

In his book, *Modern Sexuality and Ideology in Iran*, Karman Talattof states: “there is yet to be an honest discussion about sexuality especially as it pertains to female desire sensuality and sexual expression.” He further stresses, “...in the absence of any serious, useful, modern discussion about gender, sexuality, and sexual identity, Iran’s population continues to be treated as subjects, not as individuals, not as free citizens.” I am reminded of the urgency of these statements, by the repeated emergence of anxiety and controversies in Iran’s contemporary society especially around women’s sexuality. For example, young women are still anxious over their perceived “obligation of virginity” to their husbands and behaving not like “whores” but “proper ladies.” Men still recognize masculine virility in having sex with as many women as possible, yet expect their sisters and daughters to remain celibate until marriage. Even celebrity young women-who one would assume are somewhat exempt from the same expectations as the “average” women- are kept under scrutiny. When Golshifteh Farahani, a young Iranian actress residing in Paris, published her nude photos in the French magazine *Egoïste*, Iranians from various backgrounds and belief systems were up in arms about how she as “an Iranian woman” had dishonored the culture and the nation. Little doubt remains that regulating individual’s sexuality is central to “Iranian” identities. In this context, I am repeatedly most disappointed by the fact that various self-identified Iranian leftists and intellectuals are some of the most zealous silencers and regulators of women’s and indirectly men’s sexualities.

In the context of Iran, several scholars have contributed to the understanding of the construction and the regulation of gendered sexual individual and collective selves. Iran’s early modern scholarship highlights the prevalence of homosocial and male homoerotic sexualities which are commonly reflected in poetry, and other literary narratives. In this context, gender relations were hierarchical both inside and outside court culture. However, these gender relations were regulated more through mitigating circumstances than strictly by the State. By the 17th century Safavid era, gender and sexuality were closely linked to Shiism and Iranian identity. In the last two hundred years various groups and the State have deployed gender and sexuality in various projects of nationalism and modernity. For example, during the Pahlavi era, the State presented the ideal Iranian man and woman as “modern” “Western” with less emphasis on “Muslim” while the post-revolutionary Islamic Republic attempted to present the Iranian man and woman still as modern but pious Muslim subjects. The scholarships pertaining to the immediate years before and through the 1979 revolution, usually focus on women and vary in discussion from the impact of the Islamic laws on the bodies of women to their legal rights and daily realities. However, despite the extensive role of leftists and intellectuals in a revolution that led to very restrictive gendered repressions, few scholars have focused on the re-production and impact of hierarchical gendered relationships in the context of leftist movements of the 1979 Revolution.

Several Iranian leftist guerilla groups- the Iranian People’s Fedai Guerrilla and People’s Mujahedin being the most notable- participated in every step from mobilization of the masses through the victory of the 1979 revolution. These organizations began their mobilization at least a decade before the revolution. In their operations, they adhered to an ideology of the “collective spirit” making every decision – even what pertained to individual matters such as sexuality. Such a framework was justified by the urgency and seriousness of their activities which often took place in secrecy and in “underground” group houses. Aside from my personal connections to the leftist movements of the 1979 revolution, my dissertation focuses on understanding these gendered dynamics among the self-identified leftists because they viewed themselves as challengers of the status quo. They brought the revolution to fruition as they were watching their

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fellow leftists across the globe demanding for social justice; this was a time of global shift. Yet, these leftist thinkers, activists, and guerillas nonetheless re-produced a very strict, conservative, rigid framework of gender and sexuality. Despite distinguishing themselves from Islamist activists and thinkers, the secular leftists and intellectuals in Iran, reproduced a gendered hierarchy in which sexuality and especially women's sexualities were repressed and heavily regulated within the private and public sphere.

My dissertation will focus on understanding the structure and the reasoning behind the hierarchal gendered framework and the presence of sexualities in this framework as it related to the leftists spaces in Iran. Some of the broader questions include: 1) How did the self-identified leftists negotiate their sexualities and gendered identities within the restrictive frameworks before and during the 1979 revolution? 2) How did they perceive the Islamic frameworks versus the leftist frameworks? and, 3) How did they relate to the sexual social movements that were occurring in Europe and the United States?

Thanks to the Taleghani Fellowship, I was able to travel to Harvard library where I learned about two major Iranian oral history archives which include interviews from self-identified leftists who as organizational members or individually had active roles in the 1979 revolution. I have also spoken with the director of the Research Association for Iranian Oral History who is delighted to facilitate my research in the archives as well as connect me to communities of the Iranian leftists for any necessary supplemental interviews in the upcoming year.