise women. Rather than focusing on the land-redistribution plan, as some other clerics did, Khomeini focused on the women’s right to vote:

According to Khomeini’s proclamation, the electoral law was un-Islamic and the referendum [to endorse the White Revolution] unconstitutional... These denunciations helped turn the June 1963 Moharram processions into violent street protests against the regime. Khomeinists date the beginning of their movement to the June Uprising (Qiyam-e Khordad).¹¹⁶

Khomeini was arrested and exiled after these events. But he did not stop his campaign. Among one of the least known facts about the events that prompted the mass demonstrations in 1978 is the role that the Islamist efforts for reveiling women played in the early days of the Revolution. On January 8th, 1978, on the anniversary of Reza Shah’s anti-veil legislation, a small group of Islamist women, supported by theology students, demonstrated in Qom demanding the reinstitution of the veil.¹¹⁷ The police confronted them, disbanding the small crowd through violent force. The next day, January 9th, a larger crowd, this time mostly theology students, took to the streets of Qom, and the ensuing killings by the police prompted the successive demonstrations which soon led to the Shah’s downfall.

It is in this historical context that the aforementioned anecdote about Foucault’s praise of hijab as a political gesture and his enduring silence about the sexual dynamics of the Revolution take on their profoundly disturbing meanings. Surely in *the kind of theatre that was the Revolution*, born of the history that was, the veil as a symbol

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹¹⁷ A newspaper report of this event is documented in *of shifting shadows*.

pointed to a more profound *truth* than the one Foucault perceived:

The return to the past, the return to tradition that men are demanding, is a means of putting things “back in order.” An order that no longer satisfies everybody, especially not the women who have never accepted it. The “return” to the veil invites women who have left “their” place (the “their” refers to the place that was designated for them) to leave their newly conquered territories. And it is implied that this place in which society wants to confine them again is to be marginal, and above all subordinate, in accordance with the ideal Islam...¹¹⁸

The new political regime that was in the making was bent on creating another carcereal society, one in which women’s bodies and their subjectivity were going to be the target of disciplining and disciplinary practices of a moral order determined to, once and for all, teach them and the world what to think.

LAYER 18: THE ECHO

We were there, he and I and Atoussa, at the moment of birth of ideas that were centuries old, born in blood, of blood, on their way to shed blood. Standing at the crossing of Shahreza and Enqelab, he didn’t see the body marching behind the veil.¹¹⁹ That body was a woman’s. Bodies beside bodies. Voices upon voices. In time, and in space. Spiritualité? Retour aux sources populaires? ... And the heads of lovers keep falling.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Mernissi, p. 24.

¹¹⁹ Shahreza (Reza Shah) and Enqelab (Revolution) are two names for the same street, in use respectively before and after the Revolution.

¹²⁰ *of shifting shadows*, in MINA’s story, contains selected parts of a video footage of an actual stoning of a woman and a man in post-revolutionary Iran, on the charge of adultery. This video was widely distributed by Mojahedin Khalq organization, and is a gruesome document against the Islamic laws in effect in Iran.

PART FIVE: RIGHT OF LIFE AND POWER OVER BODY

LAYER 19: IRAN, 1999

The Introduction to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran states:

Family is the fundamental unit of the society and the main center for the growth of humans, and ideological agreement in the formation of the family which is the ground for the advancement of humans is of fundamental importance, and the Islamic government is responsible for providing the resources for achieving this goal. In this view of family woman comes out of the state of “being an object” or “being a tool” in the service of propagation of consumerism and exploitation, and while rediscovering the significant and valuable responsibilities of motherhood, she becomes a leader in raising believers (*ensanha-ye maktabi*) and a peer (*ham-razm*) of men in the active arenas of life, and thus she will be ready to accept bigger responsibilities, and in the Islamic view she will deserve higher value and respect.¹²¹

According to the civil and religious laws and practices, currently in the Islamic Republic of Iran, regardless of age, ethnicity, religion or class, a women does not have the following rights:¹²²

- The right to appear in public with her hair exposed or the shape of her body detectable through her clothes.¹²³
- The right to enter her first marriage without the permission of her father or male guardian or a court of law.¹²⁴
- The right to travel without the permission of her father or male guardian.¹²⁵
- The right to own a passport without the permission of her father or male guardian.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Mo'tamedi, p. 43. Reflecting the convoluted language of the original, the translation is mine.

¹²² All the laws in Iran are based on *Sharia*, the Islamic legal code. In addition to *Sharia*, there are other kinds of ‘laws’ like *orf*, informal laws sanctioned through normalized and traditional practices in the community.

¹²³ This is based on interpretations of the Qur’anic verses on hijab. Although this rule is not written as it appears here, the current policies and practices enforced through a variety of mechanisms, ensure women’s adherence and conformity.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 132-3. Note Item 1043, *Ghanoon-e Madani-e Jomhuri-e Eslami-e Iran* (Civil Laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran), 1991.

¹²⁵ Although this is not enshrined in the *letter* of law, its practice is based on *orf*, informal laws finding their authority through tradition and repetition.

¹²⁶ Note Item 18.3, *Ghanoon-e Gozarnameh* (Passport Laws), 1983. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

- The right to divorce her husband unless the conditions were set in a prenuptial agreement, also signed by her father or male guardian.¹²⁷
- The right to be seen unveiled by or have any physical contact with any member of the male population who is not her father, brother, husband, or offspring.¹²⁸
- The right to keep, upon divorce, the custody of her male children of 2 years and up and female children of 7 years and up unless approved by an Islamic court.
- The right to a share of an inheritance equal to that of the primary male(s) involved.¹²⁹
 - The right to judge in any court of law.¹³⁰
 - The right to sing solo in a public that includes male audience.¹³¹
 - The right to transfer Iranian citizenship to her off-springs unless they were born in Iran in a legally approved and recorded marriage.¹³²
 - The right to play a sport if there are any males around who are not her father, husband, brother, off-springs.¹³³
 - The right to receive a government grant for university education abroad unless she is married and accompanied by her husband.¹³⁴
 - The right to reside outside her husband's residence, if married, unless permitted by her husband or, upon his prolonged absence, by an Islamic court.¹³⁵
 - The right to make decisions for her family.¹³⁶
 - The right to refuse sexual intercourse with her husband.¹³⁷

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-43. The letter of law reads: "On Divorce; Generalities: Item 1133 - A man can divorce his wife any time he wishes." All of the items in this section of the law are written from the perspective of the rights of men. Women's rights have not been clearly stated. The prenuptial agreement, was mentioned as a solution by Khomeini in 1985 in response to women's demands.

¹²⁸ Again, this is a practice rooted in interpretations of the Qur'anic verses about the veil.

¹²⁹ This is rooted in the Shi'i interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunna, sanctioned in the civil laws.

¹³⁰ Note Amendment 5 to the Regulations for the Selection of Judges and Justices, 1984. *Ibid.*, pp. 120-1.

¹³¹ This is rooted in *orf*.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹³³ Note Item 3, Policies for Women's Cultural, Social and Sport Activities, approved by the High Council for Cultural Revolution, 1987. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹³⁴ Item 3-1, Ghanoon-e E'zam-e Daneshjoo (Laws for Sending Students Abroad), 1985. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹³⁵ Item 1005, Civil Laws. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 139. The letter of law reads: "Item 1105 - In the relationship between couples, the management of the family is characteristic of the husband."

- The right to choose her career.¹³⁸
- The right to choose her residence upon marriage unless such condition was set in a prenuptial agreement.¹³⁹
- The right to enter a government building if she wears make-up.¹⁴⁰
- The right to sit or stand in front of male passengers on the public transportation buses.¹⁴¹

LAYER 20: RIGHTS AND HISTORY

Similar to sex, revolution is transformed into discourse. This is not to say that revolutions *happen* in discourse. Revolutions are rupturous events in the physical world that take place in the lives, and subjectivities, of the people involved in them, and profoundly affect their corporeal bodies, their political rights, the physical organization of their lives, and the limits of their power over their bodies. But because revolutions are about change, they unfold in discourse as much as on the streets. As Paidar, Moghissi and others have argued, the discourse of the Iranian Revolution clearly pointed to the domination of male-centered socio-political powers.

In "Iran: Spirit of a World without Spirit," Foucault referred to Furet's reading of the French Revolution to distinguish between two phenomena: the "totality of the processes of economic and social transformations that began well before the revolution," and the "specificity of the Revolutionary events."¹⁴² In both the totality of the processes and the specificity of the events, the Iranian Revolution engaged intimately in redefining gender relations because, and as much as, it involved a redefinition of political and economic powers. Common androcentric theoretical and methodological approaches to the social and the political marginalize the sexual dimension of the dynamics of power. But

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 139. The letter of law reads: "Item 1108 - If a wife without legitimate reasons refuses to perform her marital duties (*vazayef-e zojijyat*) she shall not deserve to receive financial maintenance [from the husband]."

¹³⁸ The letter of law reads: "Item 1117 - The husband can prevent his wife from acquiring any skill or job that may conflict with the well-being of the family or the husband or herself." *Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹³⁹ Note Item 11, Marriage Laws, first passed in 1931, re-approved by the Islamic Parliament and The Guardian Council in 1988. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁴⁰ Currently, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, all government buildings have separate entrances for men and for women. Prior to entering the main offices, women have to go through a check-point at the door, equipped with make-up, nail-polish remover, cotton balls and tissues, where they are inspected for subtlest violations and asked to *cleanse* themselves or refused entry.

¹⁴¹ The local transportation buses have designated separate entrances for men and for women: Men enter through the front doors and women have to enter through the back.

¹⁴² Foucault, "Iran: Spirit of ...", p. 214.

The question of women is far from an optional extra in analyzing Iranian political history. On the contrary, the study of Iranian political discourses shows that gender relations and women's position are situated at the heart of these discourses. Women's issues have not arisen in twentieth-century Iran merely because of the open-mindedness and progressive policies of our revolutionaries and statesmen [and historians and philosophers and ideologues, G.H.], as is often assumed. They have become the burning issues of this century in Iran because any discourse which has addressed the question of political and social reorganization of Iranian society has necessarily entailed a redefinition of gender relations and as part of that the reorganization of women's position. To marginalize the relevance of women's issues to national processes is to misunderstand the political history of Iran and other Middle Eastern societies which have revolved around the question of development and change in this century.¹⁴³

If we are to understand genealogical thought as a method intended to unveil the "hidden", the "disqualified", the "marginalized", and the "subjugated" within the social and political discourses, then in Iran Foucault hit the *wall*. His political discourse about the Iranian Revolution, his observation that Iranians were, more than anything, demanding a "radical change in their subjectivity", his notion of "political spirituality", and his encounter with "the collective will" on the streets of Iran, did not penetrate the surface of the immediate events, the present, to understand the real dynamics of power defining the discourse of the Revolution.

If, as Foucault suggested in *History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, silence, rather than being the limit of discourse, itself is a discursive act in the field of the relations of power, then in veiling the Iranian women with his silence, Foucault showed that his discourse, far from being neutral, or even neutered, is clearly sexed and raced. The discussion of the rights of women in Iran in relation to Foucault's seemingly dis-gendered analytics of the Iranian Revolution is directly relevant to any feminist considerations of his theories of power and sexuality - and in theorizing women's liberation as a practical struggle played out in the fields of macro- and micro-politics - precisely because women's struggle in Iran is taking place in a new order of things that ultimately defines the priorities of women's international struggle. Recently the German police beat up and violently veiled Iranian women activists residing in Germany in order to deport them to Iran.¹⁴⁴ This only points to the historical continuity of the 'global' male domination and the hegemony of androcentric ideologies that have defined the politics and practices in the East *and* the West.

BITA's knowledge: The one that carries the sword knows me not. The one that holds the book smells of sweat, opium and blood. Swords carve words in flesh. Words give swords their edge.

Among Foucault's most frequently quoted maxims is "where there is power, there is resistance". The continuation of this statement, however, is often forgotten: "and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to

¹⁴³ This is Denise Kandiyoti re-articulated by Paidar, pp. 2-3.

¹⁴⁴ Press Release, International Federation of Iranian Refugees (IFIR), December 23, 1999.

power.” Understanding Atoussa’s resistance in relation to the power that was Foucault’s and Khomeini’s in 1978 must then be a condition of understanding the power that resisted *her*, the power that was bent on subjugating her body through silencing her voice.

Between parallel mirrors stands the infinity of the faces of resistance.

LAYER 21: TO LEAVE M. FOUCAULT

Sitting in my room, looking south: I can see the sky over the lake through the sliver of space between McDonald and Optical World. It hits me: The man is dead and when he was alive he was functionally blind: He went there to watch a birthing. There was an uprising so big he could see the blood erecting the veins of all the men who thought they’d seen the devil and there had appeared the saint in the moon.¹⁴⁵ He saw the curfew, the soldiers on the streets, the broken windows, the closed shops. And he imagined the bodies butchered a week ago on the square of morning dews,¹⁴⁶ and he saw the people flowing through the streets again like a stream with no other bed. But he didn’t see the women’s lines before the men’s, behind the men’s.¹⁴⁷ This means his vision was at best 50% or less... There he was and here I am: Twenty years later, wondering why I can’t find myself beyond the veil/wall /sword of his words... When I close my eyes I can see the water, and the flocks of seagulls and geese coming near for the food they know I’ve brought. But I am here, tied to my chair, squinting my eyes, looking at this terminal typing these words. It is my body, again, disciplined by a man’s words. Alas! The irony that is life... I think I shall go for a walk.

The Poet on King Street is singing...

¹⁴⁵ One of the ‘revolutionary’ slogans that became popular around this time was “*Be koorye cheshm-e shah / Aks-e khomeini to mah*” (*Shah is blind with envy / On the moon image of Khomeini*). Some years ago, banking on superstitious beliefs to legitimate the Shah’s regime, some people, including a number of lower-rank clerics, claimed that they could see the Shah’s image in the pattern of the dark areas on the face of the moon. In the late summer of 1978, suddenly Khomeini’s image appeared on the moon as a counter legend to legitimize *his* leadership. All four personae in *of shifting shadows* make references to this.

¹⁴⁶ The reference is to the massacre on the Jhaleh (Morning Dew) Square.

¹⁴⁷ During many street demonstrations, women’s lines marched in front of men’s. This was a tactic intended to make it more difficult for the soldiers to shoot at the crowd, for women, after all, were women; they were to arouse sympathy rather than violence!

APPENDIX: TRANSLATION OF FRENCH TEXTS

ATOUSSA H.'S LETTER TO LE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR,

6.NOV.1978

Living in Paris, I am deeply upset by the comments used often by the French Left to address the arrival of an "Islamic government" replacing the Shah's despotic regime. Michel Foucault, for example, seems to be moved by the "Islamic spirituality" (no. 727, October 16) which is supposed to replace the brutal dictatorship, according to him, for the better. After 25 years of silence and oppression, should the Iranian people only have the choice between the Savak and religious fanaticism? To have an idea of what Qur'an's spirituality, literally applied by Khomeini's moral order, signifies, it is worthwhile to re-read some of the original text. [...] From 'Surat 2': "Your wives are like a field for you, Come to your fields as often as you want." To clarify: Man is the sovereign, woman the slave, he can use her according to his whims, and she has nothing to say. Originated in the Prophet's jealous guarding of his wife Aisha, women must wear the veil. This does not just concern spiritual ideas, but a choice of society. These days unveiled women are often insulted and the young Muslims don't hide that in the regime they want, women can do nothing but to shut up. He has written also that the minorities have a right to liberty under the condition that they do not harm the majority. When do minorities begin to harm?

Spirituality? Return to popular sources? Saudi Arabia claims itself as the source of Islam. And the hands of thieves and the heads of lovers fall [...] One could say that the Western left is weary enough of humanism to find Islam desirable... For others. Many Iranians such as myself are distressed at the idea of an "Islamic government." They know what it means. Everywhere in Iran, Islam has always served the feudal and pseudo-revolutionary oppression. Often too, as in Tunisia, Pakistan and Indonesia, Islam - alas - is the only means of expression available to the oppressed people. The progressive Left in the West must realize what kind of barrier the Islamic religion can become in the societies eager for change, and not allow themselves to be seduced by a remedy that is perhaps worse than the illness.

MICHEL FOUCAULT'S RESPONSE TO ATOUSSA H.'S LETTER,

LE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR, 13.NOV.1978

Mme Atoussa did not read the article she criticizes. This is her right. But she shouldn't have associated me with the idea of 'Muslim spirituality replacing the dictatorship for the better'. Because people have participated in demonstrations and have died in Iran shouting for an Islamic government, it was an elementary duty to wonder what content was given to these words and what force generated them. I have indicated a number of issues which to me seem hardly reassuring. If there was only an error of reading in Mme H.'s letter, I would not have responded. But the letter contains two

intolerable things: 1. It confuses all aspects, forms, and virtualities of Islam and holds them in a single contempt, thus their complete rejection under the reproach of fanaticism. 2. It suspects all Westerners of being interested in Islam only because of hatred for Muslims (what could one say of a Westerner who has contempt for Islam?) The problem of Islam as a political force is an essential one for our times and for the years to follow. The first condition to approach it with any bit of intelligence is to not start adding hatred.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

- Abrahamian, Ervand. Khomeinism; Essays on the Islamic Republic. Berkely, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993.
- Afary, Janet. The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origins of Feminism. New York: Colombia University Press, 1996.
- Amanat, Abbas. Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844-1850. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989.
- Bani-Sadr, Abol Hassan. My Turn to Speak: Iran, the Revolution and Secret Deals with the U.S. Translated by William Ford. Washington, New York, London, etc.: Brassey's Inc., 1991.
- Barthes, Roland. S/Z. Translated by Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.
- Corbin, Henry. The man of light in Iranian sufism. Translated from the French by Nancy Pearson. Boulder, Colo.: Shambhala ; [New York] : distributed by Random House, 1978.
- Corbin, Henry. Temps cyclique et gnose ismaélienne. (English: Cyclical time and Ismaili gnosis.) London, Boston: Kegan Paul International in association with Islamic Publications Ltd., 1983.
- Eribon, Didier. Michel Foucault. Translated by Betsy Wing. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality, Volume 1. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1980.
- . The History of Sexuality, Volume 2, The Use of Pleasure. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- Hekman, Susan J., ed. Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996.
- Kar, Mehr-Angiz. Hoghoogh-e Siasi-e Zanan-e Iran (The Political Rights of Iranian Woman). Tehran: Entesharat-e Roshangaran va Motale'at-e Zanan, 1997.
- Keddie, Nikki R. Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran. With a section by Yann Richard. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981.
- Massignon, Louis. Essay on the origins of the technical language of Islamic mysticism. Translated from the French with an introduction by Benjamin Clark; foreword by

- Herbert mason. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997.
- Massignon, Louis. The passion of al-Hallaj: mystic and martyr of Islam. Translated from the French with a biographical foreword by Herbert Mason. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982.
- Mernissi, Fatima. The Veil and the Male Elite: A feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam. Translated by Mary Jo Lakeland. New York: Addison-Wesley
- Milani, Farzaneh. Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992.
- Milani, Mohsen. The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic. Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1994.
- Miller, James. The passion of Michel Foucault. New York : Anchor Books, 1994.
- Millett, Kate. Going to Iran. New York: Doward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1982.
- Moghissi, Haideh. Populism and Feminism in Iran: women's struggle in a male-defined revolutionary movement. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan; New York, N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1994.
- Mo'tamedi, Gholamreza, et. al. Ghavanin va moghararat-e marboot beh zanan dar Iran [Laws and Regulations Pertaining to Women in Iran]. Tehran: Qoqnoos Publications, 1997.
- Pahlavi, Ashraf. Faces in the Mirror. Englewood: Prentice Hall, 1980.
- Paidar, Parvin. Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Sabah, Fatna A. Woman in the Muslim Unconscious. Translated from French by Mary Jo Lakeland. New York, Oxford, etc.: Pergamon Press, 1984.
- Sanasarian, Eliz. The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981.
- Trinh, T. Minh-ha. Woman, Native, Other; Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989.
- ARTICLES
- Atoussa H. "Une Iranienne écrit". In Le Nouvel Observateur, no. 730, November 6/1978, p 29.
- Foucault, Michel. "Iran: The Spirit of a World Without Spirit". Translated by Alan Sheridan. In Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture, Interviews and Other Writings 1977-84.
- , "A quoi revent les Iraniens?" In Le Nouvel Observateur, no. 726,

October 16/1978, pp 48-9.

- . "Is It Useless to Revolt?" Translated by James Bernauer. In Philosophy and Social Criticism, v. 8, no. 1, Spring 1981, pp 2-9.
- . "L'armée, quand la terre tremble". In Michel Foucault, Dits et écrits, 1954-1988, ed. Daniel Defert and Grancois Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1990. #241.
- . "Le chah a cent ans de retard". In Michel Foucault, Dits et écrits, #243.
- . "Lettre ouverte à Mehdi Bazargan". In Le Nouvel Observateur, no. 753, April 14/1979, p 46.
- . "Mosahebe ba Michel Foucault" (Interview with Michel Foucault). In Farsi, in Name-ye kanoon-e nevisandegan-e iran, no. 1, Spring 1979, pp 9-17.
- . "Réponse de Michel Foucault à une lectrice iranienne". In Le Nouvel Observateur, no. 731, November 13/1978, p 26.
- . "Téhéran: la foi contre le chah". In Michel Foucault, Dits et écrits: 1954-1988, ed. Daniel Defert and Grancois Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1990. # 244.
- Keating, Craig. "Reflections on the Revolution in Iran: Foucault on resistance". In Journal of European Studies, v. 27, 1997, pp 181-197.
- Leezenberg, Michiel. "Power and Political Spirituality: Michel Foucault on the Islamic Revolution in Iran". In Arcadia, v. 33, no. 1, 1998, pp 72-89.
- Lorde, Audre. "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action". In Women, Creativity and the Arts: Critical and Autobiographical Perspectives, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona and Lucinda Ebersole. New York: Continuum, 1995. Pp 203-206.
- Nikazmerad, Nicholas M. "A Chronological Survery of the Iranian Revolution". In Iranian Studies; Volume XIII, Nos 1-4, 1980, pp. 327-68.
- Said, Edward. "Michel Foucault, 1926-1984". In After Foucault: Humanistic Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges, ed. Jonathan Arac. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1988.
- Scullion, Rosemarie. "Michel Foucault the Orientalist: On Revolutionary Iran and the "Spirit of Islam"". In South Central Review, v. 22, no. 2, pp 16-40.
- Stauth, George. "Revolution in Spiritless Times: An Essay on Michel Foucault's Enquiries into the Iranian Revolution". In International Sociology, v. 6, no. 3, pp 259-280