1) Elaheh KOOLAEE
Changes in Iranian Women’s Role after the Islamic Revolution

Abstract
Iranian women have always belonged to the private sphere and men have belonged to the public sphere which is consisting of different social, cultural, political & economic activities. The impacts of improvement in the condition of Western women have also accelerated the changes in their status in other regions, and Iran too. Iranian Women have gained unprecedented and fertile experiences in the course of their efforts to find suitable condition in social life. In Pahlavi era, the modernization model was based on Western pattern. Reza Shah forced women to put aside their veiling. This enforcement has its impacts in the next decades, after the Islamic Revolution, in forced veiling. But this model was not successful, because they did not take the profound role of religion into the consideration. Women human rights, something that even men were lacking at the time, became controversial issue. The Islamic Revolution outlined the principles of a new outlook that transformed the social, political, cultural and economic life of the Iranian women. Then a new generation of Iranian women emerged in social arenas which had played a very important role in the victory of Islamic Revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini always emphasized on women prominent and effective role in social life. Their role clearly perpetuated in the eight years war with Iraq. Islamic republic hardly needed their support, so the condition was prepared for women increasing presence in Public sphere. This was the beginning of changes in their role that the author will discuss in this paper.

Biography
Elaheh Koolaee has been born in Tehran, in 1956. She has been married, and has four children. She has got her PhD in International relations, and became a faculty member of Faculty of Law and Political Science in University of Tehran. She has written any books and articles about Russia, Central Asia, Caucasus, Iran’s foreign policy and women issues.

She was elected for Iran’s parliament (Majlis) in 2000-2004, and was a member and Speaker of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission. She was an active member of the Women Faction of the Reformist Parliament (6th Parliament). She is full-professor of Regional Studies in University of Tehran, and a member of the Central Council of IIPF, the largest reformist party of Iran.

2) Mahboubeh ABBASGHOLIZADEH
Video as a tool for social change

Abstract
District level film production; a documentary about Mokarameh waiting for her stoning sentence to be carried out and group discussion on the role of the documentary in women’s movement.

Access and use of public spheres were restricted for women’s movement pursuant to Ahmadi Nejad’s government. Since then, establishment of alternative public sphere has been the main and key strategy of women’s movement. Production of documentary films with the aim of reflective the difficult condition women are living in and victims of human rights issues, has been the main strategy of Meydaan Zanan Network (Women’s Field Network) as an active member of women’s movement. Activists of the documentary production team in Women’s Field, have used their personal digital...
cameras and trained as amateur move producers to document and reflect their world from their own perspective.

The documentary on “Mokarameh’s life waiting for stoning” is one of the very same films which shall be screened in this conference and a 15 minute presentation shall be offered on the processes of production by women’s movement activists. Then the participants shall participate in the debate.

**Biography**

Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh is a founding member of several initiatives to promote women's rights in Iran including Meydaan Zanan (Women’s Field), a network of women’s movement and also initiated the Stop Stoning Forever Campaign. She has been involved in a number of ground-breaking projects aimed at empowering the women in Iran and has also published a number of important works on the status of women in the country. She was editor in chief of Farzaneh Journal, a journal of women’s studies and research. She has worked on the Beijing Platform for Action since 1995 as a director of NGOs coordination centre and was the editor and chief researcher of the Alternative National Report on Women's Status in Iran which was presented at Beijing+10, New York, 2005. She has been arrested twice for her activities to defend women’s rights. She has started making video documentaries on key issues facing the Iranian women recently and co-founded the setting up of a progressive film collective.

3) Azadeh KIAN  
**Social and Cultural Change and Women’s Rights Movement in Iran**

**Abstract**

The implementation of Shari'a institutionalized gender inequality in post-Revolutionary Iran. Despite the Islamic state’s attachment to patriarchal order, however, revolutionary changes combined with the implementation of modernization policies, especially in rural areas and small towns, have had crucial consequences for women from traditional religious middle and lower class families. Lower fertility rates, better education, increase in women’s age at the first marriage and in the number of marriage by free choice, and the active participation of women in social, cultural and economic (especially informal economy) realms are some indicators of the change. Profound changes occurred in the lives of these women have also changed their attitudes regarding men's authority. This paradoxical modernization of women’s attitudes, despite religious precepts and the predominant Islamist ideology that denies women individuality, autonomy, and independence, has in turn led to their mounting resistance or opposition against gendered social relations.

The emerging Iranian civil society is marked by the vitality of debates on social, civil and political dimensions of women’s citizenship. The arrest of several women’s rights activists, the closure of several women’s magazines and women NGOs and many other attempts by the government to intimidate women’s rights activists attest to the increasing importance of women’s issues as a political stake. Although state authorities qualify feminism as a sign of Western cultural invasion, it has become commonplace in the discourse of women’s rights activists, and self identification with feminism is no longer a taboo. Despite limitations set by the current government to freedom of expression and action, women’s rights advocates attempt to express their views in women’s press, internet sites and weblogs, books, novels, paintings, theatre, cinema and through ongoing campaigns.

Iranian women’s rights movement, however, still remains largely confined to the educated urban middle class and often Persian women in large towns. Lower class, rural, and ethnic women and women in middle and small towns (were the majority of the population live) are barely represented within the movement although their younger generation share the egalitarian demands of women’s
rights activists. Despite the lack of organic relations between these ordinary women and the activists, the women’s movement overwhelmingly reflects the demands of an increasing number of women who have become aware that the current laws and institutions tend to strengthen patriarchal order, and that the struggle for women’s citizenship rights and democracy are intertwined.

Biography

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Articles in English:


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4) Zari TASHAKOR
Challenging Fundamentalist Cultural Pattern by Iranian Women

Abstract

Islamic fundamentalism is becoming increasing a phenomenon to reckon among one billion Muslims around the world, from Algeria to Egypt, Sudan to Saudi Arabia and particularly in Iran. Religious fundamentalism has emerged in different ways in Islamic countries. Iran is a country in which religious fundamentalism has won and succeeded to govern the country’s political system and inspired Islamic parties, organizations and movements around the world, especially in Middle East. What happens in Iran in everyday life is important because provides a vivid picture of the fate that women have to undergo under fundamentalist religious rule. Going by the experience of Iran, it can be argued that fundamentalist rule can be perilous to individual freedom and human rights in modern societies.

I would like to define fundamentalism based on collective identity and its references. Fundamentalism believes God to be the perfect source of social norms and regularities. In their belief, divine rule needs to cover the entire ground of human existence and should override all human rules. In this discourse, religious leaders have responsibility and privilege of interpretation of the rules of God. The interpretation must be obeyed by all people. The rules are unique and all individuals must understand and interpret them in the same way. Obviously, the religion fundamentalist utopia would be a society based on similarity and uniformity which does not tolerate difference in individual tastes, inclinations and freedom. On the one hand, the similarity helps to give an identity for fundamentalists, guarantees the unity of fundamentalist’s movement and socially allows for collective identity and on the other hand, it would be utilisable for definition of “others”, sets defense fort around them, keep the others at a safe distance.

The formal and external symbol of this arbitrarily posed similarity would be veil. Fundamentalists, especially those of the Islamic order, define themselves by the way of veil. The definition of how women should come into public view is among the primary missions of Islamic fundamentalists. Islamic fundamentalists particularly focus on Hijab (the Islamic way of covering women’s body).

Immediately after Islamic fundamentalist revolution in 1978, regressive political religious system in Iran imposed new dress codes for women. Based on the codes, women have to wear scarves, long, loose cloths with limited colors (such as black, brown and dark blue) in offices, schools and in public spaces. The new Islamic government oppressed those women who had not accepted the codes, sacked them from offices and schools and even put them in jail. Hijab became mandatory in Iran and deprived Iranian women of choosing their clothes in public as their basic human right.

It seems women’s covering is vital and an important symbol of collective identity for Islamic fundamentalist government in Iran. Iranian women have to keep Islamic appearance by their Hijab. No woman has the right to become visible in public spaces without the determination of the Hijab. During three decades, women have frequently been oppressed by police because of not respecting to the mandatory covering of head and body. Recently police has arrested 1098 women in streets for violating mandatory dress codes. Some young girls have been deprived of education in universities every year for such violation.

During past three decades, Iranian women especially middle class women in cities have experienced inequality in their everyday lives. However, some women have resisted acquiescence to such mandatory beliefs. In certain cases they have succeeded to invert planned uniformed identity dictated by the fundamentalist government. For this, they use their silent non-systematic individual strategies.

The individual strategies have not received support from by feminist campaigns. In spite of importance of mandatory Hijab as a permanent problem for Iranian women, Iranian feminists have not strategically challenged it. Firstly, they think Iranian women have more important problems which
should be opposed, such as unequal Islamic laws for women in divorce right, custody, and heritage and so on. Secondly, violation of dress codes would help the regressive government to find a good reason to prevent the activities of feminists by police and some social forces. Thirdly, they would lose the support of those who are trying to reconcile Islamic laws with human rights. Therefore, the violation of Hijab would peril unity of Iranian feminists. So, Iranian feminists are silent about Hijab and its mandatory trait and leave it to the strategies of stray individuals. Recently they have conducted a drive to collect “One Million Signatures” from women of different quarters for change in Islamic unequal laws. The major tactic of the campaign is face to face persuasion.

I would like to report the Iranian women silent resistance and their individual strategies, revitalization of their individual self outside the prescribed norms of Islamism and the challenge they are posing to planned, uniform identity by Islamic fundamentalist government.

**Conclusion:**

Religious fundamentalism focus on every possible way of what it considers ‘safeguarding’ of family. Islamic fundamentalists believe that existence and stability of “family” would be guarantied by limiting the visibility of women in public. For the same reason, basic human rights for women are limited in favor of family as a traditional and patriarchal institution. The major reason of their belief in the necessity of Hejab or other unequal laws for women is preservation of family which they think it is in danger. The relation between limitation of women’s freedom and safeguarding of women has been placed beyond question and attributed a religious sanctity.

In Iran, social traditions and religious structure encourage the fundamentalist view. The preservation of family, which is held by most people as the crux of religiosity, is the major reason for unequal laws and mandatory Hijab. In addition, Hijab is related to body and is largely understood as a symbol of chastity for women. Advocacy against Hijab, understandably, is difficult because of its deep cultural roots. What I would like to discuss is the importance, as well as the sensitivity, that any intervention calls for. The issue cannot be judged outside social, political and cultural context, and considerations of various social costs.

**Biography**