

# Confronting the International Patriarchy



Confronting the International Patriarchy:  
Iran, Iraq and the United States of America

Edited by

Philippa Winkler

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P U B L I S H I N G

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# INTRODUCTION

## CONFRONTING THE INTERNATIONAL PATRIARCHY

PHILIPPA WINKLER

The Middle East is accused of having a “democracy deficit”, but little attention is paid to how external wars, interventions and sanctions deployed by dominant sectors of the International Patriarchy (IP) have severely restricted the political and participatory lives of women in the region. As we have seen by women’s energetic participation in the “Arab Spring”, populations in the Middle East are more accepting of women’s public roles than previously believed in the West.

I define the International Patriarchy (IP) as the global rule of male elites over women and subordinated men. Elites include elite women such as Hillary Clinton. The IP maintains its power through competing political and economic modalities which shift across time and geographical space. The nature of women’s and subordinated men’s oppression differs depending on contexts of culture and economic class.

Traceable over the last 5000 years, the various sectors of the IP are marked more by similarities than differences. Its primary aspects are territoriality, privilege, acquisition, competition, hierarchy, ritualistic behavior, physical aggression, shifting alliances (the enemy of my enemy is my friend today, tomorrow my enemy) and oppression of women and children. The IP today is evidenced by how few women are in political and economic power. In representative democracies, only 15% women are elected on average in parliaments worldwide. According to some estimates, 70% of the world’s poor are women. The United Nations Development Fund for Women estimates that at least one in three women and girls are beaten or sexually abused in her lifetime.

Globally, women make up less than 10% of the world's leaders.<sup>1</sup> The US, with its much vaunted emphasis on women's rights, is not among the 28 countries to have reached the 30 percent critical mass mark for women's representation in an elected national assembly. With few exceptions, women are deprived of political and economic power. The majority of women are therefore the end-users of policies shaped and implemented by national and international sectors of the IP. Other end-users are the (mainly) male military forces sent into war zones by commanders of enforcing nations: "American battle casualties, including dead and wounded, have mounted to 55,216 since the United States launched a war in Afghanistan 11 years ago and then initiated eight years of deadly fighting in Iraq by invading in 2003."<sup>2</sup>

Worldwide, women, men and children are subordinated through the mal-distribution of wealth: the richest 2% own half the world's wealth. Food exists in great abundance, yet one in every 8 people are undernourished. UNICEF notes that 1.5 billion children are engaged in child labor.

Male elites manage this disparity of wealth through the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and multinational corporations. One in two people on the planet is female, yet women hold only one in every five senior management positions globally in 2012, the same level as in 2004.<sup>3</sup>

In international relations, the dominant sectors of the IP maintain their power through the use and deployment of the most lethal weapons, to control access to the earth's resources, labour forces and markets.

One of the major goals of patriarchal strategy throughout the centuries, is to bring militarily weaker populations into the sphere of more powerful elites. In realist international relations theory, this is called 'bandwagoning'. Elites of the stronger power offer incentives, such as financial rewards, trade agreements and arms deals to induce elites of weaker states to join with them.

But alliances with stronger powers do not necessarily imply immunity from attack. In the name of the war on terror, US military personnel are deployed in the Philippines, Pakistan, Yemen, Kashmir and the Horn of

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<sup>1</sup> "World Leaders Draw Attention to Central Role of Women's Political Participation in Democracy", UN Women Press Release, 9/19/2012. Accessed 9/27 on <http://www.unwomen.org/2011/09/world-leaders-draw-attention-to-central-role-of-womens-political-participation-in-democracy/>

<sup>2</sup> Wood, David, "U.S. Casualties In Afghanistan Rise Past 2,000 As Long-Term Costs Of War Remain Unknown" 9/30, 2012, accessed 10/29/2012. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/30/casualties-afghanistan-war\\_n\\_1927691.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/30/casualties-afghanistan-war_n_1927691.html)

<sup>3</sup> GrantThornton International Business Report 2012, "Women in Senior Management Still Not Enough".



Africa. During his Presidency, Obama has secretly deployed US special forces to 75 *countries*.<sup>4</sup> He has escalated secret drone attacks, killing hundreds of civilians<sup>5</sup>, and continued torture by rendition to other countries. Contradicting his avowal to protect Americans, Obama has signed into law the *National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)* - making it legal to assassinate Americans without charge or trial.

Yet, even taking into account the tragic events of 9/11, the chances of private American civilians being attacked by terrorists are extremely low, ranging from 1 in 3 million to 9 million. For example, in the year 2005, a relatively small number of 56 private American civilians were killed by terrorist attacks, mainly in countries occupied by US forces such as Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup> In 2012, Americans are more likely to be killed by their own furniture than in a terrorist attack<sup>7</sup>. Reactions to individual terrorist acts seem disproportionate. The cost of wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan are estimated at 225,000 lives and up to \$4 trillion in U.S. spending, according to a 2011 report by scholars with the Eisenhower Research Project at Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies.

Today, the Arabian Gulf is a strategic waterway which is of particular relevance to US Command and Control, due to the Middle East's vast oil reserves, and the flow of petro-dollars which prevent the US from going into bankruptcy.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the Arabian Sea and the Arabian Gulf are heavily militarized. The US Fifth Fleet operates out of Manama, Bahrain. US Central Command (USCENTCOM) operates out of Qatar. America and its allies have several naval bases adjacent to Iranian territorial waters. The threat of bombardments by Israeli nuclear weapons daily hangs heavily over the heads of populations in the Middle East— a form of psychological torture. This book focuses on how women activists confront regional and dominant sectors of the IP where they overlap and where they

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<sup>4</sup> DeYoung, Karen and Jaffe, Greg, "U.S. 'secret war' expands globally as Special Operations forces take larger role", June 4, 2012; <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/03/AR2010060304965.html>. Also see: <http://stpeteforpeace.org/obama.html>. Accessed 11/4/2012.

<sup>5</sup> Drone strikes kill, maim and traumatize too many civilians, U.S. study says, September 25, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/09/25/world/asia/pakistan-us-drone-strikes/index.html>

<sup>6</sup> "Terrorism Deaths, Injuries, Kidnappings of Private U.S. Citizens, 2005", Provided by the Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Accessed 11/4/2012. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/65498.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> *The Atlantic*, June 6, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> See my blog <http://the-incessant-thinker.blogspot.com/2013/01/petrodollars.html>

compete. Authors of chapters in this book focus on the intersection of US power elites and those of Iran and Iraq in the period 1990 until the present.

## **Western Encouragement of Fundamentalism and Dictators**

Euro-Anglo IP sectors led by the US give protection to US-friendly regimes lower down in the IP hierarchy. In the Middle East, a seminal event was the CIA overthrow of the elected Prime Minister Mossadegh in Iran in 1953. Under his leadership, the Iranian parliament had nationalized the Iranian oil industry, thus incurring the wrath of the IP's oil sectors. The US-backed Shah Pahlevi then savagely eliminated a secular, left-wing opposition to Western interests, leaving open a political space for fundamentalist religious resistance which later instituted an oppressive theocratic republic in 1979. Another seminal event was the US intervention in Afghanistan in the 1980s, which helped bring to power the fundamentalist Jihad, precursors of the Taliban. In 2011, NATO's overthrow of Gaddafi of Libya introduced a more conservative government: women's quota of 10 percent of the parliament was removed. Regarding Western invasion supporting Libyan rebels, "Human Rights Watch condemned rebels for looting shops, homes and medical facilities in towns seized in the western mountains."<sup>9</sup>

In Syria, fundamentalist groups are participating in the attempted overthrow of President Assad, a rebellion supported by arms and funds from the West. Foreign-backed rebels "seek to take advantage of the chaos to transform Syria into a Shariah-based fundamentalist state."<sup>10</sup>

The US provides military aid to Israel, which has imposed a collective punishment of Palestinian women and subordinated men. It can be argued that Israel's statehood is fundamentalist, because it bases its land claims on a literal interpretation of 2000 year old religious texts.

US policy in the Middle East has closely followed the maxim "the enemies of my enemies are my friends". The US had sent weapons technology and loans to Saddam Hussein in support of his aggressive war against Iran (1980-1988), and also to a lesser extent, weapons to Iran, keeping alive a conflict in which an estimated total of a million died. After the US' ally Saddam Hussein "jumped out of his box" and invaded

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2014236/Libya-Children-young-7-trained-fight-Gaddafi.html#ixzz1Rzp0Q34qp>

<sup>10</sup> Hall, Benjamin, "Among the Snipers of Aleppo", New York Times, October 18, 2012, accessed [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/19/opinion/western-intervention-in-syria.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/19/opinion/western-intervention-in-syria.html?_r=0)

Kuwait, the US waged Gulf War I in 1991, removed Iraq from Kuwait, imposed sanctions on Iraq and then waged Gulf War II in 2003-2011. The US invasion of Iraq displaced the US' former ally, Saddam Hussein, and the Sunni Baath Party. After the 2003 US invasion, the US elevated to power the more misogynistic Shia political parties. As a result, women's rights and economic status in Iraq have deteriorated rapidly.<sup>11</sup> Women under Saddam Hussein had received full educational and employment opportunities.

Since the end of the World War II, the United States has sent military and economic aid to other leaders known for repressive, anti-democratic policies, including Sheik Jabir Al-Ahmad Al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait 1977-2006, Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, King of Bahrain, 2002-now; Fahd Ibn Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, King and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia 1982-2005.

## **A Feminist Analytical Approach**

The bifurcation of the personal and the political is an analysis that leads to such contradictory concepts as 'bombing a country into democracy' and 'bombing to liberate women.'

So feminists in the field of international relations would ask: Did Euro-American governments consult women or women's groups in the Middle East before launching covert or overt external military operations and sanctions, in the name of women's rights? How would women like to see change in their country? Do they want an economic blockade, and how could they get help from outside in appropriate ways? Are the materials being used as 'liberators', explosives harmful to the health of current and future generations (for example the use of 'depleted' uranium in weapons and tanks)? Is there compensation for casualties as result of external wars? Are women a part of peacekeeping efforts, as required by UNSC Resolution 1325? Are there women armed combatants in the government and/or rebel forces?

Women are end users of foreign policy exercised by the Great Powers on the United Nations Security Council. What is being done to change the androcentric norm?

Feminist IR would ask the following normative questions:

1. Is the foreign intervention a manifestation of androcentric competitive

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<sup>11</sup> Al-Ali, Nadjat and Pratt, Nicola, *What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq*, University of California, Berkeley, 2009.

North-South, left-right politics? It is noted that Libya, Iraq and Syria had nationalized their oil production and distribution; Iran, Libya and Iraq were moving away from the petro-dollar. Italy, Spain and France were the principle buyers of Libyan oil under Gaddafi; they were the principle military actors in his overthrow. Is that a coincidence?

2. Iraq and Libya had agreed to give up their nuclear weapons programs, under pressure from the ‘international community’. After doing so, both countries were attacked in 2003 and 2011 respectively. Does this send a message that weaker States need to develop WMD programs for purposes of deterrence?

3. Is the intervention by foreign powers approved of by the ‘dictates of public conscience’? Here one would look at global and national opinion surveys and note gender differences of opinion.

4. Is there a normative double standard in operation? Feminist analysts question alliances between ‘liberal democracies’ and dictators and oil monarchs which brutally crush people-power protests, most recently in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, Iraq and the Palestinian Territories. They question glaring double standards such as Israel’s unacknowledged possession of nuclear weapons, a sleight of hand that has allowed it not to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

## **International Sanctions: Collective Punishment of Women in Iran and Iraq**

Women confront the Euro-Anglo IP’s ultimate economic weapons of mass destruction: the multilateral and bilateral sanctions regimes imposed on them by the leadership of the world’s superpower, the United States. A large portion of this book is devoted to the blockade currently imposed on Iran by the UN Security Council since 2006, and that which eviscerated Iraq from 1990 to 2003.

The sanctions examined in this book are defined as coercive measures adopted by a country or group of countries in order to elicit a change in the behaviour of the leadership of a target state. Collective punishment is the result. Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, adopted on August 12, 1949, states that:

“No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measures of

intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited. . . Reprisals against protected persons and their property are prohibited.”

Sanctions reinforce women’s lack of economic and political power, because of their devastating impacts on civilians. In response, women activists around the world have mounted campaigns to stop the imposition of blockades on the collective. One such campaign, to lift a 13-year siege on Iraq, is described in this book.

## **Sanctions on Iraq 1990-2003**

The year was 1996. UNICEF had reported half a million dead Iraqi children as a result of the sanctions imposed on Iraq by UNICEF’s boss, the United Nations Security Council. United States (US) Secretary of State Madeleine Albright went on the US television program “60 Minutes” to defend the infanticide which she said was ‘worth it’ to contain Saddam Hussein and his alleged weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program. But, when US troops invaded Iraq in 2003, no WMD program was found. “It turns out that we were all wrong, probably in my judgment, and that is most disturbing”, said David Kay, chief weapons inspector of the Iraq Survey Group, 2004. Kay resigned, saying that WMD stockpiles never existed in Iraq.<sup>12</sup>

## **Iraqi society today**

The after effects of bombardments and sanctions too easily slip off the world’s headlines. Today, Iraq’s society is in shatters.

Estimates of Iraqi civilians killed since the US invasion of 2003 range from over 125,000 to 1.4 million.<sup>13</sup> In 2010, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that 1.5 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) were in Iraq, including about 500,000 homeless individuals displaced in settlements or camp-like situations in extremely poor conditions.

Thousands of Iraqi children are suffering from malnutrition, lack of clean drinking water, lack of health care and general economic

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<sup>12</sup> BBC-News, “ US chief Iraq arms expert quits”, 1/24/2004, accessed 9/29/2012 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3424831.stm>

<sup>13</sup> Iraq Body Count, 2012; the United Nations World Health Organization in conjunction with the Iraqi Health Ministry, 2007; John Hopkins Study 2nd survey, 2006; Opinion Research Business, 2005.

deprivation. The Iraqi Orphan Initiative (IOI) reports that 4.5 million Iraqi children are now orphans, having lost both or one of their parents. The US' use of radioactive uranium weaponry has been linked to abnormally high rates of anomalous birth defects and cancers in Fallujah and other areas in Iraq.<sup>14</sup> Wars are being waged on fetuses developing in the womb.

## Sanctions on Iran

The year is 2012, and history repeats itself. A new round of punitive sanctions have been levied on Iran mainly by the US and the European Union (EU), for the alleged reason that Iran is building nuclear weapons of mass destruction. Yet, in an apparent contradiction, Western intelligence reports deny that Iran has a WMD program.<sup>15</sup>

Under sanctions, Iran's oil exports declined 50 percent in 2011, while food and electricity prices have skyrocketed.<sup>16</sup>

In a 2012 report to the UN General Assembly, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon wrote: "The sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran have had significant effects on the general population.

[These include] an escalation in inflation, a rise in commodities and energy costs, an increase in the rate of unemployment and a shortage of necessary items, including medicine."<sup>17</sup>

"Sanctions are affecting the entire country, but it is the people that bear the brunt and have the least ability to protect themselves from this pressure," said Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council and the author of the book *A Single Roll of the Dice: Obama's*

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<sup>14</sup> Jamail, Dahr, "Fallujah babies: Under a new kind of siege", Al Jazeera, 1/6/2012; Chulov, Martin, "Research links rise in Falluja birth defects and cancers to US assault," The Guardian (UK), 12/30/2010; Al-Azzawi, Souad, "Depleted Uranium Radioactive Contamination In Iraq: An Overview", Global Research, 8/31/2006; "Radioactive Mines to Radioactive Weapons", video documentary, 1999 (on youtube).

<sup>15</sup> Clifton, Eli, "Panetta: Iran Hasn't 'Made The Decision To Develop A Nuclear Weapon'" <http://thinkprogress.org/security/2012/02/28/434146/panetta-iran-hasnt-decided-on-nuclear-weapons/?mobile=nc>, accessed 9/27/2012

<sup>16</sup> Estrin, Daniel "Israeli report says sanctions hitting Iran hard" AP, 9/27/2012, accessed same date, <http://news.yahoo.com/israeli-report-says-sanctions-hitting-iran-hard-100034237.html>

<sup>17</sup> Marshall, Tim, "Iran Sanctions Prompt Protests As Prices Rise", Sky News, 10/10/2012, accessed same date <http://news.sky.com/story/996040/iran-sanctions-prompt-protests-as-prices-rise>

*Diplomacy with Iran.* "What is most concerning is that it is now increasingly clear that the people are the target."<sup>18</sup>

At one meta-level of the IP, the Great Powers hold competing currencies. Iran has rejected the dollarization of its oil bourse, and turned to the Euro. Iraq did the same under Saddam Hussein in 2000. Three years later, the US/UK occupied Iraq. A US-led invasion of Iran is not off the table.

### **A feminist initiative: UN experts can determine when sanctions are illegal under international law**

Meanwhile, women activists attempt to mitigate the impacts of IP hostilities. In 2000, US human rights lawyer Karen Parker, an advocate for women's rights, worked closely with Mark Bossuyt, the UN Special Rapporteur on Sanctions to produce the "Bossuyt Report". The report painted a horrific picture of the suffering of thousands of Iraqis blockaded since 1990 – a crime of huge proportions:

"The sanctions against Iraq are the most comprehensive, total sanctions that have ever been imposed on a country. The situation at present is extremely grave. The transportation, power and communication infrastructures were decimated during the Gulf war, and have not been rebuilt owing to the sanctions. The industrial sector is also in shambles and agricultural production has suffered greatly. But most alarming is the health crisis that has erupted since the imposition of the sanctions..."

The gendered impacts of sanctions were noted:

"Researchers have also shown that sanctions have an overwhelmingly greater negative medical and social impact on women, as women bear the brunt of the social and economic displacements and upheaval....**The sanctions regime against Iraq is unequivocally illegal under existing international humanitarian law and human rights law. Some would go so far as making a charge of genocide...the sanctions regime against Iraq has as its clear purpose the deliberate infliction on the Iraqi people of conditions of life (lack of adequate food, medicines, etc) calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.**"<sup>19</sup>

The importance of the 2000 Bossuyt report is threefold: 1) It reaffirms the concept that no one is above the law, and everyone must answer to it,

<sup>18</sup> Dehghan, Saeed Kamali, "Sanctions on Iran: 'ordinary people are the target', The Guardian (UK), 10 August 2012

<sup>19</sup> The Bossuyt Report, UN Economic and Social Council, E/CN.4./Sub.2/2000/33.

even the UNSC; 2) it re-affirms the concept of sanctions as a tool of war (contrary to the UN Charter's definition as a 'measure short of war'), and therefore actionable under the Geneva Conventions and other instruments of humanitarian law; and 3) it introduces a six prong test to evaluate the legality of sanctions.

In response, the 26-member United Nations Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights voted on SC Resolution 2000/25, requesting an examination of the 'adverse consequences' of the blockade. Soon afterwards, airplanes landed in Iraq with humanitarian supplies.

The question remains today: how long will Iranians have to endure deprivations by sanctions imposed by sectors of the IP led by the US? How many Iranians will have to suffer from lack of food and medicines before the impacts of sanctions are evaluated for their legality under international law?

## **Themes and Chapters**

In Chapter One, "Sanctioning Change", the Iranian born researcher Asu Tehrani sees many parallels between the Iraqi sanctions and economic sanctions currently imposed on Iran by the European Union, and bilaterally by the US and numerous other countries (the UN Security Council's sanctions are restricted to military items). Essentially, the more vulnerable elements of societies – the sick, the old, children, and women – feel the most pain under a blockade. Tehran has underplayed the social and economic impacts on Iranians, in order to appear strong and unbowed to the international community. However, the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, recently described the sanctions as "barbaric". Ms Tehrani describes the varied reactions of Iranian women's groups, including the feminist Marxist "March 8" organization.

Zubaida Rasul-Ronning notes in Chapter Two, "Women in Iraq and Iran: Leadership and The Right to Equal Political Participation", that current polls in the Middle East indicate high rates of approval for women's rights. But, she describes how external wars and sanctions have restricted the political and participatory life of Iraqi and Iranian women. She draws our attention to current negotiations where women are adding to a more open approach to Iran. "Women can make negotiation processes more credible".

In Chapter Three, "Sophie's Choice and the Sacrifice of Iraqi children by Sanctions: Interviews in 1999 with Diplomats and Feminist Activists", I examine the worldviews of Western diplomats in 1999 at the UN



Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR, now the Human Rights Council) who advocated women's rights, yet promoted a genocidal act called 'the sanctions' on the Iraqi people. I analyze the psychological/political mindset of male elites who rationalize the death and destruction of an innocent society. Defying the diplomats' cognitive dissonance, were women non-governmental representatives at the UNCHR who initiated resolutions that condemned the sanctions on Iraq.

Externally imposed sanctions and wars are not the only methods which deny women their rights. In countries such as Saudi Arabia (a US ally) in the Middle East, conservative religious practices, culture and institutions deny women's freedom of expression.

But nothing can crush the spirit of women as they challenge local patriarchies. This is illustrated in Chapter Four, the elegant essay offered by Reem Kelani, Palestinian singer, musicologist and broadcaster. Born in Manchester and brought up in Kuwait, Kelani describes in "*Write it down... Artist or prostitute: perspectives on female creativity and activism in the Arab world*", the ways in which the experiences of women Arab singers, including her own, sit at the intersection of activism, resistance, creativity and music.

In Chapter Five, "Sanctions on Iran: What's Missing from Obama's New Dialogue", Daniel Robicheau explains the geo-political and financial motivations underlying the sanctions on Iraq and Iran which he concludes hinge on the need to control access to the Middle East's vast oil resources. Another motivation is Israel's determination to remain the sole nuclear power in the region: "Iran's charge that it is subjected to double standards by being placed under sanctions, when Israel's nuclear program remains unexamined, opens up the debate to the wider issue of regional weapons proliferation, involving all nations of the Middle East."

What is needed is 50% participation by women in all economic, social, religious and political aspects of life, in all areas of the world, in order to achieve real peace and stability. A 2012 study on violence against women conducted over four decades and in 70 countries reveals the mobilization of feminist movements is more important for change than the wealth of nations, left-wing political parties, or the number of women politicians.<sup>20</sup> As Reem Kelani concludes in her article: "We need to question and revise age-old traditions of a more secular nature, that are no less judgmental than inherited dogma."

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.awid.org/News-Analysis/Announcements2/Press-Release-Largest-Global-Study-on-Violence-Against-Women-Finds-Feminist-Movements-Hold-the-Key-to-Change>, accessed 17/10/2012



## CHAPTER ONE

# SANCTIONING CHANGE: A BRIEF CRITIQUE OF THE USE OF ECONOMIC SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAN

ASU TEHRANI

The sanctions imposed on Iraq following the Western invasion of it in 1991 had devastating consequences for Iraqis, particularly Iraqi women and children. Economic and military sanctions are a primary tool of the United Nations, used to coerce nations to alter their behavior. After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the West used the United Nations to impose sanctions under allegations that Saddam Hussein had instituted a program to build weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The logic of the West was that Hussein was a dangerous ruler whose demonstrated aggression presented a substantive threat to the safety and interests of Western as well as neighboring nations. Sanctions, they argued, were the only way they could ensure that Iraq would not import supplies for the purpose of strengthening the alleged WMD programs (which, in fact, were never found and may never have existed).

However, the effects of the sanctions were overwhelmingly devastating to Iraqi infrastructure and the health and well-being of Iraqi women and children. Medical supplies and other basic necessities were severely limited under the so-called “dual use” prohibitions implemented by the United States and United Kingdom. United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright famously stated that the by-then estimated deaths of 500,000 Iraqi children were a price worth paying for securing the “safety” of other nations. She later expressed remorse at her statement. But the system in which international relations have evolved is inherently patriarchal; Albright only expressed the existing rationale under which nation-states operate in such a system.

The lessons of the Western sanctions against Iraq from 1991 to 2003 can indeed be applied to the current stand-off between Iran and the West

over Iran's nuclear program. Iranian officials have repeatedly and consistently proclaimed the peaceful nature of their nuclear program, stating that it is for civilian energy rather than military purposes. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has publicly issued a *fatwa*, a religious decree, stating that nuclear weapons are un-Islamic. According to its November 2010 Board report, the International Atomic Energy Agency has failed to find Iran in violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The financial and petroleum sectors are the heart of Iran's economy, and China has repeatedly insisted, in UN negotiations, that global economic recovery efforts and Iran's economic health as a whole should not suffer as a result of the most recent rounds of sanctions.

The sanctions against Iran began immediately after the 1979 revolution which ushered in the current era of theocratic rule. Since then, they have primarily focused on the oil and finance sectors. In 2000, President Bill Clinton loosened the sanctions program against Iran, allowing the trade of goods such as Persian rugs and food items. This was reversed in 2010 by President Barack Obama as the confrontation over Iran's nuclear program intensified.

The United States and its allies, particularly the UK, France, and Germany, have stated that they believe Iran is secretly building a nuclear weapons program, and they have called on the United Nations Security Council to impose a harsher sanctions regime against Iran to persuade it to halt its efforts. By and large, Iranians see this action as another example of Western intervention in Iranian affairs, and the current regime of the Islamic Republic has done its part in framing the issue as a continuation of the policies and practices which culminated in the 1953 coup d'état against democratically-elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, who nationalized the British-controlled Iranian oil industry in 1951.

Russia has assisted Iran in the building of a nuclear reactor at Bushehr. In addition, Turkey and Brazil have recently brokered a deal by which uranium is enriched at remote sites and shipped back to Iran (Hafezi 2010). US officials have been frustrated by the efforts of nations like Turkey and China, which it sees as an impediment to the diplomatic and economic objectives of disciplinary efforts. Still, Obama has repeatedly stated that sanctions are – whether harshly binding or more suggestive in nature – a first step toward more severe measures. It appears that the US wants to safeguard its military options by legitimizing them with initial diplomatic efforts.

Current president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's campaign promises of "bringing oil money to the dinner table of ordinary people" have been hampered by the US sanctions, which appear to be intended to weaken the

current regime by undermining his credibility. In this, the West has been successful to a certain extent, indicated by the widespread dissatisfaction of Iranians with Ahmadinejad, most obviously seen by the demonstrations in the summer of 2009 challenging the legitimacy of his “reelection.”

These demonstrations have been consistently framed by Khamenei and Ahmadinejad as riots instigated by corrosive Western elements in Iranian society. They repeatedly asked Iranians to stay home rather than voice their opposition in any visible way, because such actions would “play into Western hands” and undermine the Islamic Republic. Interestingly, in spite of the mullahs’ historical distaste for Mossadegh, they publicly likened the 2009 demonstrations to the 1953 coup d’état, as it apparently suited their needs. They wanted to portray themselves as protectors of the Iranian people against Western intervention. The US has acknowledged its responsibility in overturning Mossadegh in an illegal, covert operation. The reinstatement of Mohammad Reza Shah and subsequent formation of his secret police, the SAVAK, was to change Iran’s history profoundly. Backed by the West, the Shah suppressed or eliminated nearly all secular, left-wing opposition. Opposition to the Shah and his Western allies grew in the only available political space, Islamic organizations, which ultimately helped Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the clergy ascend to power after the Shah was overthrown during the 1979 Revolution.

Ordinary women and men of Iran have consistently been victimized by such interventions by the West, and now by international sanctions programs led by the US since the 2001 inception of the current nuclear standoff between Western governments and the Islamic regime. There are valuable lessons to be learned from the experience of the Iraqi people under Western sanctions following the Gulf War in 1991. In spite of President Barack Obama’s policy of engagement and diplomacy, the economic and social rights of Iranians are currently in danger as a result of increasingly restrictive economic sanctions. In particular, Iranian banks and petroleum companies have been targeted. This amounts to an attack on the core of Iranians’ economic lives, as few Iranians are not affected by the financial and petroleum sectors. Inflation is rising at alarming rates, not only in relation to currency but also food and utilities. In a nation already stricken by a large gap between rich and poor, urban and rural, these disciplinary economic measures taken by the West only serve to exacerbate existing problems.

One of the basic tenets of the canon of Marxist literature is that a primary purpose of the state is to safeguard the interests of capital. With this in mind, the United States government’s actions against Iran are further illuminated. A recent report by CNBC News (Burnett 2010) clearly

shows how the corporate interests of US companies take priority over the increasingly harsh sanctions regimes restricting trade between US and Iranian companies. In spite of repeated and progressively aggressive constraints on trade relations between the two nations, and the public rhetoric generated by successive US administrations illustrating the importance of such punitive measures, the sanctions and trade arrangements work together in a mutually beneficial arrangement.

Companies like Transammonia have consistently circumvented the system, shipping large quantities of ammonia to Iran from the United States through its European subsidiaries. This kind of activity is not limited to higher-stakes commodities like ammonia; everything from American popcorn and chewing gum to high-end clothing and electronics have made it to Iranian markets. The justification used by those companies applying for licenses from the US Treasury Department is that if an item has nutritional or medical value in the remotest of ways, it is acceptable for export to Iran because it helps the Iranian people rather than the government. The US official who was, until recently, leading the sanctions program, former Under Secretary of Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Stuart Levey, insists that the granting of such licenses helps the United States by creating leverage in the form of public support for its economic actions against Iran. In other words, if the United States grants some licenses, it would help create the appearance that all diplomatic and non-military options have been exhausted in order to gain public support, or leverage, necessary to legitimize any future military action against the Islamic Republic. Given how crucial public support is to the economic and political viability of military intervention, the benefits gained by the US as a result of the sanctions are clear. Imposing sanctions is essentially equivalent to going through the obligatory motions in order to reach the ultimate goal of *carte blanche*. This is particularly obvious given the doubt many analysts have expressed about the likelihood that US/UN-imposed sanctions will affect the behavior of the Iranian government.

Conspicuously absent from this discussion of the effects of sanctions on the Iranian people, however, are the well-established facts showing the disproportionate impact of such measures on women and children. Because the position of the Iranian government is that the Iranian nation and economy are impervious to disciplinary economic measures by the West, there is great difficulty in obtaining useful metrics ascertaining the specific effects in Iran. However, the use of economic sanctions in various countries has nearly always resulted in similarly disproportionate suffering of women and children under such conditions.

The stand-off between the West and Iran is a constantly evolving dynamic which requires a great deal of attention if the disastrous consequences of the sanctions that the Iraqi people experienced are to be avoided in Iran, particularly for Iranian women and children. As was seen in the period of economic sanctions against Iraq after the Gulf War of 1991, the effects of economic disciplinary measures are experienced to varying degrees in different socioeconomic strata, particularly when accounting for gender. Ordinary Iranians are affected by measures ostensibly intended to impact the highest levels of government. However, it is difficult to see how the United States and its allies could believe that government officials, who invariably reside on the highest rungs of the political and socioeconomic ladders in Iran, would be impacted by sanctions directed toward the banking and petroleum sectors. Indeed, "American officials say the sanctions are having an effect and have forced the Guard Corp and shipping line to set up front companies and take other steps to evade the penalties" (Lee 2010). Rather, it seems that the West is attempting, via threats to the collective livelihood of Iranian society, to persuade Iranian officials to safeguard the interests of the common people. The problem with this strategy is the assumption that a threat to collective Iranian livelihood could or would compel the elite to act on behalf of people whose interests they do not share – the interests of the middle or lower socioeconomic strata of Iranian society. It is difficult to see how such a sanctions program could be the product of earnest efforts on the part of the West to target Iranian leadership given these dynamics.

It is a careful and dangerous high-stakes game of chicken in which the Iranian government is engaging, with its recent drastic cuts of government subsidies, which have resulted in a quadrupling of fuel prices and a more than doubling of bread prices in a matter of only a week. The cutting of subsidies has been publicly justified by government officials as measures designed to help strengthen the economy in a long-planned overhaul. However, the timing of its implementation calls attention to the concern over the vulnerability of Iran's economy to peaks and valleys in the global market. Iranian economists believe that measures such as these will exacerbate existing class tensions in Iran and increase the burden on low to middle-income families, ultimately leading to a shrinking of the middle class. If the rational choice model of international relations theory is to be believed, Iranian officials have made these decisions with full knowledge of their ramifications, and must believe that the benefits will outweigh the costs in the final calculus.

## Health Impacts

The Population Reference Bureau's (PRB)<sup>1</sup> data paint an interesting picture of the consequences of the sanctions on the citizens of Iran. In some areas, Iran's infrastructure is significantly more developed than other countries in the region, particularly Iraq, such as water and medicine. However, when compared with the United States, it becomes apparent that the basic well being of Iranians has, indeed, been affected by the economic measures taken against Iran. The clearest example is the "brain drain" that has plagued Iran since the Revolution of 1979. According to the PRB, 1 out of every 1,000 people leaves Iran. This is quite drastic considering the fact that Iran has not experienced an official "war" or other official unrest in nearly 25 years. War-torn and occupied Iraq experiences a net migration rate of -4 out of every 1,000. The United States sees a positive migration of 3 per 1,000. These figures illuminate the strength or weakness of the economy in large part, particularly given the importance of productive intellectual segments of society to technical sectors of the economy. A significant percentage of those leaving Iran are well-educated and well-trained, and would serve Iranian society and its economy productively if they were to stay in Iran. Unfortunately, exact figures on brain drain prior to 1979 are difficult to obtain, though numerous articles have been produced on the issue (Carrington and Degraatiché 1999; Beine, Docquier, and Rapaport 2001; Torbat 2002).

In spite of Iran's relatively advanced medical systems and technologies, 29 of every 1,000 live births end in death. While this is significantly less than Iraq's 84 per 1,000, it is alarming considering the US's rate of 6.4 per 1,000. On the other side of the age continuum, the percentage of the population over the age of 65 is 5% in Iran, as compared to Iraq's 3% and the US's 13%, though the life expectancies at birth in these countries are similar to one another. These findings suggest that the sanctions have had a greater effect on Iranians than the Iranian government would care to admit, given that many of the goods that have been banned, according to the terms of the sanctions, have been medical supplies, and that the uranium enrichment Iran insists is its right is in large part used for the purpose of producing medical isotopes necessary for treatment of various ailments. Ironically, the findings paint a picture that could help bolster the claims of Iran's government that it has full rights to the "peaceful" nuclear program they are pursuing, if it were simply to

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<sup>1</sup> The PRB is a non-partisan, independent institution that provides data on virtually every nation in the world, on a multitude of dimensions. It is based in the United States.



admit that the sanctions could heavily impact the well being of its citizens. That is, rather than broadcasting a message of imperviousness and defiance, were the regime to simply say that sanctions do have an effect and that their ordinary citizens are suffering in spite of the fact that they have broken no international laws in the pursuit of ostensibly peaceful nuclear energy, it may have found additional supporters. It is so insistent that it is impervious to these harsh disciplinary measures that it loses some of the legitimacy at its reach.

For their part, Iranian authorities have repeatedly insisted that Iran has not and will not be affected by any Western-imposed economic sanctions. The Associated Press reported that Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, said during a recent trip to Tajikistan that the sanctions are "annoying flies, like used tissue" (June 2010). This is undoubtedly almost purely political posturing, as most analysts agree that Iran's economy is highly dependent on global infrastructure and trade, particularly with China and Russia, who, as permanent members of the UN Security Council and major players in the global economy, are themselves heavily influenced by United States economic and political interests. It is a complicated network of relationships that Iran is attempting to negotiate. China and Russia, among others, are constantly weighing the costs and benefits of trade with Iran and its effects on trade relations with the United States.

Iranian officials consistently state that Western justifications for the economic sanctions against Iran, in a similar vein as its covert actions against Prime Minister Mossadegh in 1953, are disingenuous at best, and are tantamount to a Western monopoly of Iran's political sovereignty. Further, the official Iranian position is that these measures are political violations of Iran's national and international rights, but do not constitute material deprivation, as Iran is apparently invulnerable to Western "economic bullying." The impacts of the sanctions on ordinary Iranian citizens are not taken into account in the government's calculus; rather, they are seen almost entirely in strategic and masculinist terms, which, as articulated by feminist theory, consist of aggression, cold and calculated "rationality" in economic terms, and Realist assumptions about international relations.

Realism in international relations theory is premised on the notion that state actors are rational, unitary actors in pursuit of their own self-interest in an anarchic global environment. Within this framework, the actions of the Islamic Republic of Iran are entirely logical. They want to maintain the current – presumably "stable" – structure of gender relations in order to preserve what the top leadership (e.g., Khamenei) believes are the

cornerstones of Islamic behavior, both for men and women. A lack of what we in the West see as women's rights is, in fact, precisely what the Islamic Republic sees as the basis of "appropriate" gender relations. In practice, gender relations in the West are surprisingly similar to gender relations in the "Islamic world," when accounting for metrics that evaluate pay, childcare, healthcare, and "basic" civil liberties. For instance, according to the World Economic Forum, women in Iran have the right to maternity leave paid at 67% for 90 days (approximately 3 months). In comparison, the US Federal Medical Leave Act allows an individual to take 12 weeks (also approximately 3 months) of *unpaid* leave to care for a child within 12 months of the child's birth. Abortion in Iran is allowed when required to save the mother's life, or in the case of fetal abnormalities. Many states in the US have adopted similar policies, and restricting access to abortion has been adopted as an official position in the Republican Party's campaign platform in the run-up to the presidential election of 2012. According to the Population Reference Bureau, the use of contraceptives among married women ages 15-49 is 73% in Iran, comparable to the figure of 79% in the United States. Women outnumber men in Iranian universities, as they do in the US. The Iranian Constitution guarantees basic health care for all Iranians, which means that there are fewer women in the US with access to health care than in Iran. Births in Iran are attended by a skilled health professional in 97% of cases, on par with the 100% reported for the United States. Women's life expectancy at birth is 71 in Iran, as compared to 80 in the US. The literacy rate of Iranian women ages 15-24 is 96%, compared to 97% of Iranian men and 99% of women and men in the United States. While the above is by no means a comprehensive accounting of the totality of the state of women in Iran, it reveals a general pattern that suggests common Western conceptions of Iranian women's lives are inaccurate at best, mendaciously or paternalistically exaggerated at worst.

Much of the Iranian government's attitudes toward sanctions can be traced to the Iranian culture as a whole. Iranian society is not only collectivist in nature but also highly gendered. This is clearly observed not only in the culture at large, but, more formally, in the divorce laws of the Islamic Republic. Men are responsible for a variety of provisions for their wives and children. The expectations placed on them were primarily social in nature prior to the Islamic revolution, and have been codified in legal frameworks in the years subsequent to it (Higgins 1985). The grounds on which women can initiate a divorce, though limited, are interesting as locators of the values and norms the state wishes to reinforce and reproduce. A woman can initiate divorce proceedings against a man who is

not virile and cannot produce viable offspring, a man who takes another wife without permission from the first wife, a man who fails to equally provide for his wives if he marries more than one woman, a man who fails to provide financially for his family, and one who physically abuses his or her children (Mir-Hosseini 1998).

These types of codes of behavior have put Iranian women in an interesting and unfortunate position, simultaneously subject to competing patriarchies, both national and international. In domestic life, they are required to uphold the “standard” Revolutionary vision of piety and femininity. Women are expected to be guardians of national honor, while also relinquishing many of their own personal desires, which are necessarily subordinated to familial and national obligations, according to Iranian patriarchy. Of course, this analysis does not only apply to Iran, as Iran is part of a global system of patriarchy which uses women as mothers and producers of soldiers, while also often using them as soldiers and protectors of nation.

Familial, communal, and national honor have often been publicly tied to women’s behavior. During the Pahlavi era, “women’s liberation” was touted as a primary objective of the state because it was a marker of civilization. Control of women’s bodies was central to Reza Shah’s vision of national progress and modernity. Women and the nation were explicitly and irrevocably linked. He is said to have told his own wife, “It is easier for me to die than to take my wife unveiled among strangers, but I have no choice. The country’s progress requires that women must be set free, and I must be the person to do this” (as quoted in De Groot 1998, 158). Clearly, Reza Shah believed that women’s veils were a hindrance to national modernization, not to their own development or freedom. His initiatives focused on women’s issues as indicators of state power and Iran’s place in the discourse of modernity.

After the 1979 revolution, national honor, or *namoos*, was also – perhaps even more – closely tied to women’s behavior. The compulsory veiling decree issued by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1979 discussed the pride of the nation and the ideal Iranian woman as its representative. He was the ideological and political architect of the new Islamic Republic, and remained the head of state until his death in 1989. Given his perception that the Islamic Republic was a democratically-elected state structure, it is interesting that he did not see control of women’s bodies by the state as undemocratic.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the deliberate

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<sup>2</sup> This type of rhetoric can also be observed in current debates in the United States regarding women’s reproductive rights and same-sex marriage, the regulation of

linking of women's behavior to national strength has been consistently deployed in order to pursue nationalist objectives.

Though they have often defended the Iranian political system as democratic, the Iranian authorities do not claim to be liberal in the classical sense; they consistently proclaim their accommodation of a plurality of interests in Iranian government. President Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Khamenei have repeatedly said that they allow for the expression and representation of a multitude of ideas and identities in Parliament. However, their rationale for the state structure is familiar – and familiarly constrictive – in the region. Esposito and Voll explain the justification for an Islamist state: “the absolute sovereignty of God makes any human hierarchy possible, since before God all humans are equal” (Esposito and Voll 1996, 25). However, the position of Supreme Leader was chosen virtually unilaterally, in contradiction with and contravention of the democratic participation that Khomeini himself had advocated.

Khomeini was politically astute in spite of his occasional difficulty articulating his ruminations in public. He knew that if political, electoral participation were not achieved to a great extent in post-revolutionary Iran, his regime and his position of power would be undermined by domestic and international accusations of authoritarian or totalitarian control. In Iran, supporters and apologists of the regime have argued that their rule was based on the Quranic notion of *tauhid*, or the ultimate oneness and sovereignty of God. Since Khomeini chose for himself the position of representative of God on Earth, his rule was indisputable for all religious elements of Iranian society. In contrast, secular and communist groups challenged his rule precisely on the basis of his self-ordained religious authority.

Iranian authorities use this logic to rationalize the codification of women's second-class status in every context, from divorce law to child custody to employment and dress codes. An examination of the movements and ideas antagonistic to the Islamic Republic reveals the similarities between the movements as well as their fundamental differences. It is crucial to understand the ideologies which underlie Iranian women's struggles.

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both of which conservatives largely see as a responsibility of the ostensibly democratic government.

## Iranian Islamic Feminism and the West

The stated goal of many Islamic feminists in Iran is to “look for Islamic solutions for a very modern problem that is the result of the changed status of women” (Ahmadi 2006, 35). These feminists are attempting to address the problem of men’s dominance over women within the framework of religious doctrine. In Iran, one of the primary difficulties they face is the codified patriarchy inherent in the Islamic Republic. They argue that the text of the Quran has been misinterpreted in misogynist ways, and that a reinterpretation reveals a much more egalitarian view than is currently practiced (Ahmed 1992). Fereshteh Ahmadi argues that

“when the custodians of the Sharia became the basis of the legalistic system of an Islamic state, they had to deal with contradictory aims: on the one hand, upholding the family and restoring women to their ‘true and high’ status in Islam, and, on the other hand, upholding men’s Sharia prerogatives.” (Ahmadi 2006, 36)

However, the focus on Quranic approaches to women’s rights mirrors the liberal feminist discourse in the West, and therefore is vulnerable to the same criticism: granting women legal equality with men by removing obstacles to their social or political advancement does not in any way change the structure of hetero-patriarchy and the state’s investment in maintaining the heterosexual nuclear family over which men preside. In Iran in particular, given the specific brand of Shia Islam subscribed to by the government, the removal of legal obstacles, even were they to be achieved, would do no more than scratch the surface of prescriptions, enforcements, and reinforcements of women’s subordinate role as “devoted daughter, wife, and mother, dependent and asexual” (De Groot 1998, 160). Indeed, some have called “Islamic feminism” a fundamental contradiction in terms (Shahidian 1998; Mojab 2001).

Limited though they may be, these acts of resistance are sharply distinguishable from Western liberal feminist thought, which has been roundly criticized as narrow, racist, bourgeois, and chauvinist (Hooks 2000), partly due to its roots in upper-middle class urban white women’s activism. Women such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Margaret Sanger worked within a social-Darwinist framework which colored their perceptions of “other,” ultimately leading them to act as if their perspective were universal to all women everywhere, which served to further marginalize women of color both within the United States and abroad. Islamic feminists have attempted to recalibrate and reinterpret Islam and feminism in “indigenous” and “authentic” terms, many arguing

that the Quran is in actuality a text in defense of women's rights (Ahmed 1992). In practice, the Iranian state's relationship to Islam can be easily seen in the way it has treated women's bodies and women's and men's sexuality since the turn of the 20th century.

At the heart of Islamic feminism is the call for a return to an "authentic" Iranianness and Iranian womanhood. Ironically, authentic Iranianness means something entirely different to anti-Islamic leftist or monarchist forces in Iran, who prefer to see the primordial Iranian identity as separate from Islam, instead desiring a harkening back to pre-Islamic (Zoroastrian) times. Western feminist ideals are seen as foreign and inauthentic, the application of which to Iranian women's struggles is questionable at best (Mojab 2001).

Again, contrary to popular Western opinion, Muslim women's awareness of inequitable distributions of power along gender lines and restrictive gender roles occurred prior to first contact with Western feminisms (Mojab 2001). However, even when they expressed their dissatisfaction or "resentment against the oppressive domination of males,... the dissent was expressed individually, recorded in a few obscure writings and targeted the male members of their class only" (Mojab 2001, 125).

Shahzad Mojab's work includes a component missing in much of the body of literature on women and nationalism in Iran: class. A class-based analysis reveals lines of division that are most often ignored. Upper-class Iranian women, who enjoyed a relatively greater degree of freedom in comparison with their sisters in the bottom rungs of the socio-economic ladder and relatively less adherence to religious tradition, largely compartmentalized their desires and frustrations. This resulted in a fracturing of Iranian women's movements that hindered the progress that cross-class solidarity and radical demands would likely have engendered. Dissent often "did not seek a redistribution of gender power or, far less, the democratization of the patriarchal social and economic system within which gender relations were reproduced" (ibid). Further, the unit of analysis used in most analyses of women's status is problematic: "In using 'nations' and 'cultures' as the unit of analysis, class differences among women which defines needs, aspirations, and demands are completely ignored" (Moghissi 1999, 90).

Interestingly, the communist March 8 Women's Organization appears to embrace pluralism in a way that United States political sensibilities do not, in spite of the United States' stated commitment to pluralism and liberal democracy. This group allows for a more inclusive coalition than is allowed by the US political system. Ultimately, however, the communist