**Abstract**

Since the Iranian Revolution 30 years ago, women’s agency with regard to legal processes has gone through changes. After the election of President Ahmadinejad in 2005, women’s agency in family law debate has been increasingly restricted as women’s publications and websites have been shut down, and women activists have been arrested. This paper will analyze these changes in relation to the contemporary family law debate in Iran and elaborate on how recent developments have enabled new roles and changing arenas of women’s agency in the legal process. I argue that since 2005, women’s agency vis-à-vis the family law debate has not disappeared, but found new expressions through campaigns for legal consciousness building, Internet blogging, academic activism, transnational networking, active demonstrations and sit-in protests in the Majles, to mention a few.

In the course of the last decade, several researchers have documented the appearance of new actors gaining influence in an emerging public debate of Islamic family law (Tucker 2008, Buskens 2003, Moors 2003, Hirsch 2002, Eickelman and Anderson 1999). However, the study of the legal agency of these new actors is not completed. As part of a processual or actor-orientated study of Islamic law, I believe there is a need to include serious studies of women’s agency in legal processes in this regard. The results of this analysis will elaborate on various expressions of women’s agency in legal processes (both secular and religious). In addition, it will broaden the understanding of Islamic family law debate in Iran today.

The paper builds on qualitative research interviews with various women activists conducted during two separate fieldworks in Tehran during the spring 2008 and the winter 2009. In addition, the paper draws on text studies of different publications (web pages, blogs, articles) published by Iranian women activists during 2008-2009.

**Biography**

Marianne Bøe was born in Stavanger, Norway in 1977. In 2003 she completed her cand. philol. degree in History of Religion at University of Bergen. From 2005 – 2008, Bøe worked as Senior Executive Officer at the Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Bergen. In 2008 she started a Ph.D. project called “Debating Family Law in Contemporary Iran” at the Centre for Women’s and Gender Studies, University of Bergen. Since 2002, Bøe has conducted several fieldworks in Tehran.

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2) **Tanya LAWRENCE**  
**From Shahrestan to Tehran: The capital’s impact on young Iranian women from provincial towns studying in Tehran**

**Abstract**

Many studies that focus solely on Islamic ‘fundamentalist’ ideology and official assertions made by the Iranian government after the revolution display a great deal of alarm over the Islamic Republic of Iran’s ideology regarding women. In the immediate aftermath of the revolution scholars who examined the stated intention of the regime made dire predictions about the fate of Iranian women. However, nearly three decades after the revolution, such predictions have not been entirely fulfilled. Evidence shows that participation of women in the public sphere has in fact increased, although this has occurred
in different guises and according to different rules. This is most evident in the field of education, in which recent studies show that the university male to female ratio has gone from 70:30 to 40:60 in favour of girls from 2000 to 2007.

Education has commonly been considered a crucial means of acquiring equal status and empowerment for women. Therefore, it is significant to understand how many Iranian families, regardless of their backgrounds, consider education to be a legitimate reason for their daughters to leave the safety of the private sphere and go out in to the public sphere, i.e. school, universities and ultimately the work force. As educated women are more likely to be sensitive to any loss of rights, especially on issues of gender equality and as more girls are being educated under the Islamic Republic, one can expect this to have far-reaching consequences, not entirely envisioned by the policy makers of the current regime.

This paper examines a set of interviews carried out in Iran during 2007-2008 with young Iranian women who have moved from smaller towns to Tehran in order to continue their higher education. The study is interested in how the move from smaller towns across Iran to Tehran affects young women who leave their homes for the first time to go to university. The huge differences between Tehran and other towns in terms of social mobility, economic possibilities and political activity is addressed and considered through the personal experiences of these young women. The study works on the micro level and aims to reveal what women themselves state about their own ‘realities’. Instead of simply looking at a set of ideologies imposed on women and analyzing what effects these must have had on gender relations, it is hoped that the use of oral narratives will remove the distance between ordinary people’s lives and the broader theoretical discussion of continuities and change, providing a real feel for what it is like to live as a woman in Iran.

Biography
Tanya Lawrence is currently a Final Honour’s student at Jesus College, Oxford where she reading for Oriental Studies. She has just spent eighteen months in Iran studying Persian and carrying out research for the above-mentioned study.

3) Anna VANZAN
From The Pen To The Rotary Press: Women Publishers In Post Revolutionary Iran

Abstract
One of the most unexpected outcomes of the Islamic Revolution in Iran is the proliferation of women’s literature, so much so that their annual production is higher than that of their male counterparts. Women have become the avant guarde of literature not only as writers, but also as publishers, as the number of women who entered this field tremendously increased since the 1990s. Officially, there are at least 400 women publishers in Iran, though only half of them are active. About 60 of them joined the Professional and Cultural Association of Women Publishers (Anjoman-e senfi farhanghi-ye zanan-e nasheer), whose leader, Shahla Lahiji, was the first woman publisher in the country. Her publishing house, Roushangaran va Motal’at-e Zanan (founded 1983), boast a catalogue with more than 200 titles, mostly dealing with women issues.

The wide range of female editorship in Iran can be clearly observed at the annual national book fair exclusively dedicated to them. First launched in 1987, the fair has widespread into several provincial branches which testify to the richness and variety of women’s entrepreneurship in this field. However, this fervent activity is hindered by many obstacles, especially by censorship that afflicts every aspect of Iranian intellectual life, not to speak of the personal danger that confronts the publishers. For instance, Shahla Lahiji has been arrested, a lot share by other committed female publishers such as Nushin Ahmadi Khorasani, the courageous young entrepreneur who devotes her life to a versatile
activity, ranging from socio-political action (she is one of the promoters of the campaign “One million signatures” which asks for the reform of Iranian Personal Law) to the writing of feminist essays published by her company, the Tou’seh, which focuses on women’s problems. Both Tou’seh and Roushangaran catalogues list many books written by leading personalities of Iranian feminist movement such as Shirin Ebadi and Mehrangiz Kar.

Contemporary Iranian society is a very complex and multifaceted one, and this orientation is also clearly shown by the publishers’ activities. For instance, Ziba Jalili Nai’ni, founder and manager of Shirazeh publishing house, prefers to have a more multidisciplinary catalogue, not necessarily focused on women. However, her commitment for women’s progress is attested by her deeds, ranging from the counselling activity for women who want to enter into the political arena, to the organization of seminars addressing the young generations who are taught how to deal with the discrepancies between the constructed models imposed by the government and the realities imposed by the rapid social changes.

After presenting a picture of women publishers’ community in Iran, this paper focuses on the profile of some of these entrepreneurs, enriched by their recent and unedited interviews.

**Biography**

Anna Vanzan (Venice 1955) holds a Degree in Oriental Languages and Cultures (University Of Ca’ Foscari, Venice) and a Ph.D in Near Eastern Studies (New York University).

Though she is interested in the Middle East in general, her research is focused especially on Iran, Central Asia and the sub continent (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Muslim India).

She has been working in gender studies with particular interest for contemporary fictional literature produced by Iranian women. In order to widen Italian readership’s knowledge of contemporary debate on gender issues in Muslim Asia she has published a number of translations from female authors from that area.

She has many publications in Italian and English: her book, *La storia velata: le donne dell’islam nell’immaginario italiano*, (Edizioni del Lavoro, Roma) a history of the image of Muslim women in Italian culture from the Middle Ages has been awarded with the International Prize Feudo di Maida 2006. Her last book *Gli sciiti* (Mulino, Bologna 2008) is a portrait of the Shiite Islam between history, politics and culture.

She is editor of the Italian journal *Afriche&Orienti*. She regularly lectures in various Italian institutions on issues of multiculturalism. She has lectured at the University of Bologna, Pisa, Geneva, New York. She is currently teaching Islamic studies at the University IULM, Milano and of Sociology of Islam at the Università Statale of Milano.

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