



Words Not Swords: Iranian Women Writers and the Freedom of Movement (Gender, Culture, and Politics in the Middle East)

By Farzaneh Milani

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A woman not only needs a room of her own, as Virginia Woolf wrote, but also the freedom to leave it and return to it at will; for a room without that right becomes a prison cell. The privilege of self-directed movement, the power to pick up and go as one pleases, has not been a traditional "right" of Iranian women. This prerogative has been denied them in the name of piety, anatomy, chastity, class, safety, and even beauty. It is only during the last 160 years that the spell has been broken and Iranian women have emerged as a moderating, modernizing force. Women writers have been at the forefront of this desegregating movement and renegotiation of boundaries.

Words, Not Swords explores the legacy of sex segregation and its manifestations in Iranian literature and film and in notions of beauty and the erotics of passivity. Milani expands her argument beyond Iranian culture, arguing that freedom of movement is a theme that crosses frontiers and dissolves conventional distinctions of geography, history, and religion. She makes bold connections between veiling and foot binding, between Cinderella and Barbie, between the figures of the female Gypsy and the witch. In so doing, she challenges cultural hierarchies that divert attention from key issues in the control of women across the globe.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Farzaneh Milani is professor of Persian Literature and Studies in Women and Gender at the University of Virginia. She is the author of Veils and Words: The Emerging Voice of Iranian Women Writers and the coeditor and translator of A Cup of Sin: Selected Poems by Simin Behbahani.

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