

# “Women, Life, Freedom.”

Iran reached a revolutionary moment, that is on-going, when Mahsa (Zhin) Amini, a 22 year-old Kurdish woman, was murdered by the “morality police” in custody, and magnified the contempt and repression half the population - **the women** - undergo on a daily basis because of the compulsory **hijab** head covering. The ensuing nationwide protests turned into an unprecedented uprising to end the Islamist regime.

The basic illusion that helped the Islamic Republic maintain its ideological edifice for decades has been rooted in its base coming from the downtrodden, who supposedly call for an Islamization of the country and eradication of the Western culture. Understanding their social role and political allure for the regime helps elucidate why and how the 1979 Revolution that toppled a monarchic despotism turned into an Islamic one, a mere replacement of a crown with a turban.

The 1979 revolution was an advance on two fronts: social injustice and political despotism. The latter originated from the fact that the Shah’s regime did not have public support because of its 1953 coup, backed by the U.S., against the elected government of **Mohammad Mossadegh**. The former, however, emanated from an uneven development that went underway after land reforms in 1962.

The early 1960s saw a period of full-blown modernization, industrialization, and militarization programs in Iran. Following the coup, vanquishing all the oppositions, the Shah began to consolidate his power through a socio-political and economic program, including land reforms. The aim was to redistribute lands to small-scale cultivators and do away with big landowners. Instead, it ushered in a mass of peasants and rural workers who found themselves unemployed and at the mercy of the government, storming the large cities and industrial centers. The 1973 oil crisis and the subsequent boom in Iran’s oil revenue further intensified unprecedented urban development projects. The construction industry accelerated drastically, particularly in Tehran, incentivizing farmers and agricultural workers to leave for the cities.

While the revolution was carried out by diverse forces demanding civil liberties and social justice, from liberals and leftists to secular nationalists, **Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini** and the Islamists gained the upper hand by capitalizing on this indefinite mass. It consisted of slum dwellers, the unemployed, immigrants from the countryside, seasonal laborers – a whole bevy of the disintegrated populace, displaced and marginalized as a result of the Shah’s modernization, that would be referred to as the ‘urban poor’ or the subalterns by some leftists. What made them distinct from industrial and wage laborers was their **in-between class position**, neither belonging to their former social status nor getting a new one, and their inability to unionize and involve in politics. Having no political affiliation, they could be easily moulded into ideological manipulation.

With a touch of Islamic discourse, this category was co-opted by Khomeini as *Mostazafan*, the downtrodden. Yet, they were still defined in terms of their economic reach, while colored with the alleged ideological aspirations for an Islamic community

**which mandated hijab for women and Sharia for all citizens.** The Islamists promised to elevate *Mostazafan* and make them the real beneficiaries of the new regime. Khomeini also issued a decree to confiscate the Pahlavi Foundation with all the Shah and his family’s assets, as well as the property of fifty millionaires, in favor of redistributing them to the downtrodden. Thereafter, it was called *Mostazafan* Foundation (also known as the Foundation for the Oppressed).

In reality, however, what has been implemented is not much different from what had been before. Keeping political despotism intact, not only didn’t the Islamists bring about social justice, but also they encroached on civil liberties by implementing a strict *Sharia* law, consolidating discrimination against “outsiders” – women as well as ethnics, political dissidents, and the downtrodden – gender, racial and ethnic segregation intersects with religious, and class discrimination.

**The social deprivation of Iranian women has to be understood as the first in a series of other structuring socio-political exclusions.** The social, political, and economic “outsiders” all have resisted their exclusion in their own turn. However, what has been a structural shift in the past few years is the total disillusionment of the downtrodden with the Islamist regime as its power base. *Mostazafan* has long been a pillar of legitimacy that held the Islamist regime aloft. The 2017-18 uprisings, nonetheless, marked a turning point in their disenchantment with the government. They poured into the cities of the four corners of the country rejecting the whole political establishment, its economic policies, and its value systems. The fact that it reached the small cities and villages proves their entire disillusionment with the system. This reversed relationship between the downtrodden and the Islamic Republic has been an existential threat to the regime’s survival.

For the urban poor, little has changed since the 1979 Revolution. Their living conditions deteriorated even more. The regime’s promises have been exposed as a charade. Not only have the suburban slums in Iran’s big cities not disappeared, the country also witnessed new phenomena among marginalized people - homelessness for people living in abject poverty.

For women, the patriarchal hierarchy of **Sharia law** meant losing control over their body and their free choice. They have to observe the strict hijab law from the very first grade in school. They have had no independent right to education, abortion, work, traveling, or getting divorce. And now they want all of them back.

More than four decades after the 1979 Revolution, the “outsiders” in all their socio-politico-economic forms have come together to topple the regime. Their rallying cry:

**“Women, Life, Freedom.”**

**The downtrodden are turning their back on the regime. Women will succumb no more. Political despotism has become unbearable. The entire society has been exhausted. There remains a nation rising up once again.**

Remixed for space- with apologies to  
**@RahmanBouzari**



## Shey, Sheir, Sheirs

In the innocent progressive days of yore, gender issues were generally confined to the binary. We now swim in a world of self-defined pronouns that in the interest of being inoffensive requires we navigate with careful consideration and confirmation. Language changes organically, and as the grammar in common use evolves, we have to adapt, or, as an editor, be confused and cautious when considering whether usage is a grammatical error or an intentional modification!

Way before Greenfuse, **O.G. Waking Dogs, Paul Encimer and Kathy Epling** were the last caretakers of the nationally distributed monthly, **The Peacemaker** - The unifying organ of the Peacemaker movement of committed non-violent activist formed in 1948. In protestation of war the Peacemakers demonstrated, refused war taxes, and worked together in cooperative support, with conferences and retreats aimed at a peaceful community, non-violent action, training for activists, and exploration of land trusts. The movement’s sails lost wind as the cold war wound down, and sadly, as Paul recounted, the movers and shakers eventually faltered and disbanded over conflicts around gender politics that accelerated as the feminist movement matured, and **patriarchy itself was linked to violence.**

They continued to shepherd **The Peacemaker** and were in publication till around 1990. Ahead of the curve, Paul tackled the language of gender 43 years ago in:

**‘The Peacemaker, Volume 32, February, 1979:**

I have been applying to solving the lack of precision in English when it comes to our sexual pronouns and have developed some conclusions. In the nominal case, “she” and “he” seem adequately solved in print by “s/he” but you can’t say it.

My suggestion here is to take off from the plural “they” and use the word “**shey**” (pronounced “shay”) when we want to designate a person either she or he. I prefer “**shey**” to the perhaps more logical (and neutral?) “**hey**” speaks or reads well, already being used as an all-too direct address. “**Shey**” on the other hand rolls off the tongue, has a spoken relation to the written “s/he” and is also consistent with the nominal case.

To solve the possessive and objective cases, I would stay with “sh” and use “**sheir**” and “**sheirs**” (pronounced “shares”) for the masculine and feminine of **his, her, hers; him, her**. This usage takes off on “**their**” and “**theirs**” and ignores the chance to play on “**them**” of the plural objective case. Neither “**Shem**” nor “**hem**” seems that satisfactory to write or speak, while by using “**sheir**” and “**sheirs**” we go for the simplest solution by allowing people to key in on the word “**her**” which is common to all the singular uses of the possessive, and objective cases. Thus “**shey**,” “**sheir**” and “**sheirs**” can suffice for our present pronoun problem. The **joke** is that in my own past practice I have preferred the word “**heir**” instead of “**sheir**” because it is so “*inoffensively*” derived from “**their**.”

Now I’ve come to feel that the vaguely feminist aura around “**shey**,” “**sheir**” and “**sheirs**” makes it preferable to the neuter “**hey, heir, heirs**.” Curiously enough the word “**their**” itself is being widely used as the masculine or feminine singular of the possessive case.

I reject this solution as too piecemeal, though I suspect that the usage that a lot of people are inventing simultaneously becomes the usage that passes quickest into everyday speech and writing. However, we must also remember the power of subcultures (like Black, Gay, Dope, etc.) to coin new usages on special experiences that turn out to have wider validity.

We can have that effect on sexist language if, whatever the eventual solution to the problem, we keep our everyday language zeroed in on it until we impress upon people that a feminist consciousness needs expression through concrete change in the language.

**- Paul Encimer**

### THE ONLY FAIR ELECTION IS NO ELECTION

Will there ever be a fair, agreed-upon election again? What’s the difference? The candidates are mostly hand-picked corporate toadies. The excitement is gone, the electorate is tired, the process is moribund. A third party isn’t viable because we fear the loss of our vote if we depart from the two-party system. We continue to be dissatisfied by the results. Term limits are a partial answer to this dilemma, but when politicians are termed out, they are simply replaced by other plutocrats. It is virtually impossible for anyone without copious amounts of money to compete in a statewide or national election. Our government has become like eating at Subway: the illusion of having a choice in the making of it, but using the same bland ingredients, and leaving us vaguely dissatisfied and sick to our stomach.

**Government by lottery ???** 1/3 of the House of Representatives, would be picked every two years by random drawing. This would reinvent the public debate.



Instead of talking about how you would spend your **PowerBall** winnings, the talk would be about changes you would implement if selected to the House. This process would ensure that we have minimum wage workers, teachers, poor people, and young people in the House.

Much more in keeping with a representative population. The pool would include all registered voters and the winners would be required to pass a minimum literacy test. Once you serve your two-year term you could campaign in an open election for the next two years and you would have publicity, without having to prostitute yourself to private interests. The Senate would be picked the same way, except 10% would be picked by lottery every six years. At the very least, we would have a mirror into the opaque process of law making. Consensus would be easier to achieve without voting by rigid party lines and hope would be restored by the possibility of participation at the highest level.

**- Muir Walker**

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