

**Chapter 1 : The Islamic Republic's War on Women – Foreign Policy**

*Populism and Feminism in Iran has 4 ratings and 0 reviews. Women presented the first effective challenge to the Islamic regime and the clerical authority.*

Whatever concerns women, from their most private to their most public activities, from what they should wear and study to whether and where they should work, are issues that generate considerable heat and emotion and are openly debated and disputed by different factions. The result has been the breakdown of all kinds of easy oppositions, for example public versus private, or Islamic versus feminist, and the gendering of the whole political process. It would be a distortion to talk of an organized or coherent feminist movement in the Islamic Republic; but women certainly played important roles in forming its earlier gender discourses and then in changing and modifying them. These phases correspond with wider socio-economic and political changes in the Islamic Republic. Ranging from small and spontaneous to large and organized, these groups represented the three main ideological tendencies, Islamic, Nationalist, and Marxist, which together brought about the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty in February. Some of them were affiliated to underground political organizations of the Pahlavi era, others were formed during the Revolution. Azari, , pp. During the Revolution its offices and communication facilities were appropriated and then put at the disposal of Muslim women revolutionaries. The Provisional Government axed its budget, causing a rift between women activists and government, the break-up of the organization and the dispersal of its members. These women, whose activism and personal links with the Islamic forces carried political weight, continued their activities elsewhere. The authorities ignored these demonstrations, and radio and television by now under the control of the Islamic forces denounced them as agitations by promiscuous women and agents of the previous regime. Women continued demonstrating in protest, but they were attacked and harassed by groups of men drawn from the urban poor and religious zealots. The Iran-Iraq war. While women kept their suffrage rights, a large part of the pre-revolutionary legal reforms was abolished. As the coalition of forces that had brought about the Revolution rapidly collapsed, the religious authorities came to rely more and more on popular support, including large numbers of women. Thus, contrary to the assessments and predictions of feminists scholars Afkhami, , ; H. Gender debates that were harshly suppressed early in the Revolution now resurfaced, but this time in an Islamic format and framework. The shift was evident in a number of legislations and policies. In some ways these modifications represented the official, establishment side of the debates. There was another side, however, aligned with a new trend of thought in post-war and post-Khomeini Persia intent on creating a world view to reconcile Islam with democracy and modernity. She remained editor until , when she left because of unresolved disagreements over the ways in which gender issues were being addressed. During this process she came to confront its inherent contradictions, and became aware that she could find support in feminism, regardless of its Western baggage, while she could only meet resistance in patriarchy, regardless of its Islamic credentials. More women than before stood in the Majles elections of , and some of them defeated candidates backed by conservatives, not only in Tehran and other larger cities but also in smaller ones. It is too early to assess the impact of the new developments on feminist movement in Persia. Evidently, as before, its fate is to a large extent entangled with wider socio-economic and political developments. What is certain is that the Revolution acted as a midwife for the birth of an indigenous, locally produced, feminism. The government and those women active in its sponsored organizations had listened, willy-nilly, to feminist discourses, and in denouncing them they had also had to engage with them—and to adopt some of their elements. Morgan, *Sisterhood is Global*, Garden City, , pp. *Women of Iran*, London, , pp. *Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education 2*, Chicago, , pp. *Women and Revolution in Iran*, Boulder, , pp. Millet, *Going to Iran*, New York, Idem, *Islam and Gender: Perceptions, Realities and Struggles for Liberation*, London, , pp. Idem, *Populism and Feminism in Iran*, London, Behdad, eds, *Iran after the Revolution: The Crisis of an Islamic State*, London, , pp. *Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*, London, See also different issues of the following Journals: December 15, Last Updated: January 26, This article is available in print.

*The convergence of the Left's populism with Islamic populism, and the influence of the Iranian/Shiite political culture that promotes male authority and female submission, could not reconcile with women's claims to individual rights, choice, and personal freedom and their struggle for autonomy and self-determination in private or public life.*

Toggle display of website navigation Argument: August 29, , 4: All the activists were told the same thing: She spent the stifling Mahmoud Ahmadinejad years working in civil society. She always stopped short, for example, of explicitly calling herself a feminist. When she was asked during a U. Conservative news sites objected to her appointment, and hard-liners in the clerical and military establishments accused her of undermining Islamic values by encouraging women to work. For the hard-line establishment, she was a clear threat: It even rankled that she had managed to become the first woman in Iran to secure a license to run a notary office, the privilege of clerics since the early 20th century. Iranian reformists had their own separate meetings, demanding, among other things, a 30 percent quota for women. This revival of civil society paid off. Moderates affiliated with Rouhani swept Tehran, taking all 30 of its parliamentary seats, and, of these new legislators, eight were women. Across the country, there was a fourfold rise in the number of female candidates running for the latest Parliament, which led to doubling the number of female deputies. They have responded by training their anger on a magazine run by one of her allies, the legendary publisher Shahla Sherkat. It ran stories about everything from nose jobs to domestic violence, making the case that gender equality was entirely Islamic. It was a sort of religiously tinged Ms. It featured an interview with the Iranian-Canadian academic Homa Hoodfar, a highly regarded anthropologist based in Montreal. The interview focused on her latest academic book, Electoral Politics: Making Quotas Work for Women, which discussed research on women and elections conducted in various countries and fueled the lively Iranian debate about quotas for women in Parliament. It was not a debate that hard-liners were inclined to have. Hoodfar traveled to Iran last December and returned to Canada, telling friends that the mood was hopeful and that she was optimistic about progress under Rouhani. But after she returned to Iran in February during the parliamentary election cycle, authorities raided her flat the day before her intended departure. Agents confiscated her passports, laptop, and mobile phone. A string of interrogations culminated in her detention on June 6. Hoodfar, one piece claimed, was a foreign agent. They alleged that her research was part of a sprawling conspiracy, an international network that with the aid of foreign funding has been seeking to infiltrate Iranian society and government. Many of them have received the ominous phone calls ordering them in for questioning. The connect-the-dots of intrigue eventually lead to the Rouhani government itself. Articles on conservative websites affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards enumerate her dangerous intentions and actions. No mention is made that Iran has been an urban-majority country since For years the state only tolerated the activism of religious women and targeted secularists with special violence; with the crackdown on the Green Movement in , state aggression grew so severe that some of them abandoned the middle ground entirely. The last issue of Zanan-e-Emrooz appeared in June. The tough work of correcting Ahmadinejad-era legislation remains. But even given the modesty of their aims, hard-liners seem determined to squelch their re-emergence.

**Chapter 3 : Populism and Feminism in Iran : Haideh Moghissi :**

*Haideh Moghissi's Populism and Feminism in Iran is truly impressive. A well-written consideration of the role of left-wing women in the Iranian revolution, it convincingly argues that the revolution would have taken a different course had the leftist opposition to the Shah not shared the Islamic opposition's deeply rooted sexism.*

How to cite this article Chicago format: The author highlights how the demands, strategies, tactics, effectiveness and achievements of the movement have varied in accordance with socioeconomic developments, state policies, political trends, and cultural contexts at national and international levels. Tohid suggests that this history can be roughly divided into eight periods from the era of Constitutional Revolution and constitutionalism “ until the modern day under President Rouhani. I am grateful to Amrita Basu and Nikki Keddie for their very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter. For instance, how could women under a conservative Islamist clerical state, which has pursued sex segregation and many extreme forms of legal and practical discrimination against women, show impressive educational attainment, even surpassing men in higher education? Or how could Iran become exemplary in the world for its success in reducing fertility rates in a few decades by more than two-thirds, from 6. What factors changed the earlier pro-natalist policy of the conservative state to a widespread support for family planning and birth control? And why in more recent years, has the state or at least the more powerful and more conservative faction of it shifted again to natalism and yet is not really succeeding in its attempts to reverse the fertility to a much higher rate? The glocal and transnational dynamism in Iranian society have become particularly intensified in the past four decades due to the impact of millions of forced or voluntary exiles and emigration, mostly settled in Western Europe and North America. This massive exodus of Iranians, mostly due to political reasons, has entailed a drastic brain drain for the country. Yet, it has also resulted in the formation of many diasporic communities of Iranians that include thousands of highly educated and accomplished professionals, many of them still devoted to the cause of human rights and democracy for Iran. More specifically, the Iranian diasporic feminist activism has made up one of the significant components of transnational connections, cross pollination, and glocal process of socio-cultural changes in Iran of today. Moreover, since modernity in Iran and in many other Middle Eastern countries has been associated with Western intrusion, colonialism or imperialism, it has resulted in mixed feelings among many women and men. That is, a fascination with progressive aspects of modernity and strong desire to become modern, yet at the same time, a resentment and resistance against Western domination. This supposedly Western exported phenomenon is accused of promoting sexual license to penetrate the dar ol-Islam and the traditional family and thereby destroying the internal moral fabric of the entire society. Therefore, women activists aspiring for equal rights who may or may not identify as feminist have often found themselves in a defensive position. They have usually tried to assure their community of their moral virtue, loyalty, and patriotism. They have also tried to convince the ruling elites that not only egalitarian and powerful female images have authentic and indigenous roots in Iranian ancient pre-Islamic history the quest for equal rights is not incompatible with progressive understandings of Islamic tradition. See, for example, Mehrangiz Kar and Shahla Lahidji, *Shenakht-e hovviyat-e zan-e irani dar gostareh-ye pish-tarikh va tarikh Tehran*: Ashena and Philip G. Although Iran was never colonised, the strong influence of Russian and British Empires in Iran of the 19th and early 20th centuries had given an anti-imperialistic orientation to many of the Iranian pro-modernity and pro-democracy groups. The constitutional movement that was building a modern nation-state in Iran had to fight despotism of the old monarchy and its imperial supporters at the same time. Anti-American sentiments were added to this after the CIA and British Intelligence Service supported the coup in against the secular and democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh because of his agenda to nationalise the oil industry. In their over a hundred-year history of collective activism, Iranian women have made remarkable achievements in the realms of education; scientific, literary, and artistic creativity; and to some extent in economic productivity and sociopolitical participation. However, they have not succeeded in gaining equal rights in many areas, particularly in the family inheritance, marriage, divorce, and child custody. During the process of rapid

modernisation under the Pahlavi dynasty from the 1920s through the 1970s, many institutions in Iran, including the public education and judiciary systems, were modernised and went through secularisation. But the personal status and family law remained strictly on the basis of the old sharia Islamic law. Except for Tunisia, Turkey, and to some extent Morocco, and the Muslim-majority republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia of the Soviet and post-Soviet times such as Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, in most other Muslim-majority countries, egalitarian reforms in family law, whether by revising and reinterpreting sharia or by replacing it with secular law, have been painfully slow. This has been due to several complex reasons, the most important one being a patriarchal consensus based on a tacit distribution of power among the secular nationalist usually military elite and the religious Islamic elites, that is, the clerics ulema. But with the rise of Islamism and after the establishment of the theocratic state of the Islamic Republic in Iran since 1979, many of the laws and policies in both the public and domestic domains have come under the direct control of the clerics, who have furthered the extent of gender discrimination in favor of men. A few significant progressive reforms made in family law in the 1950s and 70s under the rubric of the Family Protection Law during the second Pahlavi were repealed in the 1980s, and family law and the penal code regressed to the way they were in the 1920s and 40s. In short, after the establishment of sharia-based rule of the Islamic Republic in Iran, women lost many rights in almost all spheres of life. In cases of bodily harm, certain body organs of a male person for example, his testicles are worth more than the whole body of a female person. Women Living Under Muslim Laws: Indiana University Press, Nazila Fathi New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, Shirin Ebadi, The Rights of the Child: This emphasis on legal reform, however, does not make Iranian feminist orientation limited to liberal feminism only. Although at this stage of economic and political development in Iran, liberalism can be very relevant, what may seem liberal in the western democratic context can be perceived as quite radical in a repressive and retrogressive religious state. As well-contextualised by one of the leading feminist activists in Iran, the classical western categorisation of Iranian feminists into liberal versus radical is false and misleading since it fails to account for the historical and specific situational conditions on the ground. The ruling conservative Islamists deny the existence of such a movement. Interaction in Culture and Cultural Politics, ed. Nikki Keddie and Rudi Matthee Seattle: University of Washington Press, Basing their arguments on some classic definitions and old theories of social movements, they point out that the current women activists lack a strong organisational structure capable of mobilising a vast number of the populace, generating serious conflicts with the state, and bringing about political changes. But, their arguments seem unrealistic in light of the more recent public protests, networks of campaigns, and many arrests and conflicts between the women activists and the state organs. This involves deploying the power of presence, the assertion of collective will in spite of all odds, by refusing to exit, circumventing the constraints, and discovering new spaces of freedom to make oneself heard, seen, and felt. The effective power of these practices lies precisely in their ordinariness. Columbia University Press, See Bettina Aptheker, Tapestries of life: University of Massachusetts Press, Social Movements Since the Sixties, ed. Rowman and Littlefield, This history can be roughly divided into eight periods. This chronological division is somewhat similar to the one presented by Parvin Paidar in her seminal book Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran. First was the era of Constitutional Revolution and constitutionalism, during which the first generation of women activists emerged mostly through their involvement in the pro-constitutional and anti-imperialist activities. His son Mohammad Reza Shah, stopped enforcing mandatory unveiling, but that did not prevent the backlash of forced veiling under Khomeini and the Islamist state since 1979. Third, the era of nationalisation of the oil industry's brought more women into the public and political activism within both nationalist and socialist ideological and organisational frameworks. Fifth, the era of Islamist Revolution and Islamisation associated with massive socio-political mobilisation of men and women, but soon followed with many retrogressive and discriminatory laws and policies against women and religious and ethnic minorities, forced hijab, sex segregation, war and violence, political repression, massive emigration and exile of intellectuals and ordinary people, and overall socio-economic decline. But the growth of civil society organisations, the vibrant and relatively free press, including feminist press, and relative economic improvement did not last long. A critique from inside. Another subject of discussion and debate among the feminist activists was related to the presidential elections. See a report,

video, and pictures of the participants at: The Feminist School, accessed November 17, , [http: The Feminist School, November 17, , http:](http://TheFeministSchool.com) Among the presidential candidates, the only one that had sent some representatives to sit in the first seminar of this coalition and listen to their demands was Hassan Rouhani. Protection of women from state and domestic violence, respect for civil and human rights that can provide security for establishing women NGOs “ in order to do educational, cultural and journalistic work toward promotion of egalitarian values and elimination of discriminatory laws and policies ” were among the main demands. They also wanted the presidential candidates to promise appointment of qualified and egalitarian ministers, including women ministers in their cabinet. This stress on setting clear criteria for appointment of ministers was in part a reaction to the tactical move Ahmadinejad had made in by unexpectedly appointing two women ministers to his cabinet in order to appease women since they had made up his primary opponents during the Green Movement. Many activists however had dismissed his gesture as opportunistic, disingenuous, and at most too little too late. Rouhani won the election with a small margin. Iran still continues to have one of the highest execution rates in the world. However, it remains to be seen how much Mowlaverdi can really achieve in the face of the relentless attacks on every progressive and egalitarian project she has tried to pursue so far. Despite intense repression at the state and societal levels, personality frictions, ideological divergence, and differences in strategy and tactics, Iranian gender activists have often converged in practice to collaborate over their common goals. While the patriarchal system has tried to keep Iran internationally insulated, women are becoming increasingly more informed of the current trends within global feminisms and more transnationally engaged, especially with regard to the mechanisms, tools, and machineries created through the U. Although due to the vetting power of the conservative Guardian Council, the attempts made by the reformist deputies in the sixth Majlis to ratify CEDAW did not succeed, most women activists, including some Islamic as well as secular ones, have been framing their demands within the CEDAW framework. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, The movement has a long way to go to reach various classes and ethnic or religious minorities among the wider populace in small towns, provinces, and rural areas. Systemic political and structural barriers too, have blocked the effectiveness of the otherwise hard and courageous struggles of women for equality and gender justice. New York University Press, The repressive, patriarchal, and authoritarian state in Iran has made it very difficult for Iranian feminists to utilise all these strategies effectively. Yet whenever such spaces become available due to changes and contradictions within the political system, women activists can and have utilised such small structural opportunities. Islamism, as a totalitarian state ideology, has resulted in a prevalent aversion toward any ideological absolutism among intellectuals, feminists included. A pragmatic, social democratic or liberal democratic human rights framework has become the common denomination for collaboration and coalition building. Aside from some who still fight for an abstract utopian society based on certain ideologies, many tend to work for concrete changes toward improvement of the rights and living conditions of all citizens regardless of their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and ideological stand. Most women activists have adopted non-confrontational, non-ideological, non-sectarian, and reform-oriented strategies. They engage the political reformers inside and outside the government, the intelligentsia, the media, the law and lawmakers in the parliament, the clerics, various social institutions, and ordinary people. This engagement takes various forms and tactics, constructive criticisms within as well as outside of the framework of the existing laws and Islamic sharia toward revision, reinterpretation, and reform as well as deconstruction and subversion. Their desire to stay away from both elitism and populism and also keep moving ahead pragmatically in the face of continuous repression by the hard-liners has proved a most challenging task. It has maintained its homegrown roots and independence both despite and because of all the national and international pulls and pushes. Many have hoped that with the latest successful nuclear deal between Iran and five plus one world powers, Iran will enter into a new era of reconciliation with the West, the end of the cold war in U. But, it is hard to keep the hope alive given the extremist trends evident in the recent U. But we can be sure of one thing:

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*Women presented the first effective challenge to the Islamic regime and the clerical authority in post-revolutionary Iran. Women's activism in support of their legal rights and personal freedom.*

### Chapter 5 : Feminism in Iran

*Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male-Defined Revolutionary Movement, by Haideh Moghissi. New York: St. Martin's Press, xii + pages.*

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*Women presented the first effective challenge to the Islamic regime and the clerical authority in post-revolutionary Iran. Women's activism in support of their legal rights and personal freedom, however, did not develop into a strong movement against the rising fundamentalism. The Iranian socialists did not support women's autonomous organizations.*

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*Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male - Defined Revolutionary Movement Haideh Moghissi New York: St. Martin's Press, ; pp. Reviewed by Shahrzad Mojab Department of applied Social Science Concordia University Montreal, Quebec Women in the Near and Middle East have been.*

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