

within the different historical stages of the national struggle to express people's aspirations and respond to national needs.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Palestinian women's activism has been influenced by its relation to, and identification with, the national liberation struggle.

Since the 1920s, Palestinian women's activism has been organically linked to and developed through the resistance movement, and hence women have shared the nation's fortunes, burdens and aspirations for independence and sovereignty (Jad 1995; Kuttab 1993). One of the historical events that had strategic repercussions on the national struggle in general and women's activism in particular was the creation of the women's union, which has shaped and organized women into a women's movement, sustained up to the present time (Jad 1995).

This process began in 1921, when the first Palestinian women's union was created in Jerusalem and came to exemplify the organic link between national struggle and social struggle. The political conditions of that period – namely the practices of the British Mandate and its support of the Jewish immigration policy to Palestine, and the Zionist encroachment on Palestinian land which resulted in the loss and fragmentation of the Palestinian community – encouraged Palestinian women to struggle alongside men in protesting against the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Women's participation in the struggle from 1929 until 1947 was spotlighted in different headlines in both local and international newspapers, especially in the Arabic press regarding the British Mandate. The media was baffled by slogans that expressed clearly that women are also nationalists like men, or that the Arab women are in the vanguard and in the forefront of the ranks, indicating the extensive involvement of women in the national struggle. Their participation took on different forms such as demonstrations, congresses, memoranda to the government, arms smuggling, meetings with government officials, fundraising, support to prisoners, and aid to the wounded (Fleishmann 2003). Yet, despite these national activities, women were able to assert a feminist agency and autonomy from the male nationalist project and the colonizers' imposition of neo-traditional customs (Ibid).

Resistance continues against the British mandate and Jewish immigration to Palestine and was disrupted by the second major event in

the history of Palestinian people in general, and Palestinian women in particular: the outbreak of 1948 Arab-Israeli War, which created a new reality as a result of the uprooting and dispersion of the Palestinian people. The creation of the Israeli state in the larger part of historical Palestine and the destruction and fragmentation of the Palestinian social networks that represent the basic conditions for sustainability were challenged, which in turn imposed new demands on the women's organizations, and forced them to expand their structures in order to be able to offer relief and social services to needy families. While the Palestinians were still rising from the ruins and coping with the agony of loss from the 1948 war, the 1967 Six-day war erupted resulting in the complete destruction of the political, economic and cultural infrastructure of the Palestinian society, reducing its ability for survival and continuity, which now demanded further solidarity and unity among the people and within the national movement. These events transformed the women's movement to a wide structure of charitable organizations that supported and responded to the needs of the communities.

Following the 1967 war and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strip, structural changes occurred in the Palestinian society that drastically transformed the economic and social lives of its population. The economic displacement of the peasants, through Israeli appropriation of lands, transformed the peasant class into a proletarian workforce for the Israeli labour market, which has put the traditional peasant family at risk. The full control of water resources by the Israelis and the structural distortion of the labour market have transformed the Palestinian economy into an economy fully dependent on the Israeli labour market (Kuttab 1988). All these practices have put new pressures on women in general and the women's movement in particular, with the central role of Palestinian women transferred to the preservation of tradition, national heritage and culture, as symbols of identity and continuity. Although on the surface these roles seem to be traditional and passive, their importance and meaning lies in the fact that sustaining a society became critical for its survival.

In this same period, women also joined different political parties to enhance their political role and enrol in the resistance. Although these developments created a new image of women's militancy, gender segregation and the traditional division of labour – where women's

roles were sexually defined and limited to providing service support – were still maintained, but also critically questioned.

Nationalism and Feminism

Women's movements that have defined themselves as autonomous from male-dominated parties and institutions are often intertwined with broader movements for social change. Nationalist movements provide opportunities for large-scale women's activism and this opportunity comes to recognize gender specific grievances and concerns. (Basu 1995)

The Palestinian women's movement has developed through its engagement in the broader issues of the nation. The process of resistance against the colonial occupation has also shaped the class and gender consciousness which affected systematically the women's agenda and their struggle for their own rights. The history of the women's movement and the analysis provided in this article serve to illustrate some of these issues more clearly.

Although Palestinian women's participation in the national struggle had been perceived as a necessary but not a sufficient condition for their emancipation as women, they still express their belief that the struggle for women's liberation is not distinct from national independence and at the same time does not constitute a paradox. Since the women's involvement in the national movement in the 1920s and throughout the *Intifada* of the 1980s, nationalism was seen as a "releasing effect" and a necessary tool to legitimize their activism, and provide them with a public role, political expression and gender identity (Fleischmann 2003). A realistic approach for women living under colonial hegemony would depend on the capacity of the women's movement to understand the working reality of their everyday lives under colonialism, and thus to accommodate the nation's worries, concerns and issues with their own. It would have been unrealistic for the women's movement to prioritize women's issues and rights, while all the Palestinian people, men and women alike, were being denied their basic human and national rights (Kuttab 1996b).

Different writers on the women's movement argue this further when they point out that from its inception, the women's movement agenda was not explicitly articulated, and was located within a nationalist framework. Yet, one of the first resolutions and by-laws in 1929

that followed the national movement and the creation of the first Palestinian women's union included a clause that stated the goals of undertaking a women's awakening, and elevating the standing of Arab women in Palestine (Fleischmann 2003). Working towards these goals, women had to prioritize the national dimension as part of their vision to improve the Arab women's status, which was embedded in their concept of the role of the nation-state. This view was not based on conceptualizing gender roles, or factors of internal oppression, but rather women perceived it as the means to and end result of social change or "reform", where achievement becomes linked to the struggle for building a nation-state. Hence women's rights became organically linked to the nation-state, and the notion of rights became linked to the political connotation of suffrage and nationhood (Ibid)

Although women did not problematize the tension between their nationalist participation and gender inequalities early on in the struggle, they always expressed the difficulty inherent in promoting what they perceived as narrow, feminist issues especially when the whole nation is under attack with men more targeted by the occupiers, and also when both Palestinian men and women have not attained their political rights.

Demands of gender equality are more mature now but are also questioned in their relevance to the struggle, as the Palestinian problem is still not resolved and the continuation of the national struggle is still necessary for attaining liberation. Hence the gender aspect of the struggle has to be redefined to incorporate national as well as social struggles, which is a difficult formula to achieve on the practical level. Yet this does not mean that the women's movement did not deal with women's issues or did not promote gender equality in its programs, but gender in its modern form and meaning, and as a concept and category of analysis did not appear even in the modern societies in the early twentieth century when the Palestinian women started their resistance against the British and Zionist political agenda.

It has now become clearer that the relation between "Feminism and Nationalism" in the Palestinian context has experienced tension, but at the same time has been misinterpreted due to the limited understanding by Western-oriented feminists who ignored the realities of imperialism and colonialism, and have universalized Western women's experiences as representative of all "women" (Fleischmann

2003; Kuttab 1996a). Acknowledging the fact that women's issues are not separated but linked organically to issues of the nation deepens the understanding of Palestinian women's vision of tying the national liberation struggle to gender equality and women's emancipation.

Democratization of the Women's Movement

The programmed Israeli practices after the 1967 war led to the destruction of the political, social and economic infrastructure of the occupied Palestinian population which affected all sectors, classes and institutions of the Palestinian society. The Israeli impact was so pervasive that it produced broad-based Palestinian resistance to defend the national identity. The period between 1976 and 1981, therefore, witnessed a process of democratization of the national struggle. Different writers have documented the experience of resistance organizations (Jad 2003; Kuttab 1993), including Taraki who describes:

[T]he emergence of open frameworks for political, social, and cultural action; the amplification of mass participation in political activities; and most important, the incorporation of new social forces, particularly the less advantaged sectors of society, into Palestinian institutional life. (Taraki 1991)

Additionally, this stage exposed the limitations of previous Palestinian traditional social and political structures that led to the loss of their functional and operational capability. In other words, the traditional formations based on class, gender and religious affiliation created by traditional figures and social forces became utterly ineffective in coping with the scope and nature of everyday problems posed by the Israeli occupation. One reason for this was the social distance between the traditional elite leadership and the masses, and the other was the misinterpretation of a dialectic relation between national and social liberation. The democratic change at the structural and ideological level created new organizations that mobilized Palestinians under broad categories and sectors such as youth, workers, women and students.

It is at this point that Palestinian women facing a triple form of oppression – by class, gender, and nationality – took advantage of the above mentioned democratization initiative and created their own mass-based organizations. A new generation of women activists

appeared with a new approach to understanding the relationship between national liberation and women's emancipation. This "new" movement, which was mainly initiated by a nucleus of progressive women of different political ideologies and of petit bourgeois origins, established new mass-based organizations capable of organizing and mobilizing women in villages and refugee camps using national as well as women's issues as frameworks for their work. The creation of the women's committees which represent the "new" women's movement have broadened the issues, expanded their agendas to include social issues in addition to national issues, and have put forward different demands such as: the right to struggle, to work, to be educated, and to be represented equally in political decision-making. All these demands have challenged the social, cultural and political traditions that prohibit women from participating actively and effectively in public life. Translating these demands into practice, the committees had to work on different levels, namely the national, economic and social in addition to the political (Kuttab 1993; 2003).

Despite the clear connection between the national and the social struggle on the theoretical level, the situation became more difficult on the practical and daily level as the political and national issues remained a top priority. This did not mean that the new women's movement did not emphasize the required changes affecting the role and status of women in the Palestinian society. But the complexity of balancing the national and social agendas, under colonial settler occupation, made the whole process very demanding and complicated.

The committees had to respond continuously to emergency situations due to the occupation, which made feasible, systematic work plans or programs difficult to achieve and implement.

It is known historically that the eruption of the 1987 *Intifada* came within a long process of democratic activism led by mass-based organizations acting as democratic extensions of the national movement. The strength of the national movement and the crystallization of democratic political consciousness in the mid-1970s had a direct impact on the creation of democratic vehicles of change that integrated political, social, and cultural action in a comprehensive strategy for political activity (more detailed discussion can be found in Taraki 1991 and Kuttab 1993).

These different mechanisms have become the mobilizing tools for organizing larger sectors of the community such as students, women,

workers and professionals, who became major actors in sustaining the first *Intifada* of 1987 (Kuttab 1993). In comparison, the second *Intifada* or Al-Aqsa *Intifada* erupted within a different political situation, during a period where democratic political activism had been weakened, political activity was transformed to formal official negotiations, and civil society was being marginalized (Johnson and Kuttab 2001).

Contemporary Palestinian Women's Movement

Characterizing the contemporary women's movement, one can talk about two distinct periods: a pre-Oslo Agreement period of revolutionary style covering the 1970s and 1980s that featured a genuine democratic movement emerging in its decentralized structures to respond to the needs of the national struggle and promote women's consciousness around national and gender issues; and on the other hand, an elite movement represented in more central and formal institutions or non-governmental organizations that has institutionalized women activism and transformed it into specialized work.

The social movements in general and the women's movement in particular have accumulated their democratic resistance culture and continued the national and social function through sustaining a responsive agenda and program, and maintaining relevance to women's needs and priorities, hence becoming the legitimate representative of Palestinian women in general (Taraki 1991, Kuttab 1993, Jad 2000). The build-up of such democratic activism prepared the grounds for the democratic *Intifada* of 1987, which has been characterized as one of the major popular uprisings in the recent history of the Palestinian struggle.

Although the connection between the national and the social struggle was very clear on the theoretical level, on the practical level and daily basis, the political and national issues remained the top priority. This did not mean, as was mentioned before, that the new women committees neglected gender issues. It is the level of complexity involved in balancing the national and social agendas, while under colonial occupation, which made the whole process very demanding and confusing (Johnson and Kuttab 2001).

Mass-Based Organizations and Oslo Agreement

While the 1980s reflected the golden era of democratic activism led by mass-based organizations and civil society organizations as complementary to political parties and unions, the early 1990s treated the equation differently, resulting in the failure of these organizations to pick up the opportunity and ensure sustainability. The Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles (Oslo Agreement) was agreed upon in September 1993 by the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel, which resulted in a peace agreement that committed both parties to a series of actions and interim measures including partial Israeli territorial withdrawal and limited Palestinian self-government. This agreement created a political environment of euphoria and optimism among the Palestinian people who had suffered a long colonial occupation of almost forty years, hence setting a new mindset whereby people felt less pressured by the daily presence of the occupiers and more responsible for their own affairs. The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) was expected to have the power and will to control the future of the country under the assumption that there would be more opportunities for self-reliance through an expansion of the labour market, and that the Palestinian economy would be relatively liberated from full dependence on the Israeli economy, especially the Israeli labour market (Kuttab 2006).

This state of euphoria did not last long, as the situation changed drastically after a period of about seven years. The Al-Aqsa *Intifada* erupted in September 2000 as an expression of protest against the above-mentioned, short-sighted political agreement and against Israeli intransigence in the implementation of agreed-upon measures.

The mass-based organizations that were important actors in the first *Intifada* were dispersed or diffused due to the cantonization policy, leaving behind only a symbolic elite leadership with no constituency. The fragile left opposition parties were not able to regenerate or maintain their activity and viability as a result of their structural weakness and orthodox culture that has not been dynamic in responding to abrupt changes and realities. This in addition to the hegemony of the PNA which was able to monopolize power in the formal authoritarian structure, and diffuse democratic culture which altogether negatively affected the democratic culture that existed previously in the 1980s.

Women's Movement: Challenges and Risks

One of the most outstanding and serious challenges of all facing the Palestinian women's movement during the last ten years has been its transformation from a grass-rooted movement to an elite movement. In the early 1990s, a new phenomenon came into play: the "Ngoization" of women's organizations occurred, where the feminist NGOs came to play a prominent and highly controversial role in the revolutionary women's movement (Jad 2003). These NGOs have come to represent particular kinds of groups with orientations and practices distinct from those of the historic women's groups of the 1970s and 1980s. Growing numbers of specialized and professional feminist NGOs have mushroomed to intervene in national and international policy processes. The inception of these organizations was directly an outcome of the absence of internal democracy and indifference of the national movement regarding gender issues on one hand, and the political process and peace agreements that created a political environment of euphoria on the other. It became obvious that the women's movement leadership sought to use this opportunity and space to impact new national policies through specialized and professional work. Consequently, they became more noticeable on the national map by receiving funds from bilateral and multilateral agencies. They adopted a new agenda more oriented to policy and advocacy and provided expert input into official preparatory documents. Hence, this structural transformation that institutionalized women activism into new NGO forms marginalized the input of the grass-roots movements and weakened the historic women committees. The majority of women NGOs were further de-linked from the national movement through a rationale of decreasing control and hegemony among different political factions. In addition, the erosion of mass movements and the weakening of mass mobilization and democratic representation affected the women's movement's credibility and legitimacy. Consequently, the women's agenda was further de-politicized, reflecting a post-conflict situation through separating women's issues from governance and the political system on the one hand, and from the national struggle on the other. These challenges have not been accommodated or faced, and deeper structural imbalances between women's rights *vis-a-vis* women's practical and strategic needs, versus requirements for national libera-

tion struggle, were placed in conflict and were not resolved. This situation has empowered an elite leadership that has promoted and enhanced a new agenda, which does not focus or represent the women's priority issues (Kuttab 2008).

Women Activism: A step behind

This general demobilization of Palestinian social movements in the Al-Aqsa *Intifada* seems to have affected the women's movement, which then lost its visibility and its dynamic nature. The transition to "democracy" or to "normal" politics as I call them here, and not national politics, has also exposed the real differences and tensions among women that were latent in the past, as national issues had been a uniting force. The beginning of a fundamental divide exists today between those who believe that women's greater equality can be fought from within the state or institutions by pressuring policy makers, while a majority still sees this as a potential for losing autonomy and power for transformation and emancipation. The General Union of Palestinian Women's Executive Committee, which is a quasi-governmental organization that is controlled by women of outside leadership and the Gender Committees in different Palestinian Ministries are consolidating policy transformation by using international platforms as a basis for gender activism. As these formations are not autonomous bodies and are appendages of the state, the ability to mobilize women on issues of equality, democratic governance, and political participation decreases. Hence the limited autonomy of the women's union combined with the absence of elections as a democratic process has handicapped its representative power and limited its ability to mobilize women in the recent uprising. Although there was a consistent attempt to promote women's neighbourhood committees and popular committees in order to mobilize women for the current *Intifada*, this has failed to occur on a wide scale because of the absence of a clear program and a gap between leadership and the constituency.

It seems that women always have a dilemma in responding to the question: "Can the state be a potential force for greater equality or is it an instrument for patriarchal oppression?" (Alvarez 1990). In the Palestinian case, the Palestinian National Authoritarian state has indicated in different instances due to its patriarchal nature that it does not have

the ability or the political will to become the democratic force for democratic transformation. Hence maintaining an autonomous body that is responsible and accountable to women can be the only solution for promoting citizenship and accountability, rather than placing this responsibility on the state level.

Institutionalization of Women's Issues

The growing demand for specialized information about women's status that can be effectively fed into the policy process has led to the creation of non-governmental institutions that have professionalized women issues. These organizations have dominated the political and organizational dynamics and controlled the women's movement participation, in the form of international conferences and workshops. Hence the professionalization of women activism has not promoted women or empowered them in the formal and informal structures of national politics, but has isolated them and separated them from the real issues of the majority (Kuttab and Abu Awwad, 2004).

All of these factors combined – namely the structural limitations, institutionalization of the women issues, and the nature of the elite leadership that has alienated the women's agenda during the political transformation process – have limited the participation of women in the current *Intifada*. It is difficult to see at this stage a women's platform that has the potential ability to empower women and mobilize them in the daily political life. The political period needs a broad coalition of women organizations and independents who only believe in democratic transformation and are elected democratically to represent core women issues that take into consideration class and gender as main categories of formulating an agenda. It is clear now especially due to the *Intifada* and the policy of siege and closures that women are separated geographically, but an additional issue that we have to mention here is the localization of the issues according to the geographic or regional setting. It is clear that the *Intifada* has affected some women more than others and differently, and if such analysis is endorsed maybe a more realistic agenda can be promoted that is able to mobilize a wide spectrum of women into the struggle in a decentralized structure.

The Way Out

As long as the women's movement and other social movements are unwilling to carry the banner once again in order to safeguard their democratic achievements, there will not be a democratic Palestine that we have all dreamed of and lived for. This period is a challenge for all democratic forces and social movements. If these forces do not turn back to their constituency and become more relevant to the needs and aspirations of their people; if they are not able to build some kind of public opinion concerning the advantages of a democratic future state that maintains political pluralism and individual liberties; if they are not able to redefine their priorities and focus more on a decentralized structure that can integrate women's grass-root input into an outreach policy similar to that of the 1980s or even more developed; and if women will not regain their role as the main skeleton of the popular *Intifada*, and become truly democratic organizations, representing people's needs; then the women's movement in particular will be preparing the conditions for a deeper setback with perhaps irreversible circumstances. Serving and regaining people's confidence, maintaining their interest and fulfilling their needs are the real assets for legitimacy and credibility.

Finally, if women's organizations continue to speak of equality and empowerment in abstract and isolation from national liberation issues, and hence accommodate the local agenda as the most important agenda of all, it will continue to be distant from the masses and the needs of the masses. To make women's issues societal issues, the women's movement and women's organizations should go back to their original agenda of balancing the national and the social, in a workable formula that can bridge the gap between the requirements of the elite with the needs of the masses.

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Mouvements de femmes en Iran: entre l'islam et l'Occident

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À peine un mois après l'établissement du régime islamique en Iran en 1979, les lois et normes charitatives ont été restaurées avec l'application d'une lecture traditionaliste des droits des femmes et du droit familial. Les femmes issues des classes moyennes modernes et plus ou moins occidentalisées qui refusaient de se soumettre à l'ordre moral des islamistes (symbolisé par le port obligatoire du voile) ont perdu leurs emplois et ont été écartées de la sphère publique au profit des femmes islamistes. Ces dernières, d'origines sociale et familiale plus modeste, souvent moins instruites et plus traditionnelles, ont ainsi assuré leur ascension sociale. Se qualifiant d'héritières de la Révolution, ces femmes islamistes se sont associées au pouvoir. Cependant, une partie d'entre elles (instruites et issues des classes moyennes traditionnelles) ont plus tard réalisé que les régressions concernaient toutes les femmes, laïques comme religieuses, traditionnelles comme modernes (Kian Thiébaud 2002a).

Dans une démarche qui a pris la forme d'une stratégie collective, les militantes islamiques et laïques des droits des femmes se sont alliées pour rejeter la hiérarchisation, les normes imposées par l'État et ses lois au nom de la religion et de la tradition, et pour revendiquer le changement des lois et des rapports de pouvoir. À travers une relecture au féminin, dynamique et critique du Coran et des traditions, elles procèdent à l'historicisation et la contextualisation de l'islam et rejettent la vision déterministe de la religion qui sert à justifier la discrimination sexuelle et la domination masculine. Revendiquant leur droit à la citoyenneté, elles défendent l'idée selon laquelle les inégalités

sociales entre les sexes relève d'un choix politique et non d'une volonté divine. Ces femmes ont adopté une stratégie visant à défier les rapports de pouvoir dans le contexte des contraintes concrètes, une version de ce que Deniz Kandiyoti a appelé "*bargaining with patriarchy*" (Kandiyoti 1988).

Cette mobilisation contre l'institutionnalisation des inégalités s'explique par l'existence des mouvements de femmes depuis le début du vingtième siècle, par les réformes statutaires sous les Pahlavi (1925-79), et, enfin et surtout, par la constitution des femmes en actrices sociales et politiques au cours du mouvement révolutionnaire de 1978-79, lequel a été marqué par la participation massive des femmes appartenant à divers groupes sociaux et se réclamant de diverses idéologies (islamistes, nationalistes ou marxistes).

Pendant la Révolution constitutionnelle (1905-11), qui portait la modernité, les femmes constitutionnalistes, souvent épouses, filles ou sœurs des révolutionnaires, ont fondé les Associations secrètes de femmes (*anjoman ha-ye serri*) puis les Associations de femmes (*anjoman ha-ye nesvan*) pour débattre de leurs droits sociaux et politiques. La précocité du mouvement des femmes en Iran par rapport aux pays arabes colonisés s'explique précisément par le fait que l'Iran a échappé à la colonisation. Contrairement aux pays colonisés où les activités politiques étaient centrées sur les objectifs nationalistes et où les organisations féministes indépendantes étaient découragées, les femmes activistes iraniennes se sont identifiées avec le mouvement national/constitutionnel tout en exprimant les revendications propres à la citoyenneté des femmes.

Cependant, l'idée de la nation que véhiculaient les modernistes laïcs était imprégnée de l'influence orientaliste et énoncée dans des concepts sexués. L'inégalité des sexes était la forme paradigmatique sur laquelle reposait la nation. La condition des femmes servait ainsi à définir les frontières entre le monde «civilisé» de l'Europe et le monde «barbare» de l'islam (Moallem 2005). La nation, la politique ou le savoir étaient ainsi associés au genre masculin, la patrie au genre féminin. Le concept de l'honneur (*nâmous*), qui avait une connotation religieuse, est devenu étroitement lié à la masculinité de la nation. La représentation de la mère patrie en corps souffrant, en personnage féminin vulnérable, a offert aux nationalistes le discours de la protection des femmes et de la défense de l'honneur de la mère patrie et des

femmes. Le concept de l'État-nation (moderne) a ainsi été modelé comme un ordre patriarcal hétéronormalisé. Le patriotisme a été lié à la masculinité, les symboliques de l'État moderne iranien comme collectivité masculine ayant pour responsabilité la protection de la mère patrie sont devenues exclusivement masculines (Najmabadi 2005).

Le projet moderniste porté par la Révolution constitutionnelle, qui était centré sur la loi, la science et le progrès, consistait à civiliser ou plus précisément à européeniser la nation iranienne. À cette fin, l'instruction des femmes et la transformation de l'espace domestique s'avéraient prioritaires. Ce projet s'inscrivait dans une double perspective de réglementation et d'émancipation. Le but recherché était de mettre fin au confinement des femmes dans le monde clos du foyer traditionnel et de libérer ainsi les hommes, qui assumaient alors la gestion du foyer, afin qu'ils puissent se consacrer entièrement à la politique nationale. L'instruction des femmes visait à faire d'elles les éducatrices des citoyens instruits (hommes), les gestionnaires du foyer et les compagnes des hommes de la nation.

En 1909, les femmes constitutionnalistes, dont l'activisme était enraciné dans le nationalisme, ont organisé des *sit-in* au parlement et revendiqué les droits politiques pour les femmes. Pendant la même période, elles ont publié deux magazines féminins: *Dânesh* (savoir) en 1908 et *Shekoufeh* (bourgeon) en 1912 à Téhéran. Parmi les principales revendications des activistes, dont cette presse se faisait l'écho, figuraient les droits politiques et le droit à l'instruction des femmes, la transformation de l'espace domestique et une nouvelle configuration de la famille (nucléaire) centrée autour des époux et proche du modèle européen. Des lectrices étaient familiarisées avec des mesures d'hygiène, des mesures pour la gestion plus rationnelle de leurs ménages et l'éducation de leurs enfants. Si l'instruction constituait l'élément central des débats sur la réforme du statut de la femme, aucune unanimité n'existait alors parmi les femmes constitutionnalistes sur la question du port du voile. Pour certaines (comme Shahnaz Azad, Shams Kasma'i ou princesse Taj al-Saltaneh¹), la modernité, portée par la Révolution constitutionnelle, portait aussi la promesse d'ouvrir l'espace public aux femmes modernistes et instruites, à l'image des femmes européennes que les intellectuels modernistes

¹ Pour la biographie de Taj al-Saltaneh voir Amanat (1993).