

# TWO DECADES OF IRANIAN WOMEN'S STUDIES IN EXILE: A SUBJECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Shahrzad Mojab

This volume includes 871 entries on women of Iran. These are the materials written in Farsi (Persian) and published outside of Iran. The bibliography includes the literature published from 1979 to 1999. Both years, the beginning and the end, are significant. The year 1979 witnessed the fall of the Pahlavi monarchy, which had celebrated its twenty-fifth centenary earlier in the decade. It was a pro-Western, "modernizing," secular, despotic regime that topped the long list of violators of human rights. The monarchy was overthrown in the course of one of the most popular revolutions of the twentieth century. Urban women were active participants in a revolution, which began spontaneously in 1977 in shanty towns, factories, intellectual circles, and university campuses, but which during its final phases fell into the hands of an Islamic leadership formed around Ayatollah Khomeini, then in exile in France.

In February 1979, the Islamic state formally replaced the monarchy, and by the end of the year it emerged as an "Islamic Republic" with its constitution. In spite of its "republican" form, this political system had little in common with the Western bourgeois democratic state; it was more appropriately called, by Ayatollah Khomeini, *velayat-e faqih*, i.e., the "rule of jurisprudent." The Islamic leaders aimed, among other things, at Islamizing state and society, and liberating the world from the corruption of the West and the East (communism).

Women loomed large in this process of Islamic state-building. Seen, by Islamists, as the main conduit of corruption under the Pahlavi monarchy, women were now to act as agents

of Islamization and reproducers of the Islamic community and nation. Not surprisingly, they were the first targets of state repression. In less than a month after assuming power, the new rulers dismissed women judges, suspended the Family Protection Law, and imposed the Islamic head cover, *hejab*, on women in government offices. The response was immediate: a wave of protests by women and men on and after March 8<sup>th</sup>, International Women's Day.

The rest is a history of consolidation of state power in which extreme forms of coercion were used throughout the country against women, nationalities, religious and ethnic minorities, the media, the universities, bookstores, and any other source of resistance. Using coercion, a regime of sexual apartheid was imposed in public places, from buses and beaches to hospitals. Stoning "adulterous" married women to death, executing lesbians and gays, and other pre-modern forms of punishment were written into the penal codes of the country. The number of women political prisoners soared; they were tortured, raped and executed. Facing unceasing popular resistance and continuing internal conflict among ruling factions, Khomeini decided to consolidate state power by upgrading the "rule of the jurispudent" to the "absolute rule of the jurispudent" (*velayat-e motlaqq-e-ye faqih*). Under this regime, the absolute rule of the supreme leader and his state demanded absolute loyalty of every individual. If the Shah of Iran claimed to be the "shadow of God," the regime of absolute rule of the jurispudent was declared, in no ambiguous terms, as the very *rule* of God.

One outcome of the Islamization project was the creation of waves of refugees who were forced into exile throughout the world. By 1999, when the Islamic regime celebrated its twentieth anniversary, a sizeable Iranian diaspora had emerged in Europe, North America, Asia, Australia and other places. The state was in a state of crisis, divided into two factions which strived for hegemony and cooperated to save their rule.

In exile, Iranian women and men continued their struggle

against the policies and practices of the Islamic state. This bibliography records the literature produced by individuals, writers, activists, and print media in the diaspora. It is, at the same time, a record of a trend in the internationalization of the feminist movement. Looking at it from the “national” context of Iran, we can see the transnationalization of this particular movement.

The bibliography also records the intertwining of Western social theory and exilic interpretations and discourses. Initially, much of the literature was highly critical of the Islamic state’s policies on women. By the early 1990s, the bibliography reflects a division of the literature into critical and conformist trends. The division was in part due to changes in international politics, i.e., the collapse of Soviet and East European state capitalist systems, which many on the left considered as socialist or communist. Theoretically, the growing hegemony of cultural relativism, post-structuralism, postmodernism, and politics of identity contributed to a trend of research which treats Islam-based gender relations as genuine, indigenous, and authentic but remains critical of excesses such as stoning women to death. This trend emerged most actively among academic, secular feminists in exile, although an “indigenous” trend took shape in Iran in the late 1990s. These developments are also recorded in the companion volume, *Women of Iran: A Subject Bibliography* (simultaneously published by The Iranian Women’s Studies Foundation), which lists the English language literature on Iranian women.

The organization of the bibliography is based, in much simplified form, on the *European Women’s Thesaurus: A Structural List of Descriptors for Indexing and Retrieving Information in the Field of the Position of Women and Women’s Studies* (International Information and Archives for the Women’s Movement — IIAV — Amsterdam, 1998). It lists books, pamphlets, book chapters and periodical articles on the subjects listed in the table of contents. Each entry is

alphabetized under the author's or authors' last name(s) and is assigned a number. The numbers are used for the purpose of cross-referencing as well as for creating lists of authors and periodicals.

While we aimed at compiling a comprehensive bibliography, it was not possible to achieve this goal. For one thing, it is extremely difficult to have access to exilic literature produced in dozens of countries. Many research libraries do not acquire this type of "ephemeral" literature; the new exilic publishers and writers usually do not deposit such material in national or state libraries. Collecting such material from private collections demands considerable time and financial resources. The few archival and library facilities established by exilic individuals and groups in Europe and North America suffer from inadequate financial support. Under these conditions, this bibliography includes material published mostly in Europe and North America.

Iranian society and politics continue to change. In early 2000, there was a proliferation of publishing, both books and periodicals, about women. Resistance is remarkable in the print media of the country. In spite of the semblance of a "public sphere," the environment was an opening within the limits set by the "reformist" faction and a repeated, though futile, closure by its conservative counterpart. In spite of the opening, many topics could not be debated. A unique feature of this bibliography is the recording of a category of literature that has not yet been allowed to appear in Iran. Entries listed under the heading of "Prison Experience" include memoirs of women political prisoners who were able to escape into exile. They are stories of state brutality and women's resistance against it.

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