

Copyright Notice:

This paper is being made available on the web on the basis of trust and integrity. Feel free to quote with due credits. If you read and/or quote this text, please e-mail me at [gita \[at\] ping \[dot\] ca](mailto:gita [at] ping [dot] ca). Thank you.

**FROM FOOTNOTES TO TEXT**

**A WORKING PAPER IN FEMINIST METHODOLOGY**

**BY GITA HASHEMI**

**23.04.1998**

**THURSDAY, APRIL 23**

**10:14 A.M.**

**<BEAT 2, PARAGRAPH 1>**

I have struggled with this text for over three months. I have tried to massage it, pamper it, threaten it, intimidate it, beseech it into submission. It just won't. It springs from the heart like some flying fish searching for air. I give up; it is too slippery to hold. It flows into my sleep through the air I breath and discharges itself out of my body in the morning only to reappear and stare at me right in the face when I sit in front of this screen. I can't continue, I give up. It focuses all its might on me like some sorceress wanting to transform me from who I am to who I wanted to be. It sits here, unwritten, unspoken, only in some vague shape like a ghost in the wind, at once surrounding me and staying aloof. It is asking me to submit to its powers. It promises to liberate me from myself. It promises to bring me back to myself. It promises to bring together the two halves of the apple and fly it back through time to when it was a blossom ready to burst into a wholesome journey. It is asking me to believe in it. To follow it. To let it lead me into the orchard of my youth to play hide-and-seek with circles, triangles and lines on the pages of my school notebook. I give up. I submit.

**11:35 A.M.**

**<BEAT 2, PARAGRAPH 2>**

I have only eleven days left. I promise I will sit here for 4 hours every day thinking about it. I promise I will look over the books piled up on my desk and review my scattered notes for two hours every day. I promise I will think about it again for an hour every night before I sleep. I promise I will talk to Iraj about texts for two hours every evening or even during the day. I will call him at work, if he doesn't call me, and distract him from his librarianship for as long as I can and talk about this text or read it to him. And I will call Amani again on Saturday and let her know how I am progressing and hear about her progress. We will encourage each other to continue then we will talk about Jerri, or vice

versa. When I see Jerri next week I will tell her that I am very happy with the way things are going and of course I always knew I could get through it, I just had to do my usual song and dance to calm my fears. Then I will come home and sit in front of you, stare right into your face and say: Now is your turn, come out of wherever it is you are hiding and show me the way if you are for real. Remember, then it will be your turn to cooperate. Deal?

*12:51 P.M.*

*<RHYTHM, PARAGRAPH 1>*

I finished the last of the six interviews on Thursday, January 1. The first one was on Sunday, December 14: 4.5 hours of commuting, 3 hours of tape, 2 rolls of film, 1 bottle of wine, 4.25 hours combined breakfast chatter, snack chatter, tea and cigarette break chatter, photography. That was with Pooran and Farkhondeh. Actually I only interviewed Pooran for 2 hours but I started recording earlier when the three of us were talking about the project. Pooran wanted me to answer some questions, mostly for the sake of Farkhondeh who wasn't part of our initial discussions in October; over the telephone on October 21, to be exact. That was the first time I met Farkhondeh who had immigrated to Canada from Sweden a couple of months earlier. She was temporarily staying with Pooran; they knew each other from the International Women's Conference in China. I started rolling the tape because I wanted to have a record of our conversation: I had only slept for 2 hours the night before and couldn't talk and take mental or physical notes at the same time. The conversation flowed easily probably because we all had a lot to say, and, having found the opportunity, we wanted to say all. I let the tape roll, worried that I may not have brought enough blank tapes with me: I was limited to 5 hours. But I didn't want to curb the flow, I thought it was important to allow the mood to set in and the trust to deepen. I promised that I will do my best to not subvert their voices in any way. I said I may have to summarize or rearrange some things but I will do it with their approval and that I will give them the entire interview transcripts so they can look it over and make sure that nothing major has been lost in translation. A lot was lost in translation. The conversations were in Farsi which is very

different from English in its textuality and contextuality, in rhythm and melody. But the problematics of translation form another story. When I left it was dark. It was a very cold night. In spite of the back pain she had been suffering all day, Farkhondeh walked me to the GO bus station. She gave me her weekly pass, which was expiring on that date, saying that she was not planning to go out any more that night and I should use it up. Pooran had left earlier. She had to facilitate a group session for men with a history of family violence and abuse. She had asked her colleague to cover for her while our interview was taking longer than we expected. She left as soon as we were done, she wanted to be there at least for part of the meeting. Then Farkhondeh and I sat and talked a bit more before I left. She gave me news of Iranian women's movement in Europe. I told her a bit about what was going on in Canada. She told me she had the chance to read my questions carefully while Pooran and I were talking and that she would like to participate in the project. We agreed to meet again during the holidays. I got home around 9: Dead tired, three weeks through what seemed to be a very long day. I checked my e-mail and phone messages and responded to a few; thank god it was a Sunday. I went to bed shortly after midnight.

*MONDAY, APRIL 27*

*1:59 P.M.*

*<PAUSE, PARAGRAPH 1>*

I spent the last three days reading for the second time the three interviews I have finished transcribing to date. 8 hours of tape transcribed over 53 hours over 160 pages in 10 pt font. Amani and I talked on Saturday as planned. We both seem to have nailed down the structure of our texts. Hers is logical yet reflective. It seems consistent with her project consistent with her interests consistent with her academic goals consistent with her strengths consistent with her perceptions consistent with her subjectivity. I tried to convince her that so is mine in its deceptive incoherence and structural breakdown on the surface. I told her in

reviewing my notes I discovered that I had always been obsessed with the *voice* and with exposing the inner workings of *subjectivity* and *narrative textual structures*, and this text is going to reflect that. I said I wanted this text to document its own creation by providing clues about the workings of the mind of its author, her life and her environment, the stuff that only appear - if they appear at all - in prefaces, introductions and/or footnotes. I told her I changed the title of the text from the initial Footnotes to the Text to **FOOTNOTES INTO THE TEXT**: I want to take a more subtle approach: no more glaring, in-your-face divisions between the text and the footnotes as I had in the first draft of the text, the one I wrote six weeks ago and decided to abandon half-way. Margins seem to be necessary: They are blank spaces where the reader can make notes, adding her/his perception to the text: A refuge, a playground, a resting area and a battle zone where the reader can hide from, play with, recuperate from or fight back the author's assault. But I must integrate the footnotes into the text in order to subvert the established hierarchy of information rooted in the patriarchal conventions of spatial divisions: They want us to believe that what is not in the text is somehow less important; and where do you think the author's personal and private are usually hidden? And why should I accept this convention that so fragments my life if personal is political and private is public? Besides, in all the scientific texts outside the feminist and the post-colonial corpus what space has been assigned to us if any at all? I said any given text is at best only a partial truth, mediated through its author's subjectivity and a record of it: All the other stuff, the events and evidences, the theories and arguments, the justifications and descriptions, whether or not admitted or apparent, are filtered through the author's individual subjective processes. I said look, if I try to adopt the conventional academic/scientific voice in this text, I would be assigning myself more authority than in fact I believe I, or anybody else for that matter, should have: I wanted to *document* a few women's perceptions of themselves, their identity and their position in the world: their struggles, their victories, their reflections. I wanted their voice to be on the record so that the silence wouldn't be so frighteningly oppressive. I

wanted my voice to add theirs to form a rich harmony. I said what is the point of pretending that what justifies and validates this text has a source outside the project's own textuality, its own reason for and process of existence? I said I am aware of the difficulties in this: Some are pragmatic; they have to do with the limitations of narrative linearity: On the surface, this text, as it appears in print on paper, has a fixed beginning, a fixed end and a single line descending from the former to the latter: It draws a single direction in time in a single space. I said I wanted to insert alternative directions in the text. I said I know this would be easier to achieve if I was creating a hypertext where visual clues can be inserted to demarcate the multiple layers of the textual spaces and times, and hyperlinks can be used to provide reader-selected navigational directionality. I said that however, I must admit that some limitations are inherent in the story from the beginning: The roles are set: I am the author, the interviewer, the recorder, the presenter. My subjectivity - my experience, my perception, my needs, my desires - will leave an undeletable and undeniable mark on the choices made in this text as it did in the project. The best I can do is to be upfront with it:

**4:34 P.M.<TIMBRE, PARAGRAPH 1>**

Disclaimer: The author would like her dear readers to note that this text by no means claims to be a 'true representation' of the events and personalities mentioned here. Relying on fieldnotes and other documentation, the author has made sincere efforts to provide accurate information. However, as we all know, texts are narratives, and 'order' (in which personalities appear and events unfold) and 'selection' (of those personalities and events) are fundamental factors determining the discourse of any given narrative, the present one not being an exception. And since both order and selection are matters of choice, the author, however reluctantly, accepts full responsibility for and regrets any misrepresentation that might be perceived to result from this text.

Five women in conversation, in exchange of their perceptions, their stories, their knowledge, their secrets. I have no qualms, at least for the moment, to claim that the interviews (by convention, uni-directional flow of information) were indeed conversations (bi-directional flow). As I listen to the tapes I can hear myself stating my views in subtle ways, in the way I pose questions, in the way I question more after a question, in the way I pause and ponder when an answer is given, in the spaces I give to the answers. All of these, the spaces, the pauses, the tone and timbre of the questions were lost in the process of transcription. There are clues in the transcripts that should prompt a careful reader to wonder about the ‘objectivity’ of the interviewer: Here she leads the interviewee to divulge and reveal more; there she provokes her toward a specific answer she apparently anticipates; elsewhere she decides to not pursue a conversational thread but to start another, etc. Even the way she poses the same questions is different from one interview to another. What do all these mean in terms of the ‘objectivity of the findings’? If interviewing is a form of *human interaction*, then how does one factor in the interviewer-interviewee’s interpersonal dynamics in the final analysis? If we accept humans as *agents*, acting and interacting, responding and corresponding, always influencing the situations they are in through the process of asserting their subjectivity, then how do we recount the tale without undermining, underestimating or eliminating their influences? If you don’t know how, when, where and in what state of mind I asked the question, how do you know in what way I might have influenced the responses of the respondent? If you don’t know in what environment, what state of mind or for what purpose the respondent responded to my questions how do you know what her response means? If you don’t know the previous personal/social history of the interview pair how do you know in what ways and what places that history might have influenced the exchange? If you don’t read the entire conversation how

do you trust the analysis I might be tempted to put forth? What do all these mean in terms of the ‘validity of the findings’ as the basis of theory and practice?

8:42 P.M.

<BEAT 1, PARAGRAPH 1>

In my first written conceptualization of the project *Contestations: Dynamics of Identity in Iranian Women after the 1979 Revolution*; Part I: In exile, I said:

<SILENCE, PARAGRAPH 1>

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

I am concerned with carving a space in which Iranian women can speak for themselves. Rather, this is my passion. I am tired of listening to others who claim to be speaking for us, be they supporters of the Islamic regime or its critics, Feminist academics in the West or Muslim clergymen in Iran. I find this to be a grave injustice, particularly by those who claim to be our sisters, that, in overwhelming majority of the cases, we are portrayed as ‘victims’, passive in the tumultuous political and social currents that have changed our country and, by extension, the world. I am concerned with documenting our struggles against patriarchy (religious and imperialist) to establish and maintain our presence in the public arenas as well as our survival in the day-to-day private battles.

<SILENCE, PARAGRAPH 2>

In this project, I will interview three to five Iranian women who immigrated to Canada after 1979. I intent to record these interviews on film (for future reference) and reconstruct them on the Internet. The women to be interviewed are women that I have come to know in different, occasionally overlapping, social contexts. Thus, although the primary method in this project is intensive interviewing, prior familiarity (which may be called participant observation) contributes to setting up the context. I intend to be one of the interviewees myself. This is partly because I belong to the same social group and my

questions are of personal as well as political concern. I am also fully cognizant of the potential social and political risks implied in this project and I cannot ask anybody to accept risks that I am not willing to take myself. Having said this, I also have to say that I do not believe in exposing people to any risks at all. So, although image is of central importance to this quest, I will ensure the anonymity of the participants. Part of my work will be to look for creative ways of achieving this.

<SILENCE, PARAGRAPH 3>

I will focus on questions about our identity as individual women who come from a Muslim heritage from Iran and who belong to the generation whose youth (15-25) fell during the revolutionary years (1977-82). Our identity is always misconstrued as we are often referred to in very simplistic terms such as Muslim or Middle Eastern women, terms which tend to ignore our particularities of class, race and ethnicity and our historical specificity. I have not formulated specific questions yet but I know that I will take an exploratory approach. Some areas of focus will be our understanding of our public and private roles, contradictions and consistencies in our perception of our multi-faceted identity (as women, Iranians, immigrants, etc.) and our take of our recent history.

<SILENCE, PARAGRAPH 4>

I am not approaching this from a social or political science perspective - although such is inevitably implied. As an artist, my role is to create a narrative (in words and images) that reflects (rather than represents or explains) the reality. Interpretation is a process that should take place at the receiving end of the information. My personal interpretation is in the choosing of the subject and the respect with which I handle the stories confided to me.

9:37 P.M.

<PAUSE, PARAGRAPH 3>

What I thought was my struggle with this text in fact is not: My struggle partly originated in the dilemmas foregrounded by my transient state in the academic tunnels of the Social Sciences. Knowing fully well that this was not my home, I was concerned at the conceptual stage of the project with what, in retrospect, I would like to call methodological questions, areas of potentially contradictory approaches based on disciplinary loyalties. After all, I am an artist threading in the deep waters - known as Interdisciplinary Studies - at once connecting and separating fine arts/humanities - The Arts - and sociology/political science - The Social Sciences. Art different from (versus) Science different from (versus) Art. Such is the construct. The Social Sciences, similar to pure sciences, have *conventionalized methodologies*: methods of producing knowledge corresponding to established theories. The Arts have no methodology. Such is the claim. The Social Sciences search for facts: hard, calculable data: categorized, classified, tabulated: analyzed according to conventions: objectivity embodied: socially useful knowledge: expert interpretation and analysis. The Arts, on the other hand, ... What can we say about The Arts when it comes to calculated, categorized, classified, tabulated data? What kind of knowledge can be produced through art? As a student in Fine Arts, I had already encountered in my undergrad years - and the encounters haven't ceased at the graduate school - the academic prejudice against art as a valid tool for production of social knowledge: Where the sociologist and the chemist learn and produce knowledge, the artist learns and produces art; and the two belong to different orders of things. The former is socially important, the latter, in most cases, doesn't even pay the rent. Not to mention that artists are 'bohemians' and cannot comply with the rigorous discipline required by academic endeavors. Besides, their inherently 'subjective' position with regards to their work questions the generalizability (thus the validity) of the knowledge they produce. Undertaking a research project with the intention of presenting my findings as an artwork heavily muddied the water: research implies fact while art implies fiction. How does one reconcile the two?

10:12 P.M.

<PAUSE, PARAGRAPH 4>

Another part of my struggle was rooted in the place where I wanted to locate my work: the Feminist Zone: its parameters explored and charted, roads built, sign posts raised, destinations reasonably predictable. Leave alone the fact that using the term Feminist to refer to myself was a hard bait to swallow for someone with my cynical behaviour [*cynical adj.* definition 2 (of behaviour etc.) disregarding normal standards.], the real problem seemed to be with what came in the name of Feminism: an ideology not acknowledged as ideology: not *feminisms* but Feminism: a fortress to seek refuge in from the patriarchal assault and an army for fighting back: too bad if you don't like the food, take it or go back to the unsafe open. I have wrestled with Feminism as the big, white, middle-class, liberal sisters' gift to the rest of us. The universal conditions of patriarchy acknowledged without question: But are we all the same because we are women? And is there only one feminism?

10:52 P.M.

<PAUSE, PARAGRAPH 5>

Yet another battlefield fell in the gray zone where rigid definitions clash; definitions based on simplistic assumptions on all sides of the Identity Divides about Identity itself: feminist/non-feminist, Western/Eastern, Iranian/Canadian, native/immigrant: static categories rooted in some kind of narcissistic naval-gazing driven by divergent power politics. I was mostly angry - and there was a high degree of naiveté in that anger - because *our* own voices were not recorded on the subject yet we were already framed within pre-defined borders: Muslim women, an altogether different category of humans. I - a woman born and raised in Iran, an active participant in the revolution coined as Islamic, a political refugee - could not see or hear myself or many of the women around me in the texts written about *us*.

11:22 P.M.

<BEAT 1, PARAGRAPHS 2 & 3>

<FROM FOOTNOTES INTO THE TEXT>  
<GITA HASHEMI >  
<APRIL/MAY 1998>  
<PAGE 11 OF 30>

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 9:41 P.M.

Muslim woman: a myth and an image: of a submissive, subservient, subdued woman submerged under the veil. Muslim women: a monolithic, black-clad mass, crows in cages, unchanged in the fourteen centuries since the advent of Islam, at once the symbols of the Islamic fundamentalist's claim of moral superiority and the Western imperialist's claim against Muslim inferiority. Unfortunately, even within the feminist discourse the term Muslim women remains in use and not seriously challenged. Why is it assumed, and this assumption is taken for fact, that if one is a woman and lives in, or is from, a 'Muslim country', one is a 'Muslim woman' whether or not she practices or believes in Islam? Is muslimness in our nature, or in our blood, because we are born in 'Muslim societies'? 'Muslim wom(a)en' excludes from the picture those women who are secular, atheist or have other faiths. It excludes from the picture our subjectivity and social and political agency, thus, placing the discursive weight on Islam, making it the shrine we circle, whether in devotion, in protest or in daze. In effect, it undermines our ability to challenge Islamic fundamentalism through non-Islamic feminist discourse and agency: Have we already declared fundamentalism supreme by letting it not only define the priorities of our struggles but also the language we use to fight back?

I also find 'Muslim wom(a)en' problematic because by depriving us of our diversities, it makes us the objects of generalizations that, though may be useful in discerning patterns, inadvertently suppress our dissenting voices and submerge our political agency. (Generalization is generalization, no matter who does it. Perhaps it is because of these generalizations that an in-depth, multidisciplinary feminist critique of the term 'Muslim wom(a)en' remains to be produced.) The term (the myth) deprives us of our subjectivity. Looking back at all that I have read over the past few months, I ask: Where are our voices? Where are our faces? Where is the record of our daily struggles and our subversive victories? It is quite ironic that often the only *subjective* voices that find representation in the intellectual war over women in 'Muslim countries' are those of Islamic fundamentalist women.

11:38 P.M.

<BEAT 1, PARAGRAPH 4>

My construct of *we* was based on a very broad notion: women of a particular generation who belonged to the waves of people who left Iran after the 1979 revolution: a broad spectrum of social, economic and political diversities channeled through different port of entry experiences. I was not concerned with ‘findings’ about us, I wanted there to be a record of our *voices*: let’s hear about ourselves from our selves. How do we see ourselves? How do we define ourselves? What connects us among ourselves and to Others? What divides us among ourselves and from Others? Where are the places where we can form alliances among ourselves and with Others? Who are we anyway?

11:59 P.M.

<TIMBRE, PARAGRAPH 2>

I wanted to freeze the rainbow in one of its evanescent moments: a photograph capturing ambivalence, ambiguity, instability and uncertainty of a fleeting gesture or an expression passing over a face.

**TUESDAY, APRIL 28**

2:17 P.M.

<VOICE, PARAGRAPH 1>

Word is Jerri has decided to not follow up with the treatments. Talked to Amani this morning. She finds it difficult to concentrate. So do I.

3:01 P.M.

<VOICE, PARAGRAPH 2>

Voice.

11:14 P.M.

<PAUSE, PARAGRAPH 7>

There is a danger inherent in every thing I do socially. Every word I say, every gesture I make, every act I commit can be misinterpreted by my Others, those listening,

seeing, receiving. The danger seems to be rooted as much in me as in my Others. It is indeed rooted in the limitations of language - verbal or non-verbal - as the medium of communication. Language's reliance on signs, its nature as a signifying practice, inevitably leaves something to be desired: truth; without which I seem to be standing on shifting grounds. Signs and signifying practices rely on conventions. What happens to human subjectivity in the process of utilizing social conventions? How does the observer interpret any given action - actions of human agents in the process of asserting their subjective positioning in their world - if s/he does not have an intimate knowledge of the social conventions and the individual subjectivity mediating the action? Language relies on signs: Signs are produced to respond to specific material conditions: The meaning of a sign is produced through convention (what we do not question anymore) and difference (how we want to distinguish things from one another): Signs are telltales of hierarchies - among things, notions and people: Patriarchy is a form of social hierarchy: It has produced specific signs with specific meanings (interpretations) to safeguard its power: As a woman living in a patriarchal society, using a language that is fundamentally patriarchal to assert my subjectivity, how do I avoid giving cause for misinterpretation of my meaning and my purpose?

***THURSDAY, APRIL 30***

***12:47 A.M.***

***<PAUSE, PARAGRAPH 8>***

Constructs of identity are similar to language in that they are based on conventions and differences: This is conventionally expected of me as an Iranian woman who is different, say, from what is expected of an Iranian man or an Indian woman. Constructs of identity function as designations of belonging or non-belonging: How do non-belongers perceive my identity? What effects do belonging or non-belonging have on how I perceive

myself and how I act in, react to or interact with my social environment? My woman-ness goes beyond the materiality of my monthly cycles when, for example, the very real fear of unwanted pregnancy and subsequent abortion is added to it. My Iranian-ness surpasses my material birth certificate when I factor in my real fears of returning to Iran. Fears are real and they are material: How do they influence my perceptions and my actions? How do non-belongers perceive my identity if they don't understand my fears, my joys, my sorrows, my pleasures, my soul?

*1:38 P.M.*

*<VOICE, PARAGRAPH 3>*

I didn't know that the meaning of subjectivity was the blood in the veins of this project. All the other words were only flesh: identity, self-perception, representation, individuality, agency, choice . . . They were all pointing to one word: subjectivity. That I was not aware of this layer of reality at the time I undertook the research contributed to the confusion I have felt since the interviews were completed: I did not know what to do next. The voice kept talking: So what? What are you saying that should be of any interest to anyone? What do you want to be? A stenographer? Or a photographer? You know what photography is: A record; not the definitive description of truth. A photographer does not present the object of photography; she re-presents it. But are you sure you want to be a photographer? Are you sure you want to objectify what you gaze at? We're not talking about computers and cars; we're talking about human beings: we are talking about humans who are outside your limited subjectivity, your zone of unquestionable authority: how do you plan to re-present their subjectivity, to bare them before the gaze of others? How do you plan to demarcate the space-time of your subjectivity and the space-time of your collaborators' subjectivities?

*2:31 P.M.*

*<RHYTHM, PARAGRAPH 2>*

Dear Nancy,

At my core, I am a practitioner. I would rather do it; much more than I would like to talk or write about it. I hope you trust that I have deeply considered and studied, as best I can, the questions that were raised for me in the course of these past months in your class. I am at a phase in the development of this project that I have to challenge myself by putting to use what I have learned. Writing this paper has occupied a large part of my thinking for the past three months. I have fretted and spun my wheels, frustrating myself to the point of imagining abandoning it all. Perhaps the block I have been trying to carve a way through was really created by my own imagination: I asked you in December if you would accept a website from me instead of the required paper. Leaving the bureaucratic formality of such exchange aside, how I now interpret this encounter is that you were very generous in your openness to my work.

4:01 P.M.

<RHYTHM, PARAGRAPH 3>

Tuesday, December 16

Nargess offered to pick me up at Yonge and Eglinton where she was dropping off her son and her ex-husband's girlfriend who were going to a movie. I welcomed the offer. She lives in the northeast end of the city, 2 hours of commuting each way if I were to take the public transport all the way. She was only a few minutes late when she braked the car in front of me at the southeast corner on Eglinton. The cab behind her honked and I quickly got into the car, holding on my lap my backpack, heavy with tape recorder, tapes, camera, film, notebooks and other stuff. We exchanged the customary greetings. I told her she looked great wearing that black beret, then we talked about her school and my school and the holiday which was not going to be a holiday for either of us. She had to work throughout because she needed the income and I had to work throughout because of my Feminist Methodology course: The Christmas holiday was when I had planned to interview women who were participating in the project. She knew one of them, Arman, who lived in her building. They had a limited social acquaintance, Arman had told me.

Nargess was close friends with Soosan, Arman's cousin, the woman who had agreed to participate but had disappeared after our first meeting when we talked about the project and the questions I had drafted. She hadn't returned my calls. I told Nargess that I hadn't heard from Soosan again and left it at that. She stopped at the Iranian grocery store, Asi, on our way on Yonge to pick up bread and some other items. I took advantage of the opportunity and went to the camera store next door to buy some more film. I only had a black and white roll with me. The prices were much more expensive than what I am used to pay in downtown, so I bought a three-pack of cheap colour film. The images were for the web and I didn't care about the colour because I could get rid of it digitally. We reached Nargess's place around noon. My next interview was going to be at 5 around Eglinton and Don Mills. I had to leave at 4 at the latest.

*FRIDAY, MAY 1*

8:28 A.M.

<RHYTHM, PARAGRAPH 4>

The interview with Nargess was drastically different from all the rest. We just started talking and she found out she preferred it that way instead of responding to the questions she already had a draft of. It took us a while to settle in once we arrived at her apartment. We finally started at 1 o'clock, sitting at the small table set against kitchen's half-wall in the living room: Neither of us had eaten breakfast and we both needed tea. Now I could light my first cigarette. Nargess asked me if I had ever studied dream interpretation. I did a little in my undergrad years when I took a psych course, Introduction to Psychoanalysis, that lingered on dreams for some weeks. I had also once gone through a Jungian dream therapy in a session with my therapist some years ago. I told her that I liked the Jungian approach more and described what I remembered of its methodology. She wanted to tell me about the dream she had the previous night. I asked

her if I could start rolling the tape as a test. In fact I wanted to have a record of the conversations that set the mood for and led to the interview:

**9:26 A.M.**

**<SILENCE, PARAGRAPH 5>**

*Nargess:* I dreamt that with this social circle that I'm in contact with in recent years, we are coming back from some place; the place isn't familiar, but apparently it's where I live, but I don't know it at all. Beside the place was a wall and behind it a tumultuous river was running.

***SATURDAY, MAY 2***

**5:45 A.M.**

**<PAUSE, PARAGRAPH 9>**

The block I have been face to face with in this project was not a fiction of my imagination: Some weeks after I had finished all the interviews I received a call from Nargess. She had left a message in an anxious voice: Call me tonight even if it's late. I called her as soon as I picked up the message at five-something. She was on her way to work. We agreed that I would call her around 11. I was sitting in front of my computer, cigarettes, ashtray and lighter within immediate reach, when I called her later. She said she wanted to ask me a question: Did you tell anything to Arman about the stuff I told you in the interview when the two of you went out on Saturday? I panicked. No, I considered our interview confidential and there was no reason to say anything to Arman: What is going on? Hamid is very upset because Arman has told Shahla something about Hamid that I had told you in the interview, and Shahla, who is a good friend of Hamid's wife-in-separation, has told her what I had said and she, the wife-in separation, has called Hamid and told him that I had said that. I said I didn't know where this all came from; the only thing related to you that we talked about on Saturday with Arman after we left the poetry reading and went for coffee was that we wished you had accepted our suggestion and

come with us, particularly since Hamid was there and you could have come together and we thought that would have helped ease your situation with him a bit in the eyes of the community. But I did not tell Arman anything of what you had said in our interview which I consider confidential until it becomes public. And, as I have said, you will have the opportunity to review the transcripts before I edit the text and approve the final version. Nargess was very upset. Hamid's wife-in-separation had told him that your mistress, Nargess, has told Gita that you are a weak man and Gita has told Arman who has told Shahla who has told me. Now I was very upset. I didn't know what was going on. I reassured Nargess: I did not, did not disclose anything that came up in the interview to Arman. Nargess told me that she and Arman have had a long history that goes back to their first years in Canada. Nargess thinks of Arman as a busy-body who enjoys meddling in people's lives and for some reason has the habit of maliciously stirring things up. Now I didn't know what to say. I was at a complete loss. I didn't understand what was happening. I said I think this is between you and Arman. I suggest that you talk to her directly. As far as it relates to me, I feel I should call Arman and tell her about this conversation and reiterate that nothing I talked about on Saturday came out of the interviews I have done with people. Arman and I frequently talk in general about issues of women in our community; we have from the beginning of our relationship. But, just as I haven't told you about the content of other interviews, I haven't told her anything either. That would have been unethical and unprofessional. I urged her again to talk to Arman directly. I said I was sure this was all a misunderstanding and we had to deal with it by speaking openly and directly. As I think about it now, it seems that I did make a mistake: The fact that I had interviewed both women and they both knew of that, probably gave me some kind of authority, based on access to insider's information, which I should have been prepared for: Before the interviews my words relayed my personal opinions; after the interviews my words were likely to be construed as expert opinions.

**2:13 P.M.**

**<TIMBRE, PARAGRAPH 3>**

Shouldn't we re-conceptualize gossip? I propose that there are two kinds of gossip: The public and the private; tools for exerting personal influence in social and intimate situations. The public gossip, primarily part of men's discourse, has functioned as an unofficial channel for exchanging information necessary for maintaining or improving the participants' power, privilege and position: Gossip to stay one step ahead of your adversaries and opponents; gossip to disarm them before they attack, to ambush before they move, to police potentially mobilized elements. Here, gossip is concerned with the public sphere: Eager ears, hypocritical frowns. Gossip wears a two-faced mask: On the one side, gossip shows scars and scabs of the society: Scarecrow faced: Look, this is the real face of the undesirable. On the other side, gossip displays the expressions and colours of social morality: Values, judgments, DOs and DON'Ts: It warns the deceived and the deceiver: Uphold the mores. Gossip is a powerful tool: Legitimize its use at the hand of those in power: Call it insider's accounts, unverified rumours: Information essential for power strategists. Gossip is a powerful tool: Get the powerless to use it to keep them entertained and distracted. Gossip is a powerful tool: Use it to collect information but don't fall for the rumours. Women's gossip primarily concerns the private. The private is, for the most part, the zone of intimacy: personal relations, inner thoughts, even the most sacred ground of spirituality. Gossip in the private is an underground information fair: All the things you always wanted to know but couldn't find in formal communiqués: printed on paper or spoken from the podium. Women gossip to assert their views and exert their influence over the private/public matters. What happens when their views are shaped in a fundamentally patriarchal social system? Then, gossip can become a whip: Keeping women in line with patriarchal morality. Gossip becomes the public shadow following the private in every corner and crevice: Paranoia deep in the marrow.

**11:33 P.M.**

**<BEAT 1, PARAGRAPH 5 & 6>**

<FROM FOOTNOTES INTO THE TEXT>  
<GITA HASHEMI >  
<APRIL/MAY 1998>  
<PAGE 20 OF 30>

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 8:33 P.M.

For months I have been asking myself why writing has become so difficult although my passion for words, the need to command their power and the urge to express myself have not diminished. The passion, the need and the urge have consistently intensified as the urgency to act has been escalating with the progressive polarization and the increasing attacks on the progressive in the society in which I live and in that to which I am bound by blood. A while ago I wrote something in my diary that could be construed as an answer: *each word becomes a wall as soon as it is materialized in the sequence of keys my fingers press*. This seemed self-evident enough; words are fleeting fragments of thought until they are trapped and concretized through the act of writing (or speaking which is not my focus for the moment). As I struggle to write these words, I see that this answer was a self-fulfilling prophecy whose restrictive power does not merely lie in the quasi-truth it expresses - for I have read much concrete writing that has bounced me over historical, social and cultural walls to understand and share the thoughts and experiences of others - but in the boundary it creates between thought and matter, spiritual and physical - much like most other scriptural prophecies do - and in the latent fear it bears, the fear to cross the boundary, one that may have never materialized had the words not been scripted and taken as complete truth upon reading. The answer itself is *the wall*. Paradoxically, its validity as a lived experience qualifies it as the ladder I must climb to discover what spreads beyond the wall ...

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 3:14 A.M.

Admitting that I am not interested in, or indeed capable of, writing anything that does not directly or indirectly concern myself - that is anything that does not help me overcome my ignorance and my fears or satisfy my curiosity - I designate inside the wall's enclosure, following our forefathers' traditions, as the reign of the personal/private. Outside it, following the same traditions for consistency's sake, is the public, hence the political, realm. As a

woman I am aware, in body and soul, of the spiritual and physical role these rigid designations have played, in the universal history of gender hierarchy, in preventing women from exercising their own ability to define the spaces of their life, to choose what is meaningful to them and, particularly, to produce *public* knowledge. But, as a woman would, I have also learned the art of subversion, a kind of struggle that may not be bloody and loud (though it can be those), but is effective, not least of all, by preserving the spirit of resistance and non-compliance amidst the daily chores of survival. Therefore, I accept these binary designations momentarily, only so that I can visibly and audibly break what fragments the spaces of my life and to join the fragments. Addressing the public/political from a private/personal space, then, becomes an act of transgression (or trespassing), in defiance of the established rules. Naturally. . . I have learned that I have never been alone in my predicament in spite of *the wall* which, as its primary function, imposes solitude. Voices of others echo in the enclosure.

***SUNDAY, MAY 3***

*12:06 A.M.*

**<PAUSE, PARAGRAPH ?>**

Unknowingly, I had threatened Nargess where she was vulnerable: A woman dared to step out of the conventional, the traditional, the customary, fearful of the gossip that had already surrounded her, fighting to protect herself. The whole story shook me deeply: What if the research you do ends up stirring things in a negative channel? What if you inadvertently break the confidence people have given you? What if your research, what you do to satisfy your urge for producing knowledge, puts people at risk? What if the knowledge you produce can be used against you and your community by those who have reasons to do so? What if?

***THURSDAY, JANUARY 2, 9:53 P.M.***

*Gita:* Arman, my question is, other than the fact that I asked you to be involved in this project, is there any reason for you to be here?

*Arman:* No.

*Gita:* Okay. If we say that this project has to have a goal, what do you think this goal should be?

*Arman:* The goal of this project... I think the growth that you accomplish in your work, because you do it for a goal, right? And I think this is one of the best... now in whatever way you made your choices I don't know, you have a goal, you chose this major based on your goal. I think your achievement, your reaching your goal should be the most important goal of these talks, this project.

***TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 6:34 P.M.***

*Nooshafarin:* Okay, you're asking why I accepted to participate in this project. Well, the main reason I accepted to...of course, not accepted, but it is my honour...I am happy that there is someone who's going to put something on the internet so maybe someone, if luck helps, will go there and learn some things. After all, there are people who are seeking general knowledge, and it's good that you're trying, you're making the effort to put this on the web and many people may take positive advantage of it. The Iranian community is going to be better known, the Iranian women will be better known. And well, secondly, you are my friend, when you suggested it made me very happy, with pleasure.

*Gita:* Thank you.

*Nooshafarin:* What do you expect from this project? Well, who am I to expect anything, but I think what we all expect from this project is that it works for you and then works for the society.

*Gita:* How?

*Nooshafarin:* I mean for it to have an effect, give awareness to people, so at least people will want to find out more, give people a clue, something to go by.

<Tape 2 (60 mins), Side 1>

In short, what I mean is that what I expect is that a person who is interested, who is curious can go there and find a clue so they can study more, find out more, do more research, perhaps they want to know more. At least this invisibility, this numbness people have about Iranians, particularly Iranian women, perhaps it will become a relief for Iranian women.

*Gita:* Why this ignorance?

*Nooshafarin:* Well, look, here people are lazy in my opinion. Nobody goes after things, they all wait for a ready bite to go down their throat. But because computers have become a fever, and everybody has one, and they keep buying this and that and adding this and that to their computers, perhaps those who are used to reading, used to researching and learning, well, not everybody misuses their computer, many people use it in good and positive directions. Perhaps this can be a starting point, so they can get a clue, learn to respect the Iranian community more, don't be satisfied and done with the couple of old and rotten things that have always been in their heads about Iranians, that Iranian woman is the miserable poor woman who is always in a dark corner of the house, washing dishes on the ground, or, for example, is grinding saffron in the pestle. No, it's not like that, Iranian woman can be much higher than these. At least, this is something nice you are doing for the society to put this on the web, it's a service in fact. It's in a website so if someone comes and asks what are you people about, where is Iran, what's it about, we can say hey man, here's the address, go there and learn, get an idea. At least we have something to present. It's like whoever asks me what is your religion about I tell them here, take this pamphlet and read it. Or, there is a Baha'i television program on such and such days, go watch it. You understand? At least one is not so numb, not knowing how to answer people, my English is not too good. At least one

can give people the address, here's the www, go visit it. You understand? This is the expectation one has.

***SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2:15 P.M.***

Gita: Do you think they have a specific image of you as an Iranian woman?

*Pooran:* Ah,...I can't say as an Iranian woman. I think when they first hear my accent what they think first is that I'm a guest (laughter). Then, some people are a bit more curious, they start asking questions, well, where have you come from, what's the story, are you from Iran. Immediately, of course what I'm saying is the majority not all the people, the concept they have is what they've received from public media. Immediately, if their age allows them to remember the revolution and the hostage-taking and the down-with-America and all that and the terrorists, well that's what they remember. Some have a more subtle soul, so they remember Khayam and miniatures and Isfahan, or such things that they have read or heard. They don't look at me. They think of what I remind them of. They don't think of me at all. This is how I feel. They think of those things that saying that I'm from Iran reminds them of. And, as we said, it is our responsibility to shake them up, to say hey, hey, hey, listen now, Isfahan is very beautiful, yes, and terrorist, leave out whatever the explanation for terrorism may be, yes, the hostage-taking has happened too but independent from all these I am a human being who was born accidentally in that land and you were accidentally born in Scotland and nothing makes me different from you. It's all been an accident that I was born here, you were born there and somebody else was born in Zambia. As they say, get this straight. Then we can talk about other things. Yes, it's mostly like this. In most of the encounters, when they become curious, if they become curious, are like this.

...

*Gita:* At the moment, in Canada, is there a specific community which you consider belonging to you?

*Pooran:* Talking about sense of belonging is different from the daily work. In my daily work, because of its nature, I work directly with Iranian women. And obviously, from the hour I go to work in the morning I'm mostly in contact with these women, and if I contact anybody outside this community it's related to cases of Iranian women. This is my work, this is my work's condition. But saying that I consider myself belonging to the Iranian community, no, I haven't had this feeling. No, not specifically feeling that I belong to this community. And recently, in the last couple of years, voluntarily, without being asked... It wasn't like this before. When you first immigrate, you say things without being asked, you want to say I'm Iranian, I've come from there. But without being asked, voluntarily, I don't see a need to indicate where I am from.

*Gita:* Why?

*Pooran:* Because, perhaps, that I don't have the need to belong any more. Gradually I don't have that feeling any more. The concept of belonging is under a question mark for me. What does it mean? As I said, I hate frames, I hate belonging to anything that has borders, that has limits. I don't consider myself belonging to Toronto either, or belonging to Canada. Or considering this place belonging to me. I don't know. Perhaps this sense of belonging has never taken me. It's the same thing with identity which is brought up. I feel that somehow they are being misused. That women who, in whatever way they've justified identity, it's not an issue for them but they are trying to make it an issue for others who may really not have an issue with it. They want to tell a group of Indian women that you need identity. It's none of your business. If I need identity I will find it for myself, you don't have to designate an identity for me, you know. And the same routines, that they want to profit from this, be it social profit, economic profit, power, whatever. Like the issue of multiculturalism, you know. It makes it really easy this issue

of identity and such, so the person who wants, the people who want, take advantage of it. And I feel this. That's why not only I don't care myself, but I also stubbornly talk about it, discuss it, argue with others, let it be.

. . .

*Gita:* Ah... why did you accept to participate in this project?

*Pooran:* For the reason I brought up in the beginning. Because I felt like the little drop which can leave a positive impression in the direction of the goals I've pursued from childhood.

*Gita:* What goals?

*Pooran:* Bringing awareness, and establishing, in any, any small way, social justice, people's thinking about this issue, the issue of equality of women and men, all of these things that go back to that issue of inequality of powers, the war against powers, the war against injustices. All of these are what has been in my mind, even if the impact is really small, I am still satisfied.

***THURSDAY, JANUARY 2, 10:55 P.M.***

*Gita:* Okay? And I think this project is actually like I am taking a picture, from a specific historical moment, the distance from December 97 to January 98, from myself and the Iranian women around me. Okay? This is us. In five years, it is possible that all of us, all of the five or six people who've been in this project, will have changed. Okay? I want to know what it is that brings us together in spite of all the differences that we have, in spite of all the difficulties that we may have. Or what is it that in spite of all the sympathies and understanding...

*Arman:* Distances us.

## ***BIBLIOGRAPHY***

The following texts prepared me for and influenced me in my text:

Code, Lorraine. "Voice and Voicelessness: A Modest Proposal?" Philosophy in a Feminist Voice; Critiques and Reconstructions. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Dasilva, Fabio B., Mathew Kanjirathinkal and Kerry Rockquemore. "Her Voices: Toward a Feminist Social Theory." Her Voices; Hermeneutics of the Feminine. Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1996.

Denzin, Norman K. "Performance Texts." Representation and the Text; Re-framing the Narrative Voice. New York: The State University of New York Press, 1997.

Ellis, Carolyn. "Evocative Autoethnography; Writing Emotionally about Our Lives." Representation and the Text; Re-framing the Narrative Voice. New York: The State University of New York Press, 1997.

Held, Virginia. "Feminist Reconceptualizations in Ethics." Philosophy in a Feminist Voice; Critiques and Reconstructions. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Korsmeyer, Carolyn. "Perceptions, Pleasures, Arts: Considering Aesthetics." Philosophy in a Feminist Voice; Critiques and Reconstructions. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Kourany, Janet A. eds. Philosophy in a Feminist Voice; Critiques and Reconstructions. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Lincoln, Yvonna S. "Self, Subject, Audience, Text: Living at the Edge, Writing in the Margins." Representation and the Text; Re-framing the Narrative Voice. New York: The State University of New York Press, 1997.

Lury, Celia. "The rights and wrongs of culture: issues of theory and methodology." Feminist Cultural Theory; Process and Production. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995.

Pearce, Lynne. "Finding a place from which to write: the methodology of feminist textual practice." Feminist Cultural Theory; Process and Production. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995.

- Polkinghorne, Donald E. "Reporting Qualitative Research as Practice." Representation and the Text; Re-framing the Narrative Voice. New York: The State University of New York Press, 1997.
- Schwandt, Thomas A. "Textual Gymnastics, Ethics, and Angst." Representation and the Text; Re-framing the Narrative Voice. New York: The State University of New York Press, 1997.
- Skeggs, Beverly, ed. Feminist Cultural Theory; Process and Production. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995.
- Skeggs, Beverly. "Theorizing, ethics and representation in feminist ethnography." Feminist Cultural Theory; Process and Production. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995.
- Smith, Dorothy E. Texts, Facts and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling. London and New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Tierney, William G. and Yvonne Lincoln, eds. Representation and the Text; Re-framing the Narrative Voice. New York: The State University of New York Press, 1997.