

Amina Tawasil
Postdoctoral Fellow, Northwestern University
Midde East North African Studies/Department of Anthropology
amina.tawasil@northwestern.edu
-Submission for General Call
-Individual Paper

**“Mobaheseh (Argumentation) in Tehran:
the Howzevi (Seminarian) Woman’s Practice of Seeking Dissensus”**

Proposal: Iran is often presented as held captive by repressive clerics predisposed to eliminating voices of opposition, especially women’s. What this image obscures is the participation of the howzevi women in the maintenance of the revolutionary ideal “Islamic Republic” since 1979 through their centralized *howzeh* (seminary) education. Because of their association with the state, the howzevi of this study are often viewed as automatons of the Islamic Republic and incapable of transformation. Yet, through their participation they continue to change the male-dominated clerical establishment in Iran as well as women-related issues in society. Because this form of women’s participation has often vexed feminist scholarship, a closer analysis is called for in order to better understand this phenomenon as it endures. This is especially so when women pursue a howzeh education by the thousands annually. I look at the howzevi’s *ways of knowing* couched in a specific modality of practice of mobaheseh in the howzeh, where they purposely seek moments of suspended anti-thesis as a way of *knowing*. One is not a howzevi without having mastered the art of carrying oneself effectively in a mobaheseh, a pillar of a howzeh education. In this piece, I examine mobaheseh as a daily ritual among the howzevi women who have developed relatedness with each other. By arguing how moments of dissensus, not consensus, are sought and used to probe the gap between theory and practice of Islamic text in relation to the self and society, I also propose that mobaheseh is one of the many spaces where transformations are facilitated for women by a howzeh education. For the howzevi women of this study, it is an education attached to the state. This study is based on *grounded* anthropological analysis of a 15-month fieldwork in Pirouzi, Tehran in 2010 and 2011.