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Confirmation from a Journalist: A Case Study of Azadeh Moaveni's Orientalist Discourse in *Lipstick Jihad* and *Honeymoon in Tehran*

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## ABSTRACT

Azadeh Moaveni's two memoirs, *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America and American in Iran* (2005) and *Honeymoon in Tehran: Two Years of Love and Danger in Iran* (2010), have been praised for offering an objective picture of contemporary Iran, especially due to the fact that they are written by a professional journalist who is also a native informant. The present article argues that these memoirs, in spite of different claims about their authenticity, embody the orientalist discourse of ineptness and backwardness of Iranian people. The article, drawing on theories from Said, Genette, Barth, and Alcoff, among others, maintains that the paratexts and texts of the memoirs, confirm the expectations of many of their western readers and introduce Iranian people as pathetic beings in need of a savior, obsessed with the gratification of their sexual desires with the ultimate dream of living in the West. It is finally concluded that the memoirs can be considered reductionist as they propose some generalizations which do not apply to all sections of Iranian society and their orientalist confirmation can be strongly challenged for the dual reasons that they deny the dynamic nature of Iranian society and reflect only part of the truth about Iran, not all of it.

**Keywords:** *Memoirs, Orientalist Discourse, Paratexts, Journalism, Azadeh Moaveni*

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## 1. Introduction

Azadeh Moaveni's two memoirs, *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America and American in Iran* (2005) and *Honeymoon in Tehran: Two Years of Love and Danger in Iran* (2010), as "return narratives" (Darznik, 2008, p. 56), have been deemed important sources for Westerners to gain 'authentic' knowledge on Iran's social and political history. Since Moaveni is narrating her life story from the perspective of a professional journalist, who returns to Iran as a grown-up woman, indoctrinated on ethics of journalism at American universities, her memoirs are deemed as a meticulous reportage of an objective observer. In this regard, Jasmin Darznik argues that, Moaveni "confronts the very longing for authenticity and turns to journalism as a corrective for nostalgia" (2008, p. 68). As Darznik has put it, Moaveni, in order to undercut "the fiction of authenticity", has made "repeated and explicit references to the entangled histories of Iran and America" (2008, p. 68).

That said, in this paper, it is attempted to be asserted that Moaveni, through her journalistic capabilities, has fostered the delusion of offering a full-fledged mirror to Iran's political and social condition. Also, in both her memoirs, she has attempted to elaborate on how Iran's inexplicably dire circumstances have turned Iranians into oddities that have to deal with the immensely widespread delinquency of their society every second of their lives. Perceivably, Moaveni's profession has deterred intellectuals from conducting a meticulous analysis of her reductionist standpoint that has rendered both her memoirs interspersed with Orientalist notions. Most importantly, in this paper, it is argued that in spite of Moaveni's memoirs being praised for their objective picture of Iran by the press such as *The New York Times* and *Associated Press*, as well as her claims of contradicting in her memoirs artists and authors who have exoticized her motherland, Orientalist discourse is scarcely absent from both her memoirs. By providing

relevant scenes and conversations, we will delineate how Moaveni has overtly portrayed Iranians as exotic beings who constantly deal with mental and emotional conflicts.

Our contention is that Moaveni's Orientalist attitude has been delicately disguised since her account of Iran's political and social status are intermingled with her first-hand experiences during her stay in her homeland and her several interviews with native Iranians. In order to demonstrate her Orientalist discourse, we will examine Moaveni's depiction of Iranians as exotic, non-understanding beings suffering from a severe identity crisis, supplemented by an inefficacious health care system, and deficient public education, as a result of which they all find the West a perfect haven of tranquility. More important is how such an allegedly odd, oppressive Islamic Iran has, in Moaveni's memoirs, made women submit to patriarchal conventions, and take on passive roles, a subject that we will elaborate on further in this paper. In order to demonstrate how such an exoticization of an Islamic country directly leads to Western imperialism, and renders all Eastern cultures inferior, we will draw on Linda Alcoff's analysis of the problems of representing others and Edward Said's *Orientalism*.

## 2. Orientalism and the Paratexts of the Memoirs

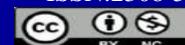
We find it imperative to stress that although Moaveni's Orientalist discourse has rarely attracted the attention of critics, even before flipping through the pages of her memoirs, her Orientalist attitude manifests itself in her memoirs' titles and cover pages, which we will explain further by drawing on Gerard Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* after giving a brief summary of each memoir.

*Lipstick Jihad* (2005) covers the experiences of Moaveni's first visit to her motherland in her adulthood. After a short visit to Iran in 1998 during a Fulbright year in Cairo, she feels mesmerized by what her country could offer her other than unending debates on Islam. In 2000, seeing the newspaper headlines regarding the raging student demonstrations in Tehran, she cannot suppress the urge to fulfill her "duty to witness history, if only as a tourist-spectator" (Moaveni, 2005, p. 35). A friend, Shazi, an Iranian correspondent for AP, motivates Moaveni to head for her country if she really aches to live and work in her motherland. From the very first moment she

arrives at Mehrabad airport, all her relatives in Iran endeavor to instruct her what to wear and how to behave. After a short while, Moaveni decides to move in with her grandfather whom she calls Pedar Joon. Moaveni, starts her life at Pedar Joon's place, but after some time, Moaveni decides to move to a one-bedroom apartment, as she did not want to cause any discomfort for her family by her socializing with different people. During her stay, since Moaveni feels bewildered by the peculiar behavior of Iranians, most of whom take every opportunity to defy the rules and gratify their physical needs, some close friends and colleagues attempt to expand her modicum of knowledge of her motherland and her compatriots. In order to get a deeper understanding of her multifarious society, Moaveni, in addition to her encounters with some relatives and friends, gives several interviews to a diverse group of authorities and social activists, which certainly adds to the illusion of authenticity of her memoir. *Lipstick Jihad* ends with Azadeh's departure to New York, after the time when the events of September 11 and Iran's being called a part of the "axis of evil" make Iranian authorities highly sensitive to any piece of writing that could evoke anti-Islamic and/or anti-Iranian sensations.

*Honeymoon in Tehran* (2010) is mainly focused on Moaveni's personal life through which she explicates serious problems in Iran's health care system and education. Moaveni returns to Iran in the late spring of 2005 to witness the country's presidential election, and during her stay she falls in love, and eventually experiences motherhood in her motherland. One of the most significant themes of her second memoir is her harsh comments on Iran's health care and educational systems. Finding a proper obstetrician in Iran to help her with pregnancy care is depicted as an intractable problem, as well as finding a suitable school for her son. Considering all these problems, Moaveni and her husband decide to head for London before their son reaches the age to start school. Since Moaveni finds her motherland not a sound and secure place for a female journalist who also has maternal responsibilities, she, together with her family, leaves Iran for good.

As mentioned beforehand, Moaveni's Orientalist attitude does not start at the onset of the very first chapter of her memoirs; rather, her negative attitude toward Iran and Iranians shows itself in her works' cover pages and titles. Such elements are called



the paratext by Gerard Genette, in his book, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. In Genette's terms, every single book is reinforced by "a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, [and] illustrations", all of which he calls paratextual elements (1997, p. 1). Genette asserts that such elements, despite constituting a minute segment of a book in comparison with the text, play an undeniably significant role in the reception of the book. Joshua Ratner also stresses the point that paratexts "affect how the reader encounters the text" and refers to the paratexts' important roles "in shaping readers' opinions and purchasing habits" (2018, p. 733). Genette further maintains that the importance of the paratext lies in its capability to empower "a text to become a book and, more generally, to the public" (1997, p. 1). Among diverse paratextual elements that shape the readership's outlook on a written work, the outermost paratexts such as "the cover, the title page, and their appendages" (1997, p. 16) play a much more noticeable role, which is beyond a shadow of doubt true about Moaveni's memoirs.

The titles of both Moaveni's memoirs could arguably be deemed a substantiation of Westerners' negative perspective of Oriental countries. "A title", as Eco contends, "unfortunately, is in itself a key to interpretation. We cannot escape the notions prompted by *The Red and the Black* or *War and Peace*" (as cited in Genette, 1997, p. 93). Regarding Moaveni's memoirs, the Western audience are certainly incapable of extricating themselves from the strong urge to take the titles of a seemingly objective journalist's works as the confirmation of their own negative presuppositions about the Oriental and Islamic societies.

The first memoir of Moaveni is entitled *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America and American in Iran*. *Lipstick Jihad* constitutes a paradoxical concept insinuating Iranians' identity crisis, specifically, that of Iranian women. Lipstick, as Moaveni is trying to demonstrate, both on the cover page of her book, and within its content, is a symbol of resistance for Iranian women to defy the restrictive rules of their country. When put beside a totally Islamic concept, jihad, lipstick gains a much more profound implication and shows how Iranian women, who are seemingly entrapped in an Islamic society that has mandated hijab, take most of the Western conventions including makeup

as an epitome of freedom, independence, and resistance. This notion is reinforced by the picture of the cover page of the book.

The significance of the image on the cover of a book written by an Eastern writer who does not have any positive idea of their motherland is best conveyed by Hamid Dabashi (2011, p.73), who, drawing on Barthes' "The Photographic Message", postulates that, "[t]he image and the caption together" inevitably "suggest the tantalizing addition of an Oriental". According to Barthes, any sort of imitative art like photography "comprises two messages: a *denoted* message, which is the *analogon* itself, and a *connoted* message, which is the matter in which the society to a certain extent communicates what it thinks of it" [emphasis in the original] (as cited in Dabashi, 2011, p. 74).

The denoted message of the image on the cover page of *Lipstick Jihad* is a young woman, her hair revealing from under her loose scarf, talking on her cellphone in front of a mosque on the walls of which verses of the Qur'an are inscribed. Nevertheless, the connoted message, considering the fact that Muslim women go to mosques with chadors, and go there to say their prayers rather than talking on the phone, indicates the identity crisis of Iranian women living a paradoxical life in their Islamic society. They can neither accept the norms of their society, nor can they totally adhere to Western conventions. In other words, Iranian Muslim women take Western conventions as a proper tool to make their voices of dissent louder and louder. Thus, both the title and the image on the cover page of Moaveni's first memoir adduce evidence to her Orientalist stance, which entails depicting orientals as beings at a loss and mesmerized by the West. Besides, the summary of the memoir published on the back cover of *Lipstick Jihad* unquestionably provides stronger grounds for this claim. After a little explanation on Moaveni's hybridity and her deep yearning to visit her motherland, the summary on the back cover explicates how her hopes of seeing her fascinating country shatters:

Azadeh found a country that was culturally confused, politically deadlocked, and emotionally anguished. In *Lipstick Jihad*, she paints a rare portrait of Tehran, populated by a cast of young people whose exuberance and despair bring the modern reality of Iran to vivid life. Azadeh also reveals her private struggle to build a life in a dark country, wholly unlike the luminous,

saffron-tainted Iran of her imagination. Here is the story of a young woman of the diaspora, searching for a homeland that may not exist.

Just like her first memoir, the title of Moaveni's second memoir, *Honeymoon in Tehran: Two Years of Love and Danger in Iran*, directly and explicitly testifies to the Orientalist notions in the critical post-September 11 era. We should stress the fact that following the terrorist attacks of the twin towers, "Islamophobia, an irrational fear of things Muslim, has taken a new agency" (Healy, 2009, p. 71), and the terrorist events of 2001 along with what happened in Afghanistan "associated the oppression of women and 'fundamentalism' with terrorism" (Grace, 2004, p. 12). That said, in such a historical period, Moaveni is introducing Iran as a region where a journalist puts her life in certain jeopardy when she falls in love. This title, also, is accompanied with the picture of a gloom-stricken veiled woman watching the bleak scenery of the country where she most probably belongs to. Thus, the title of Moaveni's second memoir depicts the Islamic society of Iran as such an exotic and oppressive place where love is almost impossible without anticipating a life fraught with grave perils. On this account, it could be argued that Moaveni, through the image of the cover page of her second memoir, along with its title, *Honeymoon in Tehran: Two Years of Love and Danger in Iran*, affirms the Westerners' speculations about the oppressive patriarchal codes of Islam, and implicitly depicts Muslim women as pathetic victims in need of a savior.

The reason why the paratexts, specifically, the cover pages are much more important than the text, according to Genette, is the fact that such elements are not addressed just to readers, but to the public. According to Genette (1997, pp. 74-75) the public involves the people "who do not necessarily read the book (or at least not in its entirety) but who participate in its dissemination and therefore in its 'reception'". Differentiating between the readers and the public shapes the basis of Genette's argument to delineate the salient position that paratexts assume in the reception of a book.

In addition to the titles and images on the cover pages, we should stress the importance of other paratextual elements such as the laudatory comments a work has received, since such elements are also addressed to the public prior to the

readership. Such paratextual elements have unquestionably played a noticeable role in giving an unrealistic picture of Iran, and making both Moaveni's memoirs Orientalist accounts through highlighting the author's objectivity. Before moving on, we should mention that such information is published based on the consensus between the author and the publisher.

Exactly on the top of the cover page of Moaveni's first memoir, Michiko Kakutani's praise of *Lipstick Jihad* piques any reader's interest: "[A] compelling ... guided tour through the underground youth culture in Tehran ... an *illuminating* [emphasis added] book." Such a remark gives the readers the impression that whatever is written in the book is nothing but the truth that has rendered the book "a *guided tour* [emphasis mine] through the underground youth culture in Tehran". Kakutani's comment is fortified by other approbatory remarks praising Moaveni's objective depiction of Iran,

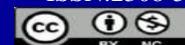
"Moaveni has a *journalist's eye* [emphasis mine] for ... struggle and a memoirist's knack for finding meaning in her own internal conflicts." *Washington Post Book World* "*Lipstick Jihad's* tug between *objective reporting* [emphasis mine] and Moaveni's subjectivity as an Iranian woman shines a fascinating light on a nation at odds with itself..." *Entertainment Weekly*

On the back cover of *Honey Moon in Tehran*, there are also remarks regarding the objectivity of Moaveni's account of her motherland, and how her country of birth disappoints her. Here we include two of them:

"At once personal and *trustworthy* [emphasis mine]... [Azadeh] Moaveni's depiction of Iranian society, her keen eye for detail and *her astute observations* [emphasis mine], make for exhilarating reading." *The Washington Post*

"Engaging... It isn't only the contradictions of a child of exiles sorting out her identity crisis that makes this book worthwhile. It's the *seductive contradictions of the motherland itself* [emphasis mine]." *The New York Times*

As emphasized by several critics, one of the most important reasons for the increasing popularity of memoirs is the overtone of truth attached to it. In this regard, Gillian Whitlock (2007, p. 133) maintains that, Memoir is a distinctive space for autobiographical writing. As a metatextual account—... it offers the possibility of incorporating "immediacy" and more authentic truth into life narrative. "Immediacy" and "authenticity" are elicited by reporters on the prowl for an "untold story"—a highly valued commodity.



According to Whitlock, “immediacy” and “authenticity” of memoirs adds an unprecedented charm to the genre of memoir and renders it in much more demand. Hence, undeniably, when a life narrative is recounted by a native journalist, the overtone of “immediacy” and “authenticity” attached to it noticeably increases and leaves no doubt for the nonacademic readership to believe whatever is told to them. That said, the choice of memoir to convey her message, writing from the perspective of a journalist and intermingling a work with several interviews with native people, and the commendatory comments on the cover page praising the author’s objectivity, all reinforce the Orientalist discourse of Moaveni.

### **3. Memoirs and Orientalist Exoticizing**

We should emphasize the fact that Moaveni’s disapproval of the exotic picture that some Iranians and Westerners have offered to the world adds to her memoirs’ delusional truth value. In *Lipstick Jihad*, she explicitly disparages Iranian artists who “portray Iran as *exclusively* static, declining, and repressive” (emphasis in the original) (2005. P. 143). And she continues:

For artists of Iranian origin, based for decades in New York or London, it lent an air of authenticity to tired, exotic images of women prostrate in pain, stranded on mountains in *chador*, in all sorts of positions in which most Iranian women—busy working and getting on with their daily lives—rarely found themselves. .... *Was Iran not already considered exotic enough in America and Europe? Why were Iranians, who knew better, producing art that made Iran seem like Saudi Arabia, a place where women actually were covered in black all the time?* (emphasis added). (2005, p.143)

In addition to her broadsides against Iranian artists’ exoticization of their homeland, Moaveni claims that, through her experiences, activities, and finally her memoirs, she is giving a much more positive, down-to-earth picture of Iran. As recounted in *Lipstick Jihad*, when Moaveni tells her American friends that she has moved to a new apartment and wants to live alone, they are taken aback, and need Moaveni’s elaboration,

My American friends got suspicious when I told them. They sent emails demanding to know how a young, single woman could live alone in Tehran. They didn’t believe half the things I told them about Iran, which they assumed was a slightly more cultured

version of Saudi Arabia, and began to suspect that I was holed up in Rome spinning elaborate fantasies with a Tehran dateline. (2005, p. 112)

Nevertheless, contrary to critics’ adulatory comments on the objectivity of Moaveni’s memoirs, and her own avowal of giving a non-exotic depiction of Iran, her Orientalist attitude is conspicuous throughout both her memoirs. From the outset, Moaveni exoticizes Iranians on the very first page of the three-page introduction of *Lipstick Jihad*. She states that when she went back to Tehran in 2000, her fantasies about Iran dissolved: “Iran, as it turned out, was not the Death Star, *but a country where people voted, picked their noses, and ate French fries*” (emphasis added) (2005, p.vii). In the same chapter, she continues to expound on the lifestyle of Iran’s young generation in their totally oppressive society, and claims that her life story is the life story of the Iranian youth, since, as she claims, she endeavored hard to adopt a lifestyle identical to that of Iran’s young generation,

I decided I wanted to live like them, as they did, their ‘as if’ lifestyle. They chose to act “as if” it was permitted to hold hands on the street, blast music at parties, speak your mind, challenge authority, take your drug of choice, grow your hair long, wear too much lipstick. ... That is why I cannot write about them without writing about myself. That is why *this is both their story, and my own* (emphasis added). (2005, p. ix)

Moaveni states that these “as if” rules has turned Iran into a desolate place where “even the sky shrank, the streets twined in mazes, and the whole of existence retreated under imposing barriers” (p. 55). Moaveni, in order to zero in on how the suppression of the Islamic regime leads to sheer moroseness, in the first chapter of *Lipstick Jihad*, recounts her unforgettable memories of her family’s brief sojourn in Iran, and maintains that “Only a very small child in the safety of a walled family compound would have felt liberated in Iran one year after the Islamic Revolution” (2005, p. 3), and compares “Iran and the West” as “the twin poles of *modernity and home*” (emphasis added) (2005, p. 7).

### **4. The Memoirs and the Depiction of a Dark Picture of Iran**

As expatiated in both memoirs, the gloominess of the oppressive Islamic regime of Iran has turned Iranians into hopeless citizens who, through using every opportunity to drink and reach sexual satisfaction, attempt to overcome their

severe desperation and ultimate disappointment over any possibility of change in their society. As Moaveni observes,

Low-grade depression was a national epidemic, and most Iranians who were not opium addicts or alcoholics had some expertise in spiritual restoratives. A generation ago, people turned to religious gatherings and prayer rituals for serenity, but in modern-day Iran, it had become commonplace to *keep Islam at arm's length* [emphasis mine]. (2005, p. 95)

Moaveni depicts Iranian youth as fed up with Islam and anything Islamic, and sexually sick, who use every opportunity, even religious ceremonies, to gratify their sexual instincts. Depicting Iran's young generation as frustrated with any possibility of change to the extent that they turn to destructive decadence to subdue their depression underpins one of the main pillars of Orientalism, that any "possibility of development, transformation, human movement—in the deepest sense of the world—is denied the Orient and the Oriental" (Said, 1978/2003, p. 208). We should highlight the fact that, in Moaveni's memoirs, Iranians' disenchantment with Islam shows itself in their lack of respect to Islamic codes, which is obviously portrayed in their behavior in Ashoura and Ramadan.

Attributing uncontrolled sexual desires to Iranians comprises an important portion of Moaveni's memoirs. Moaveni maintains that "[t]he Tehran of the revolution was one of the most sexualized milieus" (2005, p.70) she had ever confronted. In order to adduce evidence to her claim, she refers to friend's comment asserting that even the chat rooms were teeming with "erotic discussion" since what really people deeply yearned to talk was about sex (70). There are several examples of Iranian men who look for an opportunity to propose to a young woman. Some instances are a seemingly pious journalist coworker, a cleric in Qom, Mrs. Khalil's husband, and men who feeble-mindedly get nose job to be able to deceive young women by their appearances.

Based on such encounters, she comes to "the shocking realization that Iranian society was sick. Not in a facetious, slogany way, exaggerating the extent of culture wars and social tensions, but truly sick" (2005, p. 101). She believes such a society is not only "appalling" but also "spiritually and psychologically wrecked" (2005, p.101). Oddly, Moaveni, as a journalist, makes the

huge mistake of "inventing collective identities for large members of individuals who are actually quite diverse" (Said, 1978/2003, p. xxii), and takes a reductionist approach by calling Iran appalling because of some men's improper behavior.

Furthermore, by highlighting Iranians' constant obsession with amorous advances, Moaveni is strengthening one of the major presumptions of Orientalist discourse that there is "an almost uniform association between the Orient and sex" (Said, 1978/2003, p. 188). We should stress that, as Said has demonstrated, this assumption has been a well-known motif in Western literature, and this motif is conspicuously being relived in Moaveni's memoirs. Undoubtedly, Moaveni, as a native informant, has played a destructive role in representing her motherland. Rather than stressing Iranians' struggles to make progress in their society, in an era that Iran has been called a part of the "axis of evil", she has confirmed Westerners' negative perspectives of Islamic societies. That said, we are not denying that the events she has emphasized have never happened in Iran, but we are arguing that it is not the only truth to be offered to the Western audience. In case Iranian men were all like the men described in Moaveni's memoirs, Iranian women would have never been able to assume active roles in the political and social arena of their country. We should also emphasize that through her misrepresentation of Iranian men, Moaveni has underestimated Iranian women's struggles against patriarchy, and their non-stop strives to make headways in their society.

What is of paramount importance in Moaveni's life narratives is her portrayal of Islamic ceremonies as the best occasions to fulfill one's sexual drives. One of Moaveni's cousins acquaint her with the candlelight vigil, which happens on Ashoura's night:

... the candlelight vigil marking its final night (called *sham-e ghariban*) was by far the most excellent night of the year to pick up guys. Young people from across the city congregated for what they called a 'Hossein Party' in Mohseni Square, in a busy neighborhood of northern Tehran. (2005, pp. 57-58)

We should highlight the fact that Ashoura, the day Imam Hossein got murdered, has historically been respected among Shiite Muslims, specifically Iranians, and such an occasion, in Moaveni's works, is pictured as a great opportunity for Iranian youth to whet their physical desires. Once again, in Moaveni's terms, the behavior of



one group of people has been extended to everyone in Iran.

Another religious occasion through which Moaveni renders Muslims as pretentious, hypocrite beings is her portrayal of Iranians' deeds in Ramadan. In Ramadan, despite her presumption that she will "spend the month in harmony with the daily rhythm of the millions of Iranians" (2005, p. 103), she incredulously discerns an anomalous quality of hypocrisy and dissimulation everywhere. Although "[e]ating on the street for the duration of the month was illegal anyway, and there were psychedelically colored billboards celebrating the month along the expressways", besides the fact that even some schools impelled students to fast, as Moaveni learns, "Iranians of all walks of life, of all levels of education, were sneaking sips and bites during daylight hours" (2005, p. 103). As Moaveni perceives, "[t]he ratio of non-fasters to fasters was something like 6:1" (2005, p. 103).

It is undeniable that the new generation of Iran, like all the youth living at any corner of this world, are keen to break up with traditions, either religious or social, and do not respect Islamic codes on out-of-marriage relationships, or Islamic occasions such as Ashoura and Ramadan, as the previous generation did. However, the main problem with Moaveni's negative depiction of Iranians is her representation of Muslims in the post-9/11 era. Both Ashoura and Ramadan have been historically respectable occasions for Shiite Muslims, specifically Iranians, and not all Iranians try to discredit the religious rituals just to show their disapproval of social traditions. Representing Iranians living in the Islamic society of Iran as lustrious people trying to satisfy their physical needs in Ashoura clearly affirms the Westerner's negative perspectives of Islam and Muslims, or in other words, revitalizes the general notions of Orientalism.

Regarding the problems of representation, Linda Alcoff, in "The Problem of Speaking for Others", maintains that "how what is said gets heard depends on who says it, and who says it will affect the style and language in which it is stated, which will in turn affect its perceived significance (for specific hearers)" (1991, p. 13). Alcoff stresses that when a speaker or author speaks either for or about others, s/he is "engaging in the act of representing the other's needs, goals, situation, and in fact, *who they are*" (emphasis in the original)

(1991, p. 9). Hence, Moaveni, through the genre of memoir, is representing Iranians living in their Islamic country to a Western readership, and as Andrew Rehfeld has put it, she is exercising "social power" in being the representative (2017, p. 216). What is important regarding representation, or a re-presentation in texts, according to Said, is the fact that rather than being a re-presence, "the written statement is a presence to the reader by virtue of its having excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such *real thing* as 'the Orient'" (emphasis in the original) (1978/2003, p. 21). The apogee of the Orientalist confidence is, according to Said, the fact that,

No merely asserted generality is denied the dignity of truth; no theoretical list of Oriental attributes is without application to the behavior of Orientals in the real world. On the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the former are (in no particular order) rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things. (1978/2003, p. 49)

Moaveni's representation of Iranians, as a journalist seeing the whole picture, conspicuously depicts Iranians as irrational, impetuous Orientals who by no means have any value, and feel no respect for Islamic conventions in their Islamic society. Such a representation is undoubtedly what the Westerners need so as to demonstrate their superiority after the September 11 events, especially when it comes from a journalist, who knows how to report the events objectively.

### 5. More Inadequacies: Healthcare System and Educational System

In addition to showing Iranians as illogical beings whose lives have been ruined by Islam and their uncontrolled sexual drives, fluctuating between Western culture and Islamic conventions, Moaveni contends that Iranians hopelessly suffer from the inadequate health care and educational systems of their country, depicted especially in her second memoir, *Honeymoon in Tehran: Two Years of Love and Danger in Iran* (2010).

Iran's health care system has been disparaged by Moaveni as suffering from a slipshod management, which never pays heed to the patients' needs and worries. Moaveni believes that "in the West medicine is also a business, but in Iran, it was literally all about money" (2010, p. 163). She clearly maintains that humanity is by no means the

core of the health care system in Iran, and just money talks (2010, p.163).

Moaveni elaborates on Iran's deficient hospitals and incompetent doctors through the memories of her pregnancy and early motherhood. We should emphasize the fact that not only has Moaveni depicted Iranian physicians as corrupt and inept, but also she has shown Iranians as negligent citizens, not aware of their rights. For instance, Moaveni believes the reason behind the popularity of C-sections is that "they are a much quicker practice than vaginal delivery, and they are much more profitable for doctors"; however, Iranian women were superficial enough to consider C-Section a blessing that just Western celebrities had access to (2010, pp. 222-223).

During her pregnancy, after visiting several doctors, Moaveni feels that all Iranian-educated doctors think about their profits exclusively, and just prescribe C-section for their patients, ignoring their preferences or health condition. Finally, the last doctor Moaveni visits is deemed an absolutely apt choice to effectuate a safe delivery. Dr. Laleh Amini is described as "under forty, French-trained, confident, and attentive" physician, who "worked out of passion for her job", since because of being married to "a prominent juice tycoon", she by no means needed to maximize her profits to be able to afford her life. Interestingly, Moaveni, at first sight, feels happy for finding a doctor who "inhabited the same world", a conclusion deduced from Dr. Amini's "impeccably chic boots and shifts she wore under her white coat" (2010, p. 226). As Moaveni recounts, this Western-educated doctor patiently and respectfully answers the expectant mothers' questions, and cautions them "to resist the traditional Iranian ministrations to the pregnant woman: 'They will try to turn you into a veal. They will keep you inside and make you it twice or three times as much as you really need. Don't listen'" (227). Moaveni enjoys the "bustle and cleanliness" of Dr. Amini's office, and is thrilled to see her "uncompromising way of pushing everyone—the laboratories, the hospital maternity unit, the local pharmacies—to pay attention to detail, to aim higher" (2010, p. 227). This peculiarity of Dr. Amini, in Moaveni's opinion, is "working against the current of the Islamic Republic, *which permitted a culture of sloth and laxness in such places*" (emphasis added) (2010, p. 227). Thus, Dr. Amini becomes the

obstetrician who would help her give birth to her son.

Moaveni's lack of confidence in Iranian-educated doctors continues even after giving birth to her son. In order to get her son vaccinated, Moaveni chooses Dr. Abtahi, who was half-German. She urges Moaveni to get his son vaccinated in Germany and informs her that Iranian vaccines are of "outmoded type liable to cause fever" (2010, p. 265). All in all, according to Moaveni's description of the health care system of Iran, Iranians are totally deprived of trustworthy doctors and medical advances; and Iranian doctors prioritize their financial profits over their patients' needs and preferences.

First and foremost, we should emphasize the fact that Moaveni's reductive approach has blinded her to the progress of Iran's health care system. Some of the advances in Iran's medical system in the past three decades have been briefly discussed by Seyed Enayatollah Asaei, UNICEF Iran's specialist for early childhood development,

Iran has fairly good health indicators. More than 85 per cent of the population in rural and deprived regions, for instance, has access to primary health care services. The infant mortality rate is 28.6 per 1,000 live births; under-five mortality rate is 34 per 1,000 and maternal mortality rate is 25 per 100,000 live births. Poliomyelitis has been reduced to the point of near-eradication and the coverage of immunization for children and pregnant women is very extensive. Access to safe drinking water has been provided for over 90 per cent of Iran's rural and urban population. More than 80 per cent of the population has access to sanitary facilities. (par. 3)

In addition to neglecting such advances in Iran's medical system, Moaveni, through her partial representation, encourages her readership to assume that all Iranian doctors are obsessed with increasing their financial resources rather than their patients' health. We should emphasize the fact that Iran's history of health care system has shown great physicians and philanthropists whose only purpose in life was helping their compatriots through their specialties. Some examples are Dr. Mohammad Gharib and Dr. Parvaneh Vosough.

Dr. Mohammad Gharib, the father of Iranian pediatrics, who received his M.D. degree in 1937, built the 150-bed Children's Hospital Medical Center in Tehran, and



served as its medical director from 1971 to 1975. Although he was an international figure on whom the French government conferred the Cross of the Chevalier Legion of d'Honneur, he charged far less than most of his students, and offered free health care service to destitute families.

Dr. Parvaneh Vosough, addressed as the Iranian Mother Teresa, was an international figure who had founded the hematology and oncology departments of Ali Asghar Children's hospital, and joined MAHAK (Iran's non-profit, non-governmental organization to support children with cancer) during the organization's embryonic stage. Interestingly, she, throughout her many years of service, contributed as a volunteer, and did not ever charge her patients. Although as an international personality, she was invited by European research hospitals to join their research teams, she never left Iran, and committed her whole life to serving the unprivileged children.

Based on the discussions above, unquestionably Iran's history is teeming with many professional doctors like Dr. Gharib and Dr. Vosough, who work on humanitarian grounds, and never taint their professions with monetary obsessions. They do not prioritize their patients' health over money not because, like Dr. Amini, they have enough financial sources to easily afford their lives, but because aiding their compatriots is one of their main goals in their lives.

Besides the health care system, the educational system of Iran is shown as conspicuously deficient in both Moaveni's life narratives. Based on what Moaveni hears from her relatives and friends, she draws the conclusion that it is almost impossible "to raise an open-minded, healthy child in a culture that was fundamentalist and anarchist" (2010, p. 274). Moaveni is warned that elementary school classrooms "had supplied an opportunity for the authorities to terrorize Iranians who did not abide by religious codes" (p. 271). For instance, in the middle of a lesson the teacher asks the students whether their parents drink alcohol or not. Teachers also send home some checklists and ask the parents about their kids' daily prayers. Such policies require parents to either turn their kids into liars or send them to a Western school, like Solmaz, Arash's sister, who sends Aryo, her son, to a German school. Moaveni, neither wanted her son,

Hourmazed, to turn into a liar, nor did she think she and her husband could afford sending their kid to a German school. Therefore, feeling frustrated with Iranian schools, she reaches a tacit agreement with her husband that they should leave for a Western country where they would have no worries about their son's inappropriate schooling, and they choose London as the best choice. In Moaveni's opinion, Iranian schools are just to inculcate religious notions into children, and to teach them to spy on their families, rather than offering them appropriate education.

As depicted above, Moaveni, through her description of Iran's public schools, offers her readers a static, unchanging picture of Iran's education. Although compliance with religious codes were of unprecedented significance in the early years of the post-revolutionary era, Iran's educational system has always been dynamic and improving, a point unfairly neglected by Moaveni to discuss, though testified by an increasing number of students at universities and institutions.

There is no doubt that Iran, the way Moaveni has pictured it, would encourage all Iranians to leave for a Western country. Both Moaveni's memoirs are full of examples of Iranians who yearn to look like Westerners, and do their best to find a way to a Western country. Longing to live like Westerners is also depicted as a common practice for Iranian adults. As Moaveni contends, the demand for cosmetic surgery drastically increased after the 1979 Revolution, and she pinpoints the reason behind such an importunate demand in Iranian women's deep hankering for looking "modern" and "Westernized" (2005, p. 164). As Moaveni conceives, even Iranian men got a nose job "in favor of a sleeker profile that better matched their Euro-trash pretensions—a nose that said I am vain, modern, and well-off enough to cultivate my image" (2005, p. 164).

Also, Western countries are introduced to readers as perfect havens where one could peacefully study or work. Moaveni argues that many Iranian families, though with tight financial resources, endeavored to provide their children with a bright future by sending them off to a Western university, "Nearly all Iranian parents—from the affluent to the financially strained working class—shared the ambition of sending their offspring to peaceful societies where they could live

meaningful, evolved lives of material ease” (2010, p. 23).

Apart from these scenes and conversations implying the superiority that Iranians have assigned to Western culture, what is of particular significance in the memoirs is Iranians' incapability to envisage Moaveni's return to Iran. Almost all her friends and relatives rebuke her for taking such a risk.

In brief, Moaveni, through her depiction of the West as a haven of freedom and democracy, has “polarize[d] the distinction”, and has “limit[ed] the human encounter between different cultures, traditions, and societies” (Said, 1978/2003, p. 46). Such an attitude reinforces the notion that “the sense of Western power over the Orient is taken for granted as having the status of scientific truth” (Said, 1978/2003, p.46).

### 6. The Orientalist Depiction of Iranian Women

So far, we have discussed how Moaveni has unrealistically pictured the Islamic society of Iran as harrowingly oppressive to the extent that it has rendered the youth so bewildered that all are disappointed with following the tortuous line of reasoning of their country. In order to overcome their distress and desolation, most of Iranians, as shown in Moaveni's memoirs, have been seeking some peace and tranquility in drinking, smoking, mixed parties, and fleeing to Western countries. It is beyond reasonable doubt that the aggressiveness of such a suppressive country could easily marginalize women till they capitulate to the patriarchal order of their society and sink into a peaceful torpor. In Moaveni's works, women are portrayed as passive citizens whose identity crisis, importantly, as a result of mandatory veiling, has led to their unhealthy obsession over their beauty. Young women, rather than trying to promote their position in their society through getting a better education, just try to beautify themselves, and find a husband in order to gain more freedom.

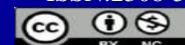
Veiling, in neither of Moaveni's works is shown as one's free choice, or as a practice that could bring out some positive changes in Iranian women's lives. Moaveni contends that although depression was widespread among all Iranians, regarding women, “it was compounded by the clothing regulations of the regime” (2005, p.156). She believes that donning hijab “intensified the general sadness many women were prone to feeling over all the things that were

wrong in their personal lives, and in the country at large” (p.156). As depicted in Moaveni's memoirs, women's attitude toward mandatory veiling are of two kinds, they either cannot accept it at all and try to alienate themselves from certain situations, or try to adjust themselves to their society's norms by making noticeable changes in their dressing style in order to meet their own desires in addition to complying with the regulations.

Thus, according to such instances, Western readership, undoubtedly, come to the conclusion that not only mandatory hijab has precluded women from socializing, but also it has removed them from the academic world. We should again stress the fact that Iran is a dynamic country, and the concept of hijab and practicing of it has changed throughout different historical periods. Moaveni, not only has not referred to the robust faith of some of Iranian women in hijab but also has given a wrong idea of veiling as a barrier to women's education. No talented Iranian student has ever decided not to go to the university because of detesting to be reprimanded for her improper dressing. Also, it should not be forgotten it was the practice of veiling that brought many women to the social stage after the Islamic Revolution. Shirin Ebadi has emphasized the role of veiling in leading young girls to classrooms after 1979,

Girls went to class in their hejabs-Rehabilited! Healthy! ... A generation of women whose mothers had been tethered to the house found themselves in cities, reading books.... there was no pretext left for the patriarchs to keep their daughters out of school. Slowly, it became fashionable for the daughters of traditional families to attend college. (as cited in Ansari, 2015, ch. 4)

Another group of Iranian women, according to Moaveni, turn to fashion both as an emblem of resistance, and a proper way to make life more tolerable in “the land of everything-must-be-as-ugly-as-possible-at-all-times” (2005,p.160). Moaveni explicitly disapproves of any sort of fashionable hijab, and when told about a fashion show of Islamic clothes states that, “I'd much rather be driving to a demonstration where women burned headscarves, rather than modeled them (2005, p.161). Her disparagement of the models in the fashion show, clearly shows her attitude toward Iranian women who endeavor to adjust their clothes in a way that both meet their aesthetic desires and live up



to their Islamic society's expectations from them.

Veiling, in none of Moaveni's works has been considered a free choice, and as she has demonstrated, either trying to resist veiling through beautifying surgeries and makeup, or accepting to don veiling properly, has turned women into objects trying to draw the attention of men around them. Veiling has marginalized Iranian women and has made them surrender to the patriarchal order of their society. In both Moaveni's memoirs, veiling is introduced as a fatal remover of individuality: if practiced, it would lead to the woman's alienation, like Fatemeh's case, a chador-wearer friend whose company everybody shunned; and if resisted, it would encourage the woman to beautify herself and look for a husband. Unfortunately, Moaveni has offered the monolithic picture of oppressed, veiled Muslim woman to her Western readers, and has never made a reference to how veiling aided women to assume more active roles in their society after the 1979 Revolution. She has forgotten that "the restoration of the veil" after the Islamic Revolution was "embraced by a large segment of women from traditional backgrounds", as it gave them the opportunity to leave the "confines of their homes" and enter into the public domain (Ansari, 2015, ch. 4). Nina Ansari has straightforwardly expressed how compulsory hijab brought women to the social stage, and opened up new opportunities for them,

And yet mandatory veiling was welcomed by millions of women who appreciated the integrity and modesty symbolized by, in their view, a liberating milestone. Ironically, they were now emancipated to a degree they had not previously enjoyed. Since they were now required to wear the veil in public, they felt comfortable leaving the confines of their homes, whether to go to school or the workplace. In other words, girls and adult women could now venture into territory they had previously avoided. Reinforcement of the veil thus legitimized their entry into the public domain. (Ansari, 2015, ch. 4)

## 7. Conclusion

Conclusively, with regard to Alcoff's emphasis on "the opposition between the knowing agent and the object of knowledge" as the "key in the reproduction of imperialist modes of discourse" in any sort of representation (1991, p. 23), Moaveni, as a professional journalist, speaking about her

Iranian compatriots as exotic miserable beings, and about Iran as the static land of gloom, through the texts and paratexts of her memoirs, has revived the main pillars of Orientalism which certainly leads to Western Imperialism. Her works are considered objective reportages of a highly skilled journalist, who is at the same time a native informant, and as a result, her affirming the superiority of the Western culture unquestionably reinforces the idea that Easterners are uncivilized people in need of being trained and rescued by Westerners. She is one of the native informants who, as Dabashi has put it, has totally digested and internalized the classical European Orientalist discourse that was crafted by the imperialists to "maintain their domination as natural and inevitable", and now "speaks it with the authority of the natives" (2011, p.18). However, as argued throughout the article, this orientalist fixing gaze of the memoirs can be challenged on several grounds, especially on the basis of the notion that Iran as a society and Iranians as a nation are dynamic and evolving rather than static and unchanging, and the desire for change and betterment as well as endeavor toward this change have been emanating from inside Iran all through the post-revolutionary years. In short, what Azadeh Moaveni has depicted in her memoirs is only a part of the picture, not all of it.

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