

Women in Iran - Princesses, Suffragists, Writers, Secularists, Islamists, NGO activists: a feminist struggle. An interview with Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud*.

Carmen Rial

Translation from the Portuguese by

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This is a translation of an interview originally published in Portuguese in a Brazilian scientific journal, *Revista Estudos Feministas*, in 2008. The interview was conducted by the Brazilian scholar Carmen Rial with the Iranian feminist Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud, now resident in France. The interview is an account of how feminism has developed over the course of Iranian history, providing an insight into its religious, social, political and historical backgrounds. The current translation is based on a German functionalist methodology with a translation project regarding the target-public. The English version of the text is especially sensitive since the translation into the contemporary global *lingua franca* entails exposing a critique of the Iranian regime and its forms of censorship to a much wider audience. The Portuguese version, on the other hand, does not elicit the same level of concern since the language is considered peripheral in the scientific world. In this sense, the translation was carefully projected to maintain the diplomacy and mutual respect among the cultures involved in this project but, at the same time, remain loyal to the interviewee's discourse. The interviewee was later sent a copy of the translated text in order for her to evaluate the translation of her own discourse prior to its publication. She suggested a few changes to the information found in the Portuguese version. All her suggestions were accepted, taking into account that she would be much more exposed in this English version. This interview provides a clear illustration of the competence of the dialogue between a Brazilian and an Iranian scholar. One of the main objectives was to emphasize the presence of Brazil in the interview and show how a Brazilian feminist establishes and pursues her questions concerning feminism and women's cultural practices. In this interview the reader can observe differences and similarities between the feminist literature and practices found in these two countries, Brazil and Iran.

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Interview

I met Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud¹ through her colleague Jules Falquet at a meeting held to discuss a prospective Agreement between UFSC² and CEDREF, the center that she is currently running. Committed to the issues addressed by the IEG,³ the *REF*⁴ and the PPGICH⁵ area dedicated to Gender Studies, Azadeh accepted my invitation to talk about feminism in Iran, an idea I had proposed at the end of this first meeting. A few days before, in a conversation that unfolded in a room of the auditorium on the *Rue de Tolbiac*, filled with feminists from all kinds of backgrounds, I had briefly talked about a more flexible view of the use of the Islamic veil. This topic was prompted in part by the debate that took place after the lecture given by Paola Bacchetta, from Berkeley; I intended to ensure she was not an isolated voice in that room: despite their numerous differences, aversion to use of the veil under any circumstances and in any place has united French feminists, and French intellectuals in general, for a long time. Azadeh knew what my position was, but I did not know hers. The conversation took place in Paris, at one of the CNRS laboratories at Ivry, in her office, on a June afternoon in 2007.

Carmen Rial: Could you give us a general idea of the most memorable moments in the history of Iran's feminist movement?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: There have been several waves in Iran. The first one, I suppose the most meaningful, occurred in 1905/1906 in the midst of the constitutional revolution in Iran, which was the first country to have a constitutional revolution. Women who were close to Constitutionnalists –their sisters, wives or other relatives– joined together in secret associations and started fighting against the king's absolutism; they were pro-revolution and they were also fighting for their own political rights. In other words, while men were demanding their political rights, these women were also demanding political rights for themselves. In 1906, when the Parliament received a lot of clerics who were elected, many of whom were in favor of constitutional revolution and they believed that Islam was not incompatible with democracy. However when these women demanded political rights, few deputies supported them. The cleric deputies argued that giving political rights to women was contrary to Islam. These women surrounded and occupied the parliament in 1909, demanding political rights,

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²TN[MP]: Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, located in the southern part of Brazil. The interview was conducted in French and was then submitted to two translations: from French into Portuguese by Carmen Rial (CR) and from Portuguese into English by Monique Pfau (MP). Translators' notes are identified with the corresponding initials in square brackets.

³*Instituto de Estudos de Gênero* (Institute for Gender Studies) at UFSC.

⁴TN[MP]: *REF*, published by UFSC, is one of the most important academic feminist journals in Brazil.

⁵*Programa de Pós-Graduação Interdisciplinar em Ciências Humanas* (Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Course in Human Sciences) at UFSC.

but their attempt failed. Sadigeh Dowlatabedi was one of the first feminists. Then newspapers and magazines started to publish articles in favor of the idea of women being educated and the revolution starting at home, indoors. Two magazines were published, *Danesh* in 1908 and *Shekoufihin* in 1911. Realizing that they could not wait for the State to do something, they acted by themselves: they created schools for girls – there were already some girls' schools, but these were founded by American, French and English missionaries and most of their students were Christian. Muslim women from aristocratic families received private tuition at home and women from ordinary backgrounds were illiterate. These feminists created schools and translated different kinds of texts depicting modern image of women; for example, texts explaining notions of hygiene, saying that it would be possible to be a housewife; however, being a good mother requires cleanliness and education.

There was a huge debate about the use of the Islamic veil among feminists from this time onwards. Some were against and some were in favor. I mean, they were not in favor of the veil, but they argued that this was not the main issue and that being a modern woman did not necessarily imply the need to abandon Islamic traditions: in other words, women should not be forbidden to wear their veil. The main demand put forward by these feminists was political rights, meaning the right to vote and to be elected. The right to education had already been established in the 1906 Constitution. Theoretically they had achieved this right, but for financial reasons the State could not actually open schools for girls. However the right existed. On the other hand, they did not achieve any political rights and neither could they change the fact that the Civil Code was enrooted in Islamic law. Equality between women and men was unattainable. However these demands kept returning to political debate, as in the 1940s for example.

In February 1921, the Shah's father took power, a military commander called Reza Khan, who could be described as a modernist but he was also anti-democratic. He implemented a State feminism that granted very few of the feminist demands. However this feminism was in line with State politics. This state feminism was therefore implemented in opposition to women's independent activities. With the Shah's father, then, the independence of the feminist movement was jeopardized, particularly from the 1930s onwards. He forbade the veil in 1936. As a result, a significant proportion of the urban population that had begun to send their daughters to school – with veils because they were also highly religious – was affected, since these women were no longer allowed to attend school.

Carmen Rial: Was the veil forbidden in schools only or in all public places?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Everywhere, even in the streets... It was a very strict ruling, more draconian than in Turkey, even at that time. The veil was banned everywhere. Police officers attacked women for wearing veils and the situation led many religious families, who had previously agreed to send their daughters to be educated, to remove

them from the schools. Logically, this kind of law ended up running counter to feminist demands. On the other hand, there were also people who benefited from these new decisions, but mostly those from the upper classes. Demands from the feminist movement date back to the 1940s, when the Shah's father, who was a dictator well-known for being extremely repressive, was forced to leave Iran by the Allies during the Second World War. From this point on, the feminist movement acquired a new lease of life, a period in which the female cause was revived by political parties, as happened everywhere. After the Shah's departure, many parties – from the left and the right, the center and the nationalists – reorganized themselves, and each of them created their own women's section. Once again the demand for political rights returned, therefore, and this time a law bill was presented to Parliament on women's right to vote and stand for election. However, it once again failed to obtain approval by the deputies because they thought that "it was too early" and that "women should not be given the right to vote," and so on. It was only in 1963 that Iran's Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the same ruler who would be removed from office in 1979 by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, granted political rights to women as part of the White Revolution, as part of a campaign based on agrarian reform and the social and economic modernization of Iran. But since he was another dictator in charge of the country, voting made no sense: the whole political system was closed and the electoral ritual of no interest to the electors. The right to vote therefore reached a moment in which the entire political system was blocked. At the same time, the Shah's sister had created her own women's organization, which also conveyed State feminism while advocating the idea that a woman should be "modern but modest."

Carmen Rial: What was this group called?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: The Iranian Women's Organization (*Sazman-e zanan*). It was an official governmental organization created by Princess Ashraf, the Shah's twin sister, with about 300 branches in different Iranian cities but working only on governmental activities. Even so, the organization was able to introduce law bills to Parliament and to propose some rulings intended to improve the legal status of Iranian women without challenging the State's patriarchal and sexist nature. Then in 1967 the statutory law changed: up to that moment the civil code had been rooted in Islamic law. From that time on, a more progressive view was adopted, albeit still following Islamic concepts, and some rights were granted to women.

Carmen Rial: And who were the leaders of this women's organization?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Princess Ashraf, the Shah's twin sister. There were other women, such as Lady Mahnaz Afkami. The princess headed the Iranian Women's Organization, though Mahnaz Afkami was also one of its directors. In addition there were women senators and deputies, some of whom, like Mehranguiz Dowlatshah and Mehranguiz Manoucherian, played a significant role in the drafting and approval of the 1960s legislation. These new laws achieved a noticeable improvement in the

legal status of Iranian women during the Shah's mandate. Despite being 'State feminists', they tried to introduce improvements to women's legal situation in Iran and they played a key role in 1967 when the family protection law was promulgated.

Carmen Rial: Which rights were granted to women in 1967?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: The new law comprised 23 articles and limited men's unilateral right to polygamy, divorce and child custody, while also guaranteeing women's right to work in some professions, such as the courts and the army, which until then had been limited to men. From this point on, women began to be accepted. The law therefore granted more rights to women. However, all of this took place within a framework of state feminism that impeded women's autonomous and independent activities. These legal changes failed to inspire much enthusiasm among the female population, at least that is my view. There was a social deficit at that moment: most of the Iranian population was rural and most of its women illiterate. The majority of people lived in rural areas; body control was out-of-date, with a high rate of children per women, an average of seven kids. Even so, women were granted some rights – the ones who really used them were those from urban areas, from the upper classes. Most women did not use these rights and did not even know they existed. What I mean to say is that the relevant social identities did not really exist at that time, even among those who stood to benefit from these legal changes. There were no demands specific to women, which partly explains why they joined the Islamic movement during the Revolutionary period in 1979. There were some women who demonstrated in the streets without making specific demands for themselves. They shared the general demands and therefore some of them – not all of them – agreed to wear the Islamic veil, even those who were not Muslims, and including many who were secular.

Carmen Rial: Was the veil worn as a political symbol, then, as a symbol of support for the Revolution?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Most definitely. It was a symbol protesting against the Shah and against United States domination. But in time the same veil became a strong symbol of the regime's exclusion of women. After the Revolution, these secular women would say: "We do not agree, we do not want to wear the veil, we do not want Islamic laws." So they were pushed aside, they were excluded. What I am trying to explain here is that the women's movement started in Iran in 1905, but during this early phase it was mostly an upper class movement, aristocratic sometimes, and that after this first period, in the 1950s, it was followed by a series of ups and downs. Then the coup d'état occurred in 1953, a coup organized by CIA against the democratically elected prime minister, Mohamed Mossadeq, the same man who, as a deputy in 1946, had presented a law bill to establish political rights for women, but which had been rejected by the Parliament. This coup d'état also damaged women's right and it was only in the democratic period, the period of freedoms, that feminists were able to unite again and revive their demands for political, social and civil rights. Afterwards, from

the 1960s onwards, women were once again marginalized and state feminism, from the Shah, took over once again. Some real improvements were made: the legal status of women was improved, but their independent activities were curbed.

Carmen Rial: So the second moment was state feminism. Can we compare the first moment to something like the suffragette movement seen in other parts of the world?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Definitely. I myself relate it to suffrages. From the beginning of the 20th century suffragists would meet in associations and they also ran a magazine, *Zabane Zanane* (Women's Language) from 1919. A number of other women's magazines were also published during this period: *Alame nesvan* (Women's Universe), *Nameh-ve banavan* (Women's Letter) from 1921, and *Peyk-e As'adat-e nesvan* (Women's Messenger of Voice) from 1928. Among the women identified as the leaders of the feminist movement, I can cite Sadigeh Dowlatabi, who was one of the first feminists to demand political rights for women in the 1910s and 20s. Also Shahnaz Azad, who was against the veil in the 1920s and 30s, and was nearly arrested. There was also a princess, Tajo l-Salteneh, from the previous dynasty, who was opposed to the veil around the 1910s.

Carmen Rial: And what has been happening today, after the Revolution?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: It has been argued that, somewhat paradoxically, the post-Revolution period has been dominated by an anti-feminist regime that imposes the veil and Islamic law, which is against women, imposing Sharia. However various modernization policies have also been introduced that have helped bring improvements to the country's rural areas. Among Iranian women, 80% are now literate. The rate of children per woman has decreased: before the Revolution it was seven and now for the number has fallen to two. Most academic students are women and the percentage of women working outside the home has gone up— indeed women have been forced to obtain paid work because of the harsh economic situation in the country. Student and non-student women need to work outside the home, though most of their jobs are in the informal sector. Nonetheless they obtain an income and their capacity to spend this money allows them greater independence from their husbands. It also affords them more authority within their families. In this sense, I believe the most noticeable change, compared with the various feminist movements prior to the Revolution – whose main agents had been secular women from the upper class with a few exceptions – is that the main agents after the Revolution were the Islamic women: the same women who had sometimes campaigned for the application of Sharia law, who had worn long black veils, the *chador*, who had joined Khomeini's Islamic movement and then, after the Revolution, who had gradually understood that the situation was harmful to all women. So after the Revolution and in particular after the war against Iraq (which started one year after the Revolution and lasted eight years; these women were very active in their support of the government during this time), these women noticed that the situation of women in general was deteriorating

severely in many areas, including the social and legal sectors, and that specific policies were therefore needed for women. They gradually started to question this interpretation of the Quran – a very masculine interpretation, I would say – especially after the 1990s. As they were from religious families, some of them educated in a religious way, they started to campaign for women’s rights through a reinterpretation of the Quran and the Islamic tradition. They argued that “according to the Quran, women and men are equals” and from this moment on referred to themselves as “Islamic feminists”: they believe that Islam does not present any kind of incompatibility with feminism, from a viewpoint of equal rights, obviously. From this time on, they have been fighting for equality. They publish women’s magazines and journals and these are usually of very high quality.

Carmen Rial: Could you list some of these?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes, *Zanan*, for example, which in Persian means ‘women.’ It launched in 1992 and from its very first issues featured articles showing that the Quran does not forbid women from writing religious edicts. This implies that women can assume religious, juridical and political roles in Iranian society. There is also a more academic journal called *Farsaneh*, meaning “Wise woman”, which presents an egalitarian interpretation of the Quran. It publishes articles by Iranian women living abroad as part of the Diaspora and is aimed primarily towards educated women, students and the like. In fact there are many such journals: *Zan-e Rouz* (Today’s Woman), which is targeted at less educated and non-feminist women, even though it is noticeable that it too works for an improvement in women’s situations through a reinterpretation of Islamic law. So from the 1980s onwards these feminists became increasingly active and the questions they raised forced the mullahs –the “religious men with turbans” –to launch a journal intended to answer their doubts. Since 1993, therefore, the Religious School in Iran, an institution comparable to the Vatican, has published a journal called *Payam-e Hajar* (The Women’s Message), which is exclusively directed towards men. In contrast to the other feminist magazines I have mentioned, all of which were founded and run by women, this journalism published by men as a forum for the ayatollahs to propose solutions to questions raised by women. For example, there are women (who are religious: its public is composed of very traditional religious families) who write asking questions and, at the same time, describe the difficult situations they have experienced as women. This journal has refuted the legalization of polygamy through a new interpretation of the verse *Al Nesa* (The Women). They have started to reorganize themselves, which I consider to be a rare and very interesting experience compared to other Islamic countries, in which Islamic feminists have asked secular women– who have been marginalized– to work with them, putting aside their differences and distinct points of view in the belief that they can work together. This is the view of the *Zanan* journal’s editor-in-chef, for instance. Thus from the 1990s both secular and Islamic women started to realize that as women, despite their different points of view, they share the same problems: they are oppressed. So they can cooperate with each other. Of course, Islamic women have been using the

experience of secular women a lot, since the latter possessed the collective memory of a feminist movement, while the Islamic women did had no prior knowledge of this kind of engagement. All of them, secular and Islamic alike, have increasingly referred to this collective memory, highlighting the existence of a feminist movement that has been around for a hundred years in Iran and posing the question of why, even after a hundred years, we have yet to develop.

Carmen Rial: How would you describe the current phase of the feminist movement in Iran?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: From the second half of the 1990s, numerous NGOs were created. In Iran, as elsewhere in the world, NGOs have sprung up: NGOs forewomen, lay people, independent of political parties because political parties in Iran need to be Islamic by law. The feminist movement – I should say, feminist movements: we need to use the plural form – have worked within this NGO framework. In the current circumstances, NGOs in Iran have looked to work both with women and for women. They have also been expanding: NGOs of lay feminist women and also of Islamic feminist women. It is interesting to note that this NGO phase of the feminist movement has generated a particular appeal among younger women. Numerous students have become feminists because of these non-governmental organizations.

Carmen Rial: These NGOs have focused on what kind of social work?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: The first environmentalist NGO was created by women and it is highly effective considering the limitations imposed. It mobilizes students to demonstrate in support of reducing car traffic on the streets, controlling pollution and so on. However there are also other NGOs that work specifically for women, for poor women, for example, such as allowing them access to microcredit, etc. Other NGOs help women with legal problems. There are others campaign to change Islamic laws through women's mobilization. A large number of such NGOs exist, therefore. They have begun work in various areas and above all they have started to be on the side of women. In Iran, as in other parts of the world, feminist movements were largely confined to the middle classes. They have recently realized, though, that in order to be effective, in order to change things, they need to approach women from other social classes too. In 2006 they began a campaign called "One million signatures" that aims to change prejudicial laws. They have been to different cities to collect signatures – though not yet in rural areas (2007) – where they have discussed these issues with non-feminist women dissatisfied with their situation, explaining and persuading them to sign the petition. There are other kinds of campaigns, like the one opposing all kinds of violence against women, another against segregation, or one recruiting new activists, and so on. This is the new trend being followed by feminism in Iran, the moment of the NGOs, which are attracting much younger feminists, women born after the Revolution, which was already about 20 years ago. These young women are students and are less attracted by the movement. However they logically join other women who have been working with the movement for longer and then they can start to question

sexual and gender relations. Although this is clearly a heterosexual movement there is also a homosexual movement in Iran.

Carmen Rial: So we have the first moment, which is the suffragist one; the second moment, which we can call State feminism; and this third moment, which is that of the NGOs. Was the right of universal suffrage maintained by the Revolution?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes, women who were granted political rights in 1963 did not lose them in the Revolution. They vote and they can be elected. There are few female politicians, though: only 5% of Parliamentary members are women. But they have always been there. Their political right was never questioned. On the contrary, it was their civil right that was questioned: Islamic law grants many more rights to men than women. And this is the private scope that nowadays feminists are looking for as for example, campaigning for a million signatures. Women, for instance, have the right to get divorced; however, it is extremely difficult for a woman to obtain the divorce herself.

Carmen Rial: What about repudiation? The Quran does not say anything about a married woman who states three times that she no longer wants to be married in front of an eye-witness constituting a divorce, does it?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: No, not at all. All kinds of divorce are judicial in Iran; there is no such thing as repudiation. You can find repudiation in Algeria, for example. Even there, though, women do not have this right, only men. Women do not have the right of repudiation even among Shiites or Sunnites. Men do have this right in some places, but not in Iran where all divorces are judicial. Therefore those wishing to divorce must apply to a court and go before a judge. In Iran a man can go to court and simply say that he wishes to divorce his wife, with no special reason and this is perfectly acceptable since, according to the civil code, men have a unilateral right to divorce. Women, on the other hand, have the right to get divorced, but only under certain conditions. For example, if the husband smacks the wife; if there is any kind of bad treatment; if he is sick with a terminal disease; if he is sexually impotent; if he has been in jail for five years; or if he has been absent from home for four years. Under such circumstances, a woman may try to get divorced. Nonetheless it is very difficult. Even if she has been a victim of her husband's violence, she needs to obtain testimony from a legal doctor, she needs to have eyewitnesses and, even then, she may be unable to obtain her divorce. This is one of the key demands made by feminists.

Carmen Rial: Does this apply to secular feminists as well as for Islamic ones?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes. To both of them. And 'Islamic' between inverted commas, because they are much more feminist than Islamic, in my opinion. Why do I distinguish them as secular and Islamic? The women I call Islamic are those who still find reference points in the Quran and still believe that its traditions can be reinterpreted. Secular women are those who adhere to international conventions and

human rights and who make no reference to Islam. Since Iran is a signatory to many conventions, they argue that these must be respected and that, according to these conventions, men and women are equals. As these two groups of women work together a lot, they influence each other reciprocally. It is impossible to say that someone is entirely secular or entirely Islamic.

Carmen Rial: Are there differences in their social origin and cultural capital, though?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes, in terms of social origins Islamic women are from lower classes and usually a lot less educated. This stems from the fact that during the Shah's rule, even though the veil was not forbidden, they did not wear them – I myself, for instance, would go to the university during the Shah's reign and would rarely see women wearing veils. It was not forbidden but even so they did not wear them. Extremely religious families did not put their daughters in secular schools but in religious ones. However women working for public bodies could not wear the veil. In this sense, those women who came from traditional families were actually underprivileged and lacked the same level of education as those from secular and less traditional families. At first, therefore, there was a huge difference in terms of social class, educational level and other variables. Today these differences no longer exist. After the Revolution some of these women began to attend university. Later secular women were pushed out from the workplace and university, replaced by Islamic women. Hence Islamic women have guaranteed their social mobility and progress in the sense that they are literate and have jobs, meaning that today you can no longer talk about significant differences, neither in terms of cultural capital or in terms of social capital.

Carmen Rial: What are the other main issues concerning feminism in Iran? Is abortion among them?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Abortion is a serious issue. First of all, I should point out that contraceptive pills are freely distributed in Iran and abortion is legal for a married woman, as long as her husband gives his permission and a doctor ascertains that her pregnancy is high risk. However this is just a formality. If her husband agrees, a married woman can easily obtain an abortion. Abortion for a single woman, on the other hand, is forbidden, though it is still undertaken clandestinely. Parliament has actually discussed the issue and the law has been improved a little. Proponents of the amendments argued that abortion had to be made easier for married women. Abortion, however, is religiously forbidden. Women know that it exists, but it remains illegal. Nonetheless for young single women, it is not part of the list of feminist priorities in contemporary Iran. Their priorities are the civil and penal codes. In the latter case, the Islamic penal code, the concept of blood price (*diyeh*) stipulates that a woman's life is worth only half that of a man's. Feminists have been fighting this law for many years in order to obtain the right for women's lives to be recognized to have the same value as men's. In terms of the civil code, these women have been fighting for equality of rights between men and women, and the raising of the minimum age for a girl to get married. Before the Revolution, the

minimum age was 18 and afterwards it was reduced to 9 – a nine year-old girl could get married! After many protests, they raised this minimum age to 13 years old. There are so many striking contradictions between current Islamic law and the contemporary reality in Iran. The average age of a girl getting married in Iran is around 23 years old. The question, then, is why 13 years old?

Carmen Rial: Even in rural areas...

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Even in rural areas. It depends on the rural area concerned, of course, but the national average in rural areas is 19 or 20 years old. In the cities women get married much later. Moreover the celibacy rate in Iran has increased considerably. Women are not getting married. Marriage has been happening less and less often. The reasons vary: sometimes they may be economic in kind, or because the women have achieved higher educational levels, or even because they have been unable to find a suitable husband. I myself belong to a group that campaigns to stop the stoning of women. The law exists in fact: unfaithful women can be stoned as punishment and not long ago we had such a case.

Carmen Rial: Is stoning of women rare?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Cases are rare, but they do still occur. We have been campaigning for the practice to be abolished from the legal framework. People claim that no stoning has happened since 2003. However we know through a network of lawyers in Iran that these stoning practices happen across the country and we have applied for it to be legally abolished.

Carmen Rial: As far as I understand, feminists today are demanding the establishment of actual social practices in the legislation, am I right?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Exactly, that is correct. In a country where most students are women, where women are found everywhere as lawyers, physicians, judges (like Charin Ebadi, who received the Nobel prize for peace, and who was one of the first female judges in Iran) it is no longer possible to rule that a woman's life is worth half that of a man's. This makes no sense.

Carmen Rial: What about female judges, do they also enforce this law?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes. In Islam each part of the body has a determined value, for example. If there is a car accident, if a man is knocked down and his leg injured, his leg is worth twice as much as a woman's leg were she to be knocked down. This law is applied every time there is an accident, when someone is killed, in daily life. This is a very important demand, therefore. As you have said, these are not revolutionary demands directly related to existing power relations. At the moment, we have already been through a liberal feminist framework. It is all about obtaining equal rights. We are

not living through an openly declared feminist framework right now – I mean nothing that can be clearly seen in public, a movement that contests existing power relations. However it is noticeable that these feminists, specially the younger ones, have become more and more radical over time. At the outset they had hopes of achieving a closer working relationship with the government through lobbying, but as they have become increasingly disappointed, they have turned to street demonstrations, seeking to change the state of affairs through civil disobedience. However, I do not myself think that this is the most efficient way because fear should not be incited.

Carmen Rial: Fear of the ayatollahs?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: No, not fear of the ayatollahs, fear of other women. Other women are still not ready for direct confrontation with those in power. Nevertheless, my own research in Iran has shown that all women have been looking to change their living conditions over the last 15 years, even those in rural areas, but they do not feel empowered enough to confront the authorities.

Carmen Rial: What are the relations like between feminists in the Muslim universe, then?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Paradoxically, not many relations are constructed with other women in the region. Iranian feminists look to debate with the Western world. There are a lot of translated articles by French and American feminists in the journals. Issues of interest to Iranian feminists intersect with feminist debates in the West. Contradictorily, there are few relations with women in the region, with Pakistanis, Arabs and Turks, for example.

Carmen Rial: So most feminists organize their workaround journals and NGOs. What are the polemical issues that split these different groups?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Tactical issues. On this aspect they are heavily divided. For example, some feminists, those linked to the journals *Zanan*, *Farzaneh*, *Payam-e Hajar* and *Zan-e Rouz*, are opposed to confrontation and say that “the gradual work that has been done over the last 15 years must be maintained”, and that “street demonstrations should not be encouraged” as “the costs of demonstrations are very high”.

Carmen Rial: Are demonstrations forbidden?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Legally speaking, demonstrations are not forbidden. But when a demonstration takes place, the police come and hit the demonstrators. Nowadays, there are even police women who are sent every time there is a women’s demonstration and they hit the women even harder than the men do. This is quite interesting. The situation has also worsened. Until 2004 the Islamic women in Parliament were feminists, they worked to introduce legal and practical improvements. The new Parliament is very traditional, though, and out of 13 female deputies, 11 are

anti-feminist. The very first thing they did when elected was to support Iran's refusal to sign the convention against any kind of segregation of women. They claim that women do not wear the veil properly and therefore must be repressed. One of these deputies even said that polygamy is a good thing. These deputies, who I label anti-feminists, are now in power, in the government and in Parliament. Consequently the Iranian feminist movement is going through a very difficult moment. Prior to 2004 it was supported in the Parliament in some fashion by the reformists, but nowadays they do not have any kind of support. It is a really hard moment. They are repressed every time they try to demonstrate or make demands. In relation to the question of what splits them: tactics is one such motive. However on other issues, such as the one million signature campaign, for instance, there is no division at all: they work together, Islamic and secular women. Or again in the campaigns to stop violence against women, there is no clear distinction. We can say that Islamic women think that it is possible to achieve equality within Islam. On the other hand, secular women think that this is impossible and that they should therefore abandon this religious framework. This is the point where they divide. Despite the absence of true equality in Iran, this division has not become a barrier to their collaboration, which means they can work together.

Carmen Rial: Why only a million signatures? For the Iranian population, this number is very small, right?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Iran has 70 million inhabitants. One million will open up some space. Having one million women's signatures will be considered a good number symbolically. But even if you have 10 million signatures, under this Parliament and this government, nothing will change. The existence of these anti-feminists in power means there is no real prospect of change. One positive aspect, though, is that feminists have finally realized that this debate is not particularly useful if it remains confined to themselves, which means only a few thousand active feminists. So they have decided to broaden the debate to include all women. In my opinion, this is a positive aspect of this campaign.

Carmen Rial: What influences do American and French feminists have on the movement? Can we speak of Gender Studies in Iran?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: French is not as widely spoken among Iranians as it used to be. English replaced French from the 1950s onwards. French used to be the second language, but today English tends to be spoken more by young people. This means that English is taught at the universities, schools and madrassas.⁶ It also means that the Anglophone feminist literature is much more accessible than its Francophone counterpart. Everything published as feminist literature in Iran comes from the USA. There is also some input from England, but it mainly comes from the USA. They, like the Americans, reproduce the use of the term 'French Feminism', a term which is not

⁶TN[CR]: Islamic religious schools.

understood as feminism in France at all. However that is what is taught in Iran about feminism in France: authors like Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva. In fact, feminism is imported from North America. It is studied American theory; they translate articles from American feminists and publish articles from Iranian feminists who are working in the USA. They interact with this literature and produce their work along the same lines. Elizabeth Badinter is one of the only French feminists who is increasingly translated in Iran. She is translated by the secular universalists who broke with Islam and are opposed to particularisms: they are strongly pro-West and take western feminism as their main reference point (which is a mistake since, in fact, there is no such thing as a western feminism). So, they translate Badinter. But the fact that she is published does not mean she is well known. If you ask them about Badinter, you discover that they do not actually know her work.

Carmen Rial: Could you mention any particular work from Badinter? Her book on maternity has been very successful in Brazil.

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaut: Not really, above all, her criticisms about particularism are retaken in Iran. Women's Studies are predominant in the departments, not Feminist Studies or Gender Studies. It all depends on the period. There have been moments when teachers have been able to teach from more radical feminist texts and other moments when they have needed to tread more carefully. Currently we are going through a period in which we have to be more careful. Basically there is nothing in terms of 'queer' theory – as far as I know, it is unknown in Iran. Studies are mainly focused on family sociology, that is, the woman performing her role as a mother and wife.

Carmen Rial: What about the homosexual movement?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaut: Homosexuality is forbidden in Iran, nobody is allowed to say that they are gay or lesbian. The law stipulates capital punishment.

Carmen Rial: So, there is equality in this sense?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaut: Yes, there is equality. However, it needs to be remembered that in Iran, as in other countries, lesbians are less repressed or even left alone. This is because they are more invisible and also because there is a specific verse in the Quran about homosexual men and nothing about homosexual women.

Carmen Rial: Because "women do not have sex..."

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaut: Yes, as you have said. Hence they are not repressed. There are no cases of lesbians being executed, but at the start of the post-Revolution period there were some cases of homosexual men being executed because of their sexual practices. They can live as long as they keep themselves hidden.

Carmen Rial: Are there meeting places, like bars?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes, there are trendy parks and cafes which are rendezvous for homosexuals and other places where lesbians meet. People know about them. They meet at these venues. There are also transvestites who are not accepted while transgender people are. Surgeries are legal. This issue was resolved some years ago for the simple reason that only two genders are logically recognized to be linked to sex: male and female. Since being both at once is impossible, people must be helped to be just one of them. Hence the surgery is legal and is practiced. A person can also get married after changing their sex.

Carmen Rial: Is this socially accepted?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: No, but this has started to become part of accepted custom, since the law allows sex change operations to be performed. So the families involved have started to accept the practice and it is now a matter of time before it becomes socially accepted. What I mean is that feminists in Iran have no knowledge about 'queer' theory nor do they campaign for lesbian and homosexual rights. There is no such thing. There are no magazines on these subjects, whether academic or otherwise. Conferences are not allowed to address these issues, while women's rights can be discussed.

Carmen Rial: Are there lesbians among the feminist groups?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes, but they do not join these groups as lesbians, only as feminists. They work as activists with the other feminists. They do not make specific demands for lesbians: were they to do so, they would be immediately repressed. Even feminists campaigning for women's rights have been increasingly repressed. Can you imagine if they were to demand lesbian or homosexual rights? We always have to keep in mind that Iran is living under a very repressive regime.

Carmen Rial: Is there censorship?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes, there are rules concerning it everywhere. The situation became much worse, especially after 2005. Some books that used to be published were barred from being republished in new editions. Several women's magazines, feminist websites and women-oriented NGOs were closed down and activists were arrested and imprisoned.

Carmen Rial: Do publications need authorization?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes. Every book, journal, magazine or newspaper published in Iran must be authorized by the Ministry of Islamic Guidance.⁷ This means they read

⁷TN[MP]: The term has been translated from the French *Ministère de la Guidance Islamique* as the interview was originally conducted in French.

everything. There are about 10,000 forbidden titles today in Iran. So imagine writing about lesbianism or homosexuality. Not only will the book not be published, you will be arrested as a propagator. Whenever homosexual citizens are visibly noticed, they are arrested. But there are in fact lesbians and homosexuals and they do try to lead a normal life. We have not started translating queer theory, we have not even started talking about it. We are still limited to issues that directly affect most Iranian women.

Carmen Rial: Are there any other influential feminist scholars you could mention? Is Joan Scott well-known?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: No, Joan Scott is not known. Perhaps it is a question of proposing a translation and confronting the censorship problem. I have some friends who are feminists and have publishing houses. They used to translate and publish various feminist books, but they no longer do so because of the censorship issues. A translation of a feminist author who questions male domination and the social relationship between both sexes⁸ will not be published. This is one of the main reasons. Furthermore books are very expensive in Iran. Hence there is no easy access to this literature.

Carmen Rial: What about the internet? Iran is a very computerized country.

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes, it is quite computerized, even though it is hard to make purchases through the internet in Iran. For those who have access, things are easier, but books are already expensive in France and the rest of Europe, imagine the cost for an Iranian university student... Their income does not stretch that far. Occasionally Iranians university colleagues ask me for books and I send them but there is no way to do this systematically. For women, especially feminists, access is very restricted. Secular feminists, for instance, had the idea some years ago of opening a library for women. They had created a cultural center and had asked for books to be sent from other countries by people able to do so and also asked for their help to buy them. Afterwards they were accused of trying to organize a book revolution, introducing a subversive western literature. NGOs in Iran have no legal right to receive funding from abroad. Although there are some projects for feminist libraries, these are not implemented due to a lack of funding.

Carmen Rial: Is internet access censored? Judith Butler's articles are on-line...

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes, there is censorship on the internet, people cannot reach sites like Amazon, for example. These articles are accessible but you need to be aware of Judith Butler's work in order to access them. I cannot say they are not accessed, they are, but only a little. I talk about authors we read and they are neither translated nor published, which means they are not part of the reading required at the universities. Feminine Studies

⁸“Social relationship between the sexes” is virtually a definition of the term ‘gender.’

are not therefore informed by the current western debate, which is completely understandable. The history of Feminine Studies is very recent and not all university departments offer such courses. On the contrary, they only exist in a few universities.

Carmen Rial: Are they linked to Social Science centers?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes, they are. There are women professors in Demography, History, Sociology and Anthropology who also teach in these departments, but the interesting thing is that they obtain the title of Doctor in Feminine Studies. However this is a recent phenomenon. I have joined the editorial board of *the Women's Studies* magazine ('the' because it is the only one) of Tehran University, for example, because you can find space there for this kind of work, even though most articles are based on fieldwork. The magazine is linked to Tehran University and it is not possible to publish disturbing ideas there in any shape or form. The woman who was responsible for this publication experienced a number of problems and was forced to resign. We are going through a very difficult period. These women have been let down. They have observed that the lobby linked to the government has failed to conquer anything and, paradoxically, these women have become more active, demanding more, taking more risks, demonstrating in the parks and on the streets, and campaigning for other women. At the same time there are various female authors, novelists and writers who have kept on writing and call themselves feminists. A lot of feminists are writers.

Carmen Rial: Feminism through metaphors.

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Exactly. Nowadays, because of censorship, feminism is pursued through metaphors, although from 1997 to 2003 there was a period when they could write a lot. Currently, they only write about women: they are the main characters with their own problems and their own forms of resistance. They write not only about women's problems, but also how they fight, how they resist and how they classify the power relations. There are also female theatre and film directors.

Carmen Rial: Could you mention some of them?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes, I can mention a few because in a recent article I published, I talk about how the number of non-governmental organizations has increased ten-fold over the last few years: there were 54 in 1995 and today they are 600. There are writers like Goli Taraqi and Shahrnough Parsipour. They live in the USA today. Both have been writing and publishing since the end of the 1970s and both are still active. They are very popular among women. Shahrnough also wrote a book entitled *Women without Men*. Right after them comes a younger generation of feminists, but with different tendencies. Zoya Pirzad, who has recently been translated into French, is someone who adopts a very subtle approach in her novels. On the other hand, there is Fariba Vafi, a secular feminist but well received. Qazaleh Alizadeh (who died in 1996), Shahrnough and Monirou Ravanipour. Mahsa Moheb-ali has also done

several disclosures: she is more objective and more demanding. She is far younger too – radicalism does not just depend on the generation, but also the approach adopted.

Carmen Rial: Do they all claim to be feminists?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: No, not all of them. Mahsa Moheb-ali calls herself a feminist, as does Lili Farhadpour (she was arrested and imprisoned following the contested June 2009 presidential elections). They are well-known feminists, but not necessarily the others. It depends.

Carmen Rial: Can we find leaders outside of this pool of writers today?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: No. I am not sure if you are aware of the women's movements in Tunisia and Egypt. In Tunisia, for example, there was a man called Taher Haddad, who is considered the 'father of feminism' by many people – not me, though. I reject the idea of a man being a leader of feminism. However, many Tunisians, women and men, are proud of Taher Haddad and do consider him the father of feminism, which is a somewhat contradictory idea for me. In Egypt, too. Qasin Amin, another reformist, is likewise known as a 'father of feminism.' There was no 'father' in Iran, though. From the beginning, Iranian feminists were women and the debate was among themselves. There were also some men who joined the debate, but there was no leader, no father of feminism, and as a result there is no equivalent icon in contemporary Iran. There is also Huda Shaarawi in Egypt: a woman who was an icon of Egyptian feminism since the 1920s. But not in Iran, there were always too many women. Taj al-Saltaneh was a princess, she was opposed to use of the veil and the veil was a topic of debate in the 1910s. Even today, there is no leader for feminism in Iran and I must say: thank God, because this helps to maintain the movement's autonomy and independence. Otherwise it could easily be taken over by political parties, something that has happened in other places.

Carmen Rial: Do men join the movement nowadays? Is there any support for it in the Parliament?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: There are men joining the movement, actually. Not in the Parliament, though. There were one or two men in the previous Parliament who were reformists and used to help advance the feminist cause by supporting their demands. Today there are some men outside of Parliament too. For example, when feminists decided to demonstrate in the streets, some of these men – like an ex-deputy and some students – have supported them and for this reason they have been arrested. Some contemporary feminists have taken Olympe de Gouges, who wrote the *Letter on Women's Rights* during the French Revolution, as a representative feminist and are writing the *Letter on Women's Rights in Iran*. Some men are helping in its production. Yes, there are some men and this is a very recent situation, which personally makes me suspicious. The only resistance movement in Iran today is the feminist one, it has

shaken the country a lot through its demonstrations and the movement is well known. So I ask myself whether these men, considering they are politicians, are not trying to take advantage of the feminist cause for political reasons. I am particularly against men being involved in writing this text for women's rights, I do not think it makes any sense. They definitely can join the movement, but not write for it. Indeed I am not in favor of the idea of them being with these women. However to answer your question, there are some men.

Carmen Rial: Women had an important role in the previous government of Mohammad Khatami.

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Definitely. That is what I mean. They provided considerable support to the reformist president Mohammad Khatami. They voted for him in 1997 and were also highly active in the Parliament elections from 2000 to 2004. Anyway, they became disappointed because nearly nothing changed. Khatami let them down by refusing to name more than two female ministers in his government. The first, Zahra Shoja'i, his counselor for women's issues and president of the Women's Participation Centre; the second, Ma'soumeh Ebtekar, vice-president and also the minister responsible for Environmental Protection. From that point on, they realized that they could not count on Parliament and they began to set up various NGOs, believing that things could only be changed through a 'grass root' movement, I mean, a social movement, rather than from lobbying.

Carmen Rial: What about Simone de Beauvoir, is she known in Iran?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes, she has been translated. The first secular feminist journal in Iran to obtain authorization for publishing her work in 1998 is called *Jens-e Dovom*, which in English means 'The Second Sex,' ruby Nouchine Ahmadi-Khorasani. Unlike Islamic journals, *Jens-e Dovom* focuses specifically on western references, which shows its importance. Someone like Marguerite Duras has had all her work translated into Persian.

Carmen Rial: What about Michel Foucault?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes but not entirely. His writings on the Iranian Revolution were immediately translated because he had supported it, but *The History of Sexuality* has not been translated. Only those titles that have not been considered problematic by the current regime. In the past various French, German and North American philosophers dialogued with intellectuals in Iran. Women did not participate, though. Because wearing veil is mandatory in Iran and western feminists refuse to wear it. This has been an enormous barrier to dialogue. For example, I have received requests from Iranian feminists wishing to invite French intellectuals and American and French feminists. I said that I was very sorry but they probably would not go, they would not accept demands like wearing a veil.

Carmen Rial: What do you think about that stance? This hinders dialogue, right?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes, of course. Feminist women in Iran seek to establish dialogue, and since they cannot go abroad, the only option is for westerners to visit Iran. Thousands of people travelling to the West would be impossible, but dozens of western people could be invited to go to Iran. They should accept the few invitations that are allowed in Iran. This barrier needs to be overcome because many Iranian feminists do not want to wear the veil either, but they are forced to wear it. By refusing to go, westerners are effectively denying the existence and importance of all the work done there. I would particularly like this dialogue to happen, even though I am aware of the difficulties involved. For instance, when a leader from the UN Commission on Human Rights needed to go to Iran to talk about human rights, which was a very positive fact, she was obliged to wear a veil, a very symbolic veil, I must say, but a veil, anyway. She was severely criticized by western feminists who demanded to know how she had dared to visit Iran and wear a veil. So what western feminist would agree to wear the veil? She will be fated to be included in the 'index' by the others.

Carmen Rial: That is just foolish. I myself have already worn the veil in some more traditional places in Tunisia, for example – and it was a way of making myself less visible. There are also many ways of wearing the veil.

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: In Iran, it is not an option and even foreign women have to wear it.

Carmen Rial: But there are several ways of wearing the veil...

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes, of course. Today young girls wear headscarves, which mean something very symbolic. Although, for French feminists... well, we know what they think about it, and this prevents any straightforward dialogue. Logically, whenever demonstrations or any kind of movements take place in Iran, some feminists support them. Recently, for example, in a case of a woman being stoned, I informed them of the incident and sent petitions. French and American feminists readily support such demands. Support like that is common, like Badinter, for example. But they do not go there. On the other hand, men do go. Lots of French, German and American philosophers have been to Iran. Habermas was there some years ago and he was really impressed by Iranians. Richard Rorty, another one, who has recently died but was one of the leading North American philosophers, went there and wrote about it. Paul Ricoeur has also been there. All of them were impressed, because Iran does have intellectuals well versed in the contemporary debate. Students able to read in English know them. Habermas said he had not known he was so well-known and well-read in Iran. I do think that French, British and other feminists would have a pleasant surprise to find out that they are known, that they are read, that there is a debate, and that their studies – especially those who write in English – are translated. There are several well-known books on the feminist movement translated into Persian which formed

encyclopedias. Christine Delphy has not been translated, for example. However, you can always find a paragraph about her in these encyclopedias.

Carmen Rial: Is Michelle Perrot known?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: No. I mean, she is known through these encyclopedias, but her books have not been translated. All the women who work at these Women's Studies departments in Iran speak English because they have studied in the United States; there is one who has studied in Austria.

Carmen Rial: Are there a large number of students who study abroad nowadays?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes, many of these students study abroad and come back to Iran afterwards. Some do not come back, it depends. There are students in France, England and many other places.

Carmen Rial: Are their studies sponsored by a government scholarship?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: No, they need to have their own resources. Anyway, a young girl cannot go to another country on her own, she must be married or be accompanied by her family. Nor can she receive a scholarship if she is by herself. Men can. However, scholarships are not given to those who are not in power. They are carefully selected: the students who obtain scholarship are pro-regime.

Carmen Rial: I have a last question: *Persepolis*,⁹ the comic book and now a film, which received an award at Cannes 2007, had a huge repercussion in the West. Do you believe the future of Iran can be discussed through its telling of recent Iranian history from a girl's viewpoint?

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Well, first of all I should say that I was very surprised to discover that Iranians did not know *Persepolis*. It is a well-known book in France and the United States. The author, Marjane Satrapi, was not known in Iran, apart from a few people. She is primarily known in France and in the West. However, the Iranian government officially protested against the award and this news was published in the Iranian newspapers. And since Iranians do read newspapers, they learned that there is a film entitled *Persepolis*, which came after Marjane Satrapi's comics. However, we must remember that the story concerns a particular kind of Iranian youth. It is not in any sense a universal story. She is a young girl brought up in a westernized family, from a determined background that cannot be reduced to general characteristics. The film is about to be shown in France,¹⁰ so we will see what repercussions it has. In Iran such films tend to circulate more easily than in France. I have seen American films in

⁹TN[CR]: *Persepolis* was considered the best comic in 2004 by the Frankfurt Book Fair.

¹⁰TN[MP]: The film was due to be released at the time of this interview back in 2007.

Iran that were no longer released in France; they arrived in Iran via illegal DVDs since the films are forbidden. I imagine that *Persepolis* will soon be available on this clandestine market: people will definitely see it and I shall ask their opinion and what they think about Marjane Satrapi's film when I go to Iran next time. I know Marjane Sartrapi personally. I have not seen the film yet, but I can imagine it tells other own experiences, her misfortunes and the things that have happened to her.¹¹ But again, we cannot generalize because the film has been built around the veil. The veil was not wanted by the author at all, as well as by myself and other young girls from the same environment; we were part of the westernized elite. When I left Iran in 1980, the veil was still not mandatory for all women. I had never worn the veil because my family was originally secular and my father was completely opposed to the veil. He hated it. My mother did not wear a veil, nor anybody else from our circle of friends. Thus, I left Iran with no veil and spent 14 years in exile. In 1994, after finishing my studies, I decided to go back to Iran in order to re-start my fieldwork. I needed an Iranian passport and a photo wearing the veil was required. I could not do it. For one month – and I am not exaggerating—I had a veil in my purse and walked past *photometers*¹² and photography stores. I would stop but I could not put the veil on, even for a simple photograph. My parents, my mum called me and asked if I had already obtained the passport. So I told her that I could not put the veil on. She finally asked me what my thoughts were on its use. She said that even when forced to wear the veil in Iran, it did not mean that women were submissive. She tried to persuade me by saying that I should go to Iran and see with my own eyes, it would be worth it. She convinced me, and for this reason, to see with my own eyes, I finally accepted the idea of taking my photograph in a veil and wearing one in Iran. I tell this story because I wish to state that I am against the veil, against its compulsory use. Marjane Sartrapi is also against the veil but because of the veil there are many women from traditional families in Iran that were able to attend university and go to work after the Revolution. This means that for them the veil symbolizes a form of emancipation.

Carmen Rial: It allowed them to enter public space.

Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud: Yes, it provides access to public space. For us, the veil meant we were excluded and Marjane Sartrapi talks about these women. I was one of them. However, as a sociologist, I am able to see that we were the minority and most women were part of the group who obtained a degree of emancipation, went to university and gained access to public spaces precisely because the veil became compulsory. This is why western feminists should accept it.

¹¹TN[MP]: The film has been released and matches Azadeh's suppositions.

¹² NT[CR] The name for photo booths in France.