

work in the future. Iran's indelible memory of a long and bitter experience with external pressure, intervention, and invasion has created a fierce sense of national resistance to foreign coercion.

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**Sexual Politics in Modern Iran**, by Janet Afary. Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. xviii + 373 pages. Gloss. to p. 377. Bibl. to p. 410. Index to p. 423. \$99 cloth; \$32.99 paper.

*Reviewed by Fariba Zarinebaf*

Research on any aspect of Iranian history, and of women in particular, is a challenging task due to the lack of access to sources and archives by scholars in the United States. Janet Afary's book is a timely addition to the history of women in modern Iran. Weaving together European traveler accounts, literary sources, and print media, she provides a detailed narrative of the struggle of women in Iran from the Constitutional era to the recent period. The book is divided into three parts: The first part covers the late Qajar history to the end of the Constitutional period; the second covers the history of women under the Pahlavi dynasty; and the third covers the history of women from the Islamic Revolution of 1979 to 2006.

The two underlying themes of the book are the evolution of sexuality in Iranian society and the struggle by women for equal rights. Inspired in part by Michel Foucault, the author argues that the construction of modern sexuality (heterosexuality) was a historical process in Iran as elsewhere (the West) and that pre-modern Iranian society was far more diverse in its sexual mores and practices. Afary focuses on the homoerotic content of classical Persian poetry and argues that much of the pre-modern poetry reflected the homosexuality of the authors. She then defines same sex relationships in Iran based on socio-economic status and ar-

gues that despite Islamic bans on sodomy, same sex relationships were the norm in pre-modern Iran. Moreover, even married men often turned to young boys for sexual companionship, which further marginalized women in a society where they were already second-class citizens.

The emergence of modern notions of sexuality (heterosexuality) based on scientific and positivist discoveries went hand in hand with the construction of modern gender roles for men and women and the suppression of the homoerotic literature and practices. Moreover, the public presence of unveiled women in the male space created sexual anxieties among many men, who turned to religious propaganda and satire to paint her as a prostitute and tool of imperialists. She had to be re-domesticated and revealed in order to preserve the honor of men and the social order. Many liberal, and even leftist men and intellectuals, shared these attitudes with their more religious and conservative colleagues. Women's struggle for equality assumed a secondary role — if any role at all — even among the leftist intellectuals. When the Islamic Republic turned its attention to their domestication and re-veiling, there was hardly any political and intellectual opposition from the right or the left while women had to pay dearly for their “immorality” and straying from the Path of God.

Afary weaves a very interesting and complex argument together that unveils the politics of sexuality in Iran. It is bound to generate a good debate among historians and social scientists. *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* is a welcome addition to the history of women and sexuality in modern Iran.

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