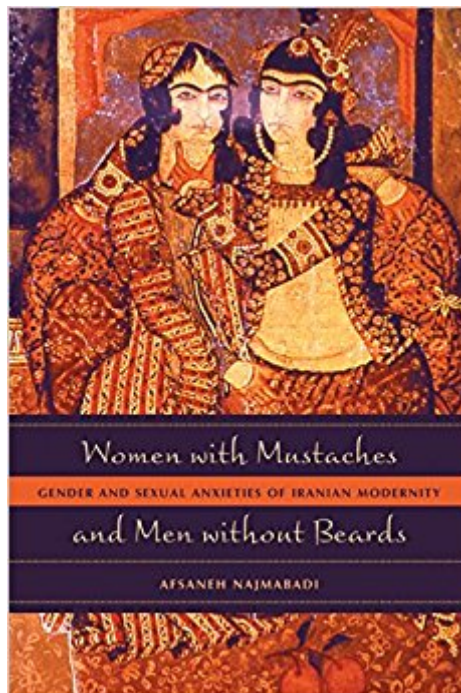




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# Women With Mustaches And Men Without Beards: Gender And Sexual Anxieties Of Iranian Modernity



## Synopsis

Drawing from a rich array of visual and literary material from nineteenth-century Iran, this groundbreaking book rereads and rewrites the history of Iranian modernity through the lens of gender and sexuality. Peeling away notions of a rigid pre-modern Islamic gender system, Afsaneh Najmabadi provides a compelling demonstration of the centrality of gender and sexuality to the shaping of modern culture and politics in Iran and of how changes in ideas about gender and sexuality affected conceptions of beauty, love, homeland, marriage, education, and citizenship. She concludes with a provocative discussion of Iranian feminism and its role in that country's current culture wars. In addition to providing an important new perspective on Iranian history, Najmabadi skillfully demonstrates how using gender as an analytic category can provide insight into structures of hierarchy and power and thus into the organization of politics and social life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

• Breaks new ground in both perspective and subject matter. • (Intl Journal Of Middle East Studs (Ijmes) 2010-07-15)

"This book is groundbreaking, at once highly original, courageous, and moving. It is sure to have a tremendous impact in Iranian studies, modern Middle East history, and the history of gender and sexuality."#151;Beth Baron, author of *Egypt as a Woman* "This is an extraordinary book. It rereads the story of Iranian modernity through the lens of gender and sexuality in ways that no other scholars have done."#151;Joan W. Scott, author of *Gender and the Politics of History*

The book provides a less-heard point of view on gender, sexuality and modernization (read westernization) in Iran, with great applicability to the wider region.

It was in pristine condition! Thanks a lot :)

Not as accessible as I was hoping but I definitely feel blessed that this info is out there.

Living in Iran for five years, I became fascinated by one particular image of Iranian women. Not the woman in the black, cover-all chador, but the round-faced curly-haired sun lady, or Khorshid Khanoum, seen on everything from key-rings to hand-painted crockery. I wrote to Afsaneh Najmabadi, asking if she knew the origin of the image, and found to my delight that it would be the subject of a chapter in her new book, "Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards." It's a fascinating and revealing detective story of how images of beauty have changed over the centuries. In the 19th century, the sun lady, rising from the back of a lion, was the national symbol of Iran, but gradually her face mysteriously disappeared. At that time, portraits of beautiful men and women were remarkably similar -- moon-faced, beardless, but sometimes with mustaches, and with heavy eyebrows joining in the middle. Further back, the most famous Persian love poetry was written to young, beautiful, beardless men, for which there was a word, *amrad*. Embarrassed scholars have never quite managed to agree on whether this important genre of poetry was homoerotic and sexual in nature or whether the beloved somehow represented an allegorical, neo-Platonic, divine love. "Women with Mustaches" challenges our assumptions about beauty and whether it is inextricably and immutably linked with gender, male or female. The book includes beautifully chosen illustrations which make the argument all the more convincing. Najmabadi, a Harvard University professor, uses Iranian history to explore ground-breaking ideas which may turn out to show a new way forward in gender studies. The book follows various paths of research, including a study of the development of women's education in Iran, in particular the period at the turn of the 20th century known as the Constitutional Revolution. Stitched together from press reports, books, and the diaries of increasingly prominent women, this is interesting in itself. But Najmabadi uses it to support her argument that women's education became an integral part of the shaping of a modern nation. Women were among the first to recognise this. As one anonymous letter-writer put it: "I am a woman and according to you gentlemen I am mentally deficient, not quite human. Thanks to my father, I was not educated. But today it is clear to everyone that [even] any

widowed woman has a claim to this National Assembly and today we demand our rights....We are fed up, we can no longer remain patient."Najmabadi's distinct areas of research make it difficult to knit the arguments together, making the book sometimes appear disjointed. It is an academic book, not a light read. But it is original, authoritative and thought provoking, and not only because the image of women and the issue of compulsory hejab are still key political issues in today's Islamic Republic of Iran. This book will make you think long and hard about the depiction of beauty in Western culture too.

I ordered this book for school and was very happy with it until I started reading it for class. Once I got to page 177 it turned into a completely different book called Emancipation Betrayed about African American civil rights. Very upset and now I don't know how I'm going to be able to finish my assignment for school.

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