

**The Women's Movement, Islamism anti Democracy in Iran:
A Glocal (Global/Local Perspective)**

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1. Description and Objectives of the Project:

This research project is about the women's movement under the Islamist regime in Iran and its role in the process of democratization and secularization of the Iranian society. The strategies and tactics of women's activism in present Iran will be analyzed within the historical and geopolitical context of today's Iran. The socio-political significance of feminism, especially its contribution to and interactions with the broader political culture toward building civil society and democracy will be demonstrated.

Due to certain demographic, socio-political and economic dynamics within the Iranian society and the interplay between these internal/local dynamisms and the external/global factors connected to the processes of globalization, Iran is going through a bottom-up process of socio-cultural transformation toward secularization and democratization. In line with Max Weber's notion of "ironic secularization," Iran is passing away from its surge of Islamic fundamentalism into a post-Islamist stage of socio-political development. The Iranian youth and the new educated middle class women have come to constitute the most elective elements of the civil society in Iran, hence the primary agents of change toward democracy and secularity (not to be misunderstood as anti-religious, but as believing in separation of state and religion).

The role and impact of the global factors to be examined include: the United Nations development agencies" dealing with gender issues such as UNICEF, UNDP, and UNIFEM; the international donor organizations: global feminism: transnational women

NGOs; transnational human/women rights networks (such as the Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch); the role of activism in the digital age; and international political pressures such as the US sanctions against Iran.

Since the 1979 Revolution there has been gradual, but consistent, changes in sexual politics and gender dynamics as well as overall political culture in Iran. These changes are due to a rapid rural-urban migration in the past 5 decades; a youth bulge in the population growth (70 percent of Iran's population is below age 30); a drastic drop, unprecedented in world history, in the total fertility rate from 7.0 children per woman in 1986 to 2.0 in 2005; a considerable improvement in community development projects; a wide expansion of primary health care networks; an overall increase in life expectancy; an increase in women's literacy rate from 36 percent in 1976 to 80 percent by 2005 (by 2005 a remarkable 63 percent of university enrolment was female); and an over 50 percent decrease in child mortality rates (hence a lower motivation for giving birth to more children). These changes have been associated with an increase in average age at first marriage for women in both rural and urban areas (rising from age 20 in 1986 to 24 in 2005). To explore the preceding factors, special attention will be paid to the gender dimension of state policies, state ideology and the law; The Islamist discourse and the role of Islamic law (sharia), especially in the family law and in certain sexist and discriminatory practices such as mandatory veiling and sex segregation. The role and impact of the new Islamic reformers, including Muslim feminists; and the role of secular modern intellectuals, especially secular feminists in the ongoing struggle toward change, will be analyzed.

Widening income gaps, poverty, and high unemployment rates (especially among educated women), rising global pressure for consumerism despite the soaring prices, high cost of housing, and the high cost of wedding ceremonies have made marriage and family raising a daunting endeavor. Changes in the younger generations' attitudes toward and expectations from love, marriage, and sexuality have contributed to the "crisis of marriage" that has caused considerable apprehension among the conservatives and Islamist governmental authorities. The stale policies in response to these issues, the local/global dimensions of these patterns, and the direct and indirect relations to a more profound "gender crisis" in present Iran as in many other parts of the greater Middle East will be analyzed.

2. Methodology, communication and outreach strategy:

This project will rely on observation (some participant) of Iranian women's activism at local, national, transnational and international levels; interviews and survey study by an open-ended questionnaire; and content analysis of primary and secondary sources. Content analysis of the media, women's press, and feminist and anti-feminist literature published in Iran and among diaspora in the US and Europe will be conducted.

During my Keddie-Balzan fellowship at UCLA (2005), I collected 73 questionnaires from prominent feminists inside Iran, including writers, journalists, artists, filmmakers, political activists, parliamentarians, NGO leaders, health workers, and feminist scholars. I have also interviewed 9 older pioneers and seasoned Iranian feminists living in exile. Another project of data collection is planned among the diaspora activists in North America and Europe. This will occur later in summer and fall of 2009 via email, telephone or in person. I plan on interviewing or conducting on line questionnaire among

about 50 activists, especially those who are in contact with activists inside Iran, thus producing cross-pollination. These data (from inside and outside Iran) are meant to provide the most telling and original information about the class (socio-economic, educational level), age, ethnic, religious, and ideological backgrounds of current women activists in Iran. These are original and untapped resources that will contribute greatly to the originality and significance of the book.

3. Anticipated Outcomes:

In addition to a few articles that I have already published or are in progress on this research, the ultimate outcome is a book to be published by a university press. A prospectus of the book has been submitted to the University of Washington Press that has expressed strong interest in its publication and is waiting to receive the entire manuscript.

4. Expected Benefits to the University and Students:

Undergraduate and graduate students in gender and women's studies and gender-related courses in sociology, anthropology, history, political science, communication and religious studies will benefit from this book. Furthermore, gender activists, scholars, policy makers and donor agencies concerned with women's rights and gender issues in the Muslim majority countries of the greater Middle East and the Muslim minority communities in Europe and Northern America will be part of the larger audience. To expand the reach of its policy recommendations and theoretical implications, a quick translation and publication of the book in Persian inside Iran is also planned. This will serve all Farsi/Persian speaking scholars and activists in Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia. My articles already published on this subject have benefited students, scholars in the field, and the public at large through my teaching, writings, and have

attracted international attention resulting in several media appearances and invitations to prestigious international conferences in different countries. Thereby, this work has given and will further give CSUN more visibility at regional, national, and international levels.

Budget: Student Assistant:

I need \$4500 extra budget for hiring a bilingual student assistant with knowledge in statistics who can help me with coding and statistical assessment of the empirical data I have collected for my prospective book. Thanks to my Keddie-Balzan fellowship at

UCLA (2005-2006), I have been able to collect 73 questionnaires so far filled by 73 most active and prominent feminists inside Iran. These are original and untapped resources that will contribute to the originality and significance of my book to a great extent. These particular data are to provide a sociological profile of the primary activists who are currently involved in the construction of a new and independent feminist movement in Iran.