

---

# Revolution, Islamization, and Women's Employment in Iran

---

ROKSANA BAHRAMITASH

Postdoctoral Fellow  
Simone de Beauvoir Institute  
Concordia University

In 1979, the North American and European media were suddenly flooded by reports of the Iranian Revolution, an event that came as a shock to the world. When the Shah fell, the United States contemplated granting him a visa to lend support to its long-standing protégé. The new revolutionary government asked the United States to extradite the Shah to Iran instead of protecting him, but the United States refused. This refusal raised anti-American sentiments, steadily turning the Iranian revolution against the United States. It was too early for many Iranians to forget the CIA-engineered coup of 1953, which returned the Shah back to power. The revolutionary Iranians insisted on U.S. cooperation and the U.S. refusal led to the attack on the American Embassy, which had been the center of CIA operations during the 1953 coup. Thus the American Embassy hostage crisis started. American flags were burned as demonstrators chanted “Down to America.” To the American public, unaware of the history of U.S. involvement in the 1953 coup, the flag burning and anti-American chanting was nothing but a sign of Iranian villainy. From then on, every aspect of the Iranian Revolution, most notably the Islamic religion itself, became associated with evil. In the United States, the condemnation of the Iranian Revolution spanned the political spectrum; liberals and conservatives, as well as leftist and mainstream feminists, were united in their condemnation of the revolution. Ironically, while many feminists in the United States denounced the revolution, Iranian women were strong supporters of the revolution.

Much of the criticism leveled by people of all political leanings—even

among feminists—was aimed at the perceived oppression of women under the revolutionary regime. These critics failed to ask why Iranian women joined Khomeini *en masse* if the Islamic revolution was so “oppressive” to women. The idea that Westernization is the only way to bring liberation to women has become an undisputed part of the ideology of both the political right and the left. Yet if we believe that Iranian women are rational actors and responsible individuals capable of taking their destiny into their own hands, as opposed to irrational and ignorant people who need guidance and enlightenment, then we must be able to explain the massive support that women lent to the revolution and in its aftermath.

### **The Shah’s Revolution and Women’s Liberation**

In the early 1950s, the Iranian masses, in a major uprising, rallied behind Mohammad Mossadeq, a nationalist leader who nationalized the oil industry. Mossadeq’s popularity sent an important message to the United States and the UK: Iranians wanted to be in charge of their own destiny and did not want their natural resources to be under the control of Anglo-American interests. In the context of the Cold War this was an important message for the United States. The United States was determined to keep Iran under its control, and bringing back the Shah was an attempt to protect its interests. Allen W. Dulles, the Director of the CIA, approved \$1 million on 4 April 1953 to be used bring about the fall of Mosaddeq.<sup>1</sup> The success in Iran motivated the CIA to do the same in some other countries such as Indonesia, where Suharto staged a coup in Indonesia with the help of CIA. The new Shah was a different person. He became intolerant of opposition in an effort to reduce civil unrest. His first step was to dismantle all civil organizations and to establish of a strong secret police and loyal army. While the United States advised the Shah to adopt reforms to prevent major challenges to his regime, revolutions arose in other countries.

In accordance with the Alliance program, the Shah was advised by the Americans to stage a “White Revolution.” This was a package of policy guidelines designed to facilitate the transition from an agrarian to an industrial, modern economy. The main component of the package was an attempt at land reform imposed by the central government. This was an effort on the part of the Shah to preempt any possible peasant uprising. The reason it was called the White Revolution was because it was meant to be a revolutionary act without bloodshed, since it was formulated by the Shah and not by a mobilized populace.<sup>2</sup> The Alliance Program was designed by Wolf Ladejinsky, the influential Washington advisor who designed land reform from 1950-1970. Ladjinsky formulated the program in an attempt to prevent support for land reform among peasants. The Alliance Program was adopted in a number of Asian countries,

such as the Philippines, in order to undermine the type of social movement that led to revolutions in China, Cuba and later on Vietnam.<sup>3</sup>

Although land reform was at the heart of the White Revolution, the key to the modernization plan was the transformation of the role of women. Women were to be liberated and serve as cultural transmitters of Western values. Family law was modified in favor of women along with other measures to advance the position of women. The Shah's father had previously imposed de-veiling and the Shah encouraged the process by rewarding non-veiled women with positions in the new expanding government bureaucracy as well as in health care and education. Oil revenues financed the expansion of health and education and many women—particularly of urban upper and middle class backgrounds—entered the labor force.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Shah granted women the right to vote and counted on their support.

Some may now be puzzled by the fact that women who gained so much under the Shah ended up opposing him so bitterly. But the Shah's reforms did not resonate; the beneficiaries of the Shah's reforms were mainly from the privileged classes, and the right to vote was not very meaningful since there was only one party to vote for. For the majority of women who lived in rural areas, and for the working class and poor urban dwellers, the gains for women that resulted from the Shah's reforms were marginal. While upper and middle class women became ministers, attended the Olympics, and even served as delegates to the Mexico City International World Conference on Women,<sup>5</sup> the lives of most Iranian women remained unchanged. The labor force participation rate of women increased slowly during the late 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s but the new jobs were mainly for the members of the privileged class.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, the Shah's liberation of women accompanied overall political repression and exacerbated income disparity. Even to many educated middle class women the tradeoff was not always worthwhile, and many middle class women—especially students—were highly critical of the regime. With the exception of the elite, the majority of Iranians became increasingly critical of the secret police and the lack opportunity for any political expression.

## **Revolution and Islamization**

The White Revolution started in the early 1960s in an effort to limit popular support for socialism. At the same time and for the same reasons, the regime did not inhibit the spread of support for Islam. This was because, for the most part, the Islamists had been co-opted by the regime and the United States had adopted a policy of supporting Islamists to stand against the Soviet Union and the spread of socialist ideas. This support continued up until the 1980s and the time of the Taliban, which were financed and trained by the United States.

The Islamist groups grew in numbers throughout the late 1960s and the early 1970s. These groups were critical of the Shah's political repression and plan of modernization modeled on the West. Linking industrialization with cultural change was probably a huge mistake on the part of the Shah, since industrialization does not necessarily require the transformation or dismantling of the cultural fabric of a society. In fact, as Japan demonstrated, industrialization can successfully take place and still maintain at least the core of indigenous culture. But in Iran, industrialization and westernization came in a single package. The role of women was critical to the success of this process. If Iranian women could look and act like their American and European counterparts, then Iranian society could be just like Western societies. The Shah's regime failed to recognize that the European transition to an industrial society was a very painful one and took over two hundred years, and that that Western-style industrialization would mean Iran would have to abandon its culture and heritage—assuming that industrialization could be successfully achieved to begin with.

Iran's economy experienced a major decline in the agricultural sector but the success of its industrialization remained limited.<sup>7</sup> Oil and the carpet industry (the latter being the product of hardworking women in rural areas) remained the major sources of hard currency for Iran. Forced industrialization of a fairly limited scale came with a great deal of political repression that many Iranians, including women, grew increasingly intolerant of. The issue of political freedom became a major issue, and persuaded many women to turn their backs on the regime.

At the same time, Islamic groups showed sensitivity toward the issue of social and political justice. Rising income disparity and political oppression became the central focus of the Islamists' political campaign. And the fact that they were the only political actor left in Iran—all the others had been dismantled—gave a great deal of impetus to the Islamists' efforts at mass mobilization. Slowly the revolution gathered support from women who traded their granted rights for rights they wanted to earn for themselves.<sup>8</sup> The anti-colonial battle of the Algerians against France inspired the writings of people like Franz Fanon, whose ideas in turn influenced thinkers such as Ali Shariati, a leading figure of the Islamist movement in Iran. In the 1970s Shariati published a widely circulated book *Fatima is Fatima*, which soon came to embody the aspirations of many young women at the time. Fatima, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad, became a role model.<sup>9</sup> For the first time the image of the daughter of the prophet Muhammad was portrayed as a woman of strong will who stood by her husband in their major battles to achieve social justice. This was an image that many Iranian young women could identify with, a woman from their own history and from their own cultural heritage who had sought what they wanted. Many educated young women slowly began to join the Islamist

movement, and some started to wear the hejab. But their hejab differed from the traditional style of head-to-toe cover, which was too impractical for the new revolutionary generation of Islamist women. A headscarf, long coat, trousers and running shoes replaced mini skirts and the latest Paris fashions.

### **Liberating Jihad**

The issue of separation of the private sphere from the public sphere has dominated feminist discourse for a long time. Many feminist academics have written about the fact that confinement to the private sphere has been a huge barrier to female emancipation. Breaking the barrier of confinement of the private sphere has been a major source of frustration for advocates of women's rights. But the Islamic revolution broke the barrier overnight. When Khomeini called for women to attend public demonstration and ignore the night curfew, millions of women who would otherwise not have dreamt of leaving their homes without their husbands' and fathers' permission or presence, took to the streets. Khomeini's call to rise up against the Shah took away any doubt in the minds of many devoted Muslim women about the propriety of taking to the streets during the day or at night. Always at the forefront of demonstrations, women helped to make the Iranian revolution one of the most peaceful ones as their presence at the front made it difficult for soldiers to shoot at unarmed Muslim sisters who on many occasions handed them flowers and asked them to join and stand for justice.<sup>10</sup>

When the Islamists won and came to power, Ayatollah Khomeini was well aware of his female constituency and the massive support of women that brought him to power. However, soon after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Khomeini planned to send women back home to their traditional roles as mothers and wives. But two major incidents changed the Ayatollah's initial plan—economic sanctions against Iran and the war with Iraq. The hostage crisis led to U.S. economic sanctions, and the United States supported Saddam Hussein in his attack on Iran, resulting a war that lasted eight years and claimed many lives. As disastrous as this time was for the country, it meant that the Ayatollah needed all the support he could muster. Once again, he turned to his very loyal constituency—the women of Iran.

The Ayatollah announced several jihads, a jihad against illiteracy, a jihad to rebuild the country, and a jihad against foreign invasion and against the possibility of a coup. According to the doctrine of jihad, men and women are religiously responsible for following the order of their religious leader. As a result, millions of women joined these jihads, many because they were religious, some because they agreed with fighting illiteracy, building a strong economy, and preparing to defend their country. In fact, even the left and the pro-Soviet

*tudeh* party backed the Ayatollah. This massive participation of women consolidated women's presence in the public arena as active citizens of their republic.<sup>11</sup>

The literacy campaign brought millions of illiterate women into the Mosque to learn to read and write.<sup>12</sup> These were women who would not have joined the Shah's literacy programs because education was perceived as an agent of Westernization (or so their religious leaders told them). This time it was their religious leader himself making literacy a religious duty for women. Male relatives could not stand against literacy for their women without the fear of being persecuted by members of their community and local religious leaders. Mass literacy campaigns and free education was a major step towards increasing literacy and education for all Iranians in general but for women in particular.<sup>13</sup>

The jihad for reconstruction and self-sufficiency accompanied the literacy campaigns, and millions of women worked as volunteers to help build the country's economy and win a war. The spirit of the revolution was alive. The Ayatollah called it a revolution of the poor and disempowered against the rich and the powerful as well as the oppressor of the world. Many women put all their effort into making self-sufficiency possible. Iranian women adopted strategies to economize, lessen waste, and provide food for everyone. Many raised money and set up local charity funds bringing neighborhood resources together to help the community. An Islamic social safety net took care of the poor, the needy, and those families whose husbands were at war. The harder the pressures of economic sanctions, the more Iranian women became determined to pay the price for the autonomy of their country. They believed that their own autonomy could not be achieved until the country could be free from domination. Many Iranians were prepared to die if necessary, and joined the army of 20 million in an effort to end the war, and make sure that there would be no coups.<sup>14</sup>

The war dragged on for eight years and thousands died. Once Iran was completely exhausted, the economy brought to its knees, and the army depleted the U.S. support for Saddam Hussein came to an end and the war ended in 1988 with both sides losing.

One year later, in 1989, Khomeini died. His death marked the decline of the spirit of the revolution. The war with Iraq brought millions of women into the public arena working as volunteers just as the World Wars brought many American women into the U.S. labor force. Once the war ended, women who had put such hard work into the revolution could not easily be sent back home. The ideal of social justice which for so many years sent millions of Iranian women to work as volunteers had become an important part of Iranian society and now it was time to extend it to all spheres of life, including the private sphere of the family. Millions of women who had tolerated losses in the legal

sphere started to challenge the Islamist regime fiercely.<sup>15</sup> These women had allies among men who joined them in their effort to gain equality.

### **Liberalization, not Liberation**

With the death of Khomeini, the country moved away from the isolationist Islamic welfare state that Khomeini had sought. Free education, free health care, low-income and cooperative housing, food subsidies along with other programs that Khomeini supported and the left had backed, started to erode. With the election of President Rafsanjani, a new era began, and Iran turned away from social welfare.

**Table 1:** Female Labor as a Percent of Female Population

Year	Female Labor (% of total females)
1960	17.9
1965	18.45
1970	19
1975	19.7
1980	20.4
1985	20.6
1990	21.2
1995	24.2
1998	25.94

Source: World Development Indicator 2001

The new president attempted to liberalize the economy, and the state started to cut back on social services. As food subsidies started to decline and private education and health care started to replace public services, the Iranian poor started to feel the crunch. Rising prices of basic goods and inflation were the symptoms of opening the economy to the world market and further devaluation of the rial put pressure on the poor as well as on many lower middle class families.<sup>16</sup> Many women from these families could no longer afford to work as volunteers nor did they see any logic in continuing to work for free when the spirit of the revolution had evaporated into thin air. Furthermore, now that the barriers to entering the labor force for a huge number of women had been brought down, many volunteers demanded pay to help cope with the rising cost of living.

At the same time, many revolutionary institutions had become parts of the government and many women had automatically become part of the new bureaucracy.<sup>17</sup>

The early 1990s witnessed a marked increase of employment for women (see table 1).<sup>18</sup> This increase was much more than the rate prior to the revolution. Such dramatic change in the pattern of labor force participation might not have been possible if Khomeini had not broken the barriers to women entering into the public sphere. Educational attainment for women, also a product of free education and the literacy campaign, contributed to this increase. In fact, today there are more women in higher education than there are men. The Islamic Republic had adopted certain policies to expand educational levels for women in order to ensure that sexual segregation paid off. These policies were to encourage women to become skilled workers in domains exclusive to women. For example, the government set quotas for female pediatricians and gynecologists and set up barriers against women wanting to become civil engineers. Under pressure from women's political lobbying, the restrictions facing women becoming civil engineers were lifted, though quotas for women medical doctors remained. Recently, in the province of Khorasan, officials considered imposing quotas for men since the number of women entering medical schools is far more than expected.<sup>19</sup>

Some volunteer work by women continued even in the 1990s, the most notable example of which was family planning, a program through which the government called upon women to distribute contraceptives. Religious leaders announced family planning as an important religious duty and many pious Muslim women took up the workload of going from house to house to make sure women were given support and means of fertility control. This policy, which cost nothing for the government in monetary terms, made Iran's family planning a success story according to UN. But such services have had a political cost for the government. The more women got engaged in efforts such as the family planning program—which made them realize their important contribution to Iran—the more they understood and learned the importance of collective action. Such activities gave them confidence to make demands on the government in return for their services.<sup>20</sup>

Increased public engagement and high rates of participation of females in the labor force has done exactly what it is supposed to do according to feminist theories: it has made Iranian women firm in their demands for change. The number of women's magazines has increased and the content of these magazines is extremely sophisticated. From demands to change family law to international conferences on women, to the role of the IMF and the World Bank in the economy, these magazines are highly political and extremely vocal.<sup>21</sup>



In some areas there have been gains. The percentage of women who take an active role in municipal and national elections has increased. Women are also increasingly being paid for housework under a law enabling them to ask their husbands for wages as compensation for their domestic services. Even in the case of divorce, women can demand payments from their husbands for the housework they performed. This domestic wage law was passed in 1993 and was won on the basis of Islamic texts, an illustration of how Islam may be interpreted in ways favorable to women's rights. The Islamists have had to give in on issues such as child custody, which was previously the privilege of the men of a deceased husband's family. Women can now become judges, thanks to pressure applied on Tehran by Islamists and secular women. In other areas, such as divorce on the basis of requests by women and women's eligibility for the presidency have yet to meet success. In the case of divorce legislation, the Council of Guardians, the highest judicial authority (dominated by religious conservatives) recently rejected a bill submitted by parliament.<sup>22</sup> But women have not given up on this issue. There has been much public debate, and in the past few weeks there has been a trend toward changing laws that give the right to women to file for divorce.<sup>23</sup>

Much of what women have gained has been through the effort of those Islamists who have used Islamic texts and doctrines to support arguments for equality. In this way, women have been able to press for reforms from within the system. Many secularist women have joined Islamist women. In some cases, religious authorities have backed them and through different interpretations of Islamic religion many changes have become possible. These changes are here to stay and—unlike the ones granted by the Shah—cannot be easily taken away again. High participation rates in the labor force, high educational attainment, and increased political participation will slowly change the status of women in Iran. This was evident in the massive support that women lent to the election of President Khatami in 1997. The election of President Khatami marked the birth of the reform movement, which opposes the religious conservatives, the followers of Khomeini in charge of the army and the judiciary system.

The political battle between reformists and religious conservatives continues to pull the country in two different directions. Reformists seek to bring Iran out of its current political isolation, modify and moderate strict religious codes, give more equality to women, and grant freedom of expression. The moderates have the majority of the people behind them. Conservatives, led by Khamenei—Khomeini's handpicked successor—resist change and freedom of expression. While Khatami wants a dialogue with the West, Khamenei persists with Khomeini's stand but without the charisma and mass support that Khomeini enjoyed.

There is another undercurrent to the politics and economic policy of Iran. President Rafsanjani was very clear about its economic policy. He called for liberalization and he himself benefited from through easier borrowing and became a rich man. His neo-liberal policies increased female employment, but they did not necessarily bring more economic power to women, as is the case in the rest of the developing world. Throughout the Third World, the percentage of female labour is increasing but because of the liberalization of the economy, rising prices of basic goods and welfare reduction have badly affected women.<sup>24</sup> Today, there are 1.3 billion people living on less than a dollar a day and 70 percent of them are women.<sup>25</sup> Iran is no exception: the increase in labor force participation by women may have increased, but the poverty and income disparity that has come with liberalization of the economy remain a serious challenge to female empowerment. The fact that there are more women in the labor force in Iran is important because it does give them some degree of autonomy. But rising prices of basic goods and cutbacks on social spending have hindered the growth of women's economic autonomy by undermining their decision-making power.

Many advocates of neo-liberal economic policies have argued that free trade has created more job opportunities for women. Such increases have been viewed as an important factor in giving women power to challenge local patriarchy. In some cases this may be true, particularly where multinationals have set up factories with production units employing only women. Overall, however, free market policies have created income disparity and poverty—affecting women much more than men. Therefore, gains made by women through rising employment, in many cases, are undermined by the overall deterioration of economic conditions for women.

Khatami, unlike Rafsanjani, is not committed to full-fledged liberalization of the economy, but his balancing act between the wishes of the people and the conservative religious faction has put him in a fairly weak political position. Moreover, if he wants to open the country politically and establish a dialogue with the West, he has to open Iran's economy to foreign trade. Like other leaders of Third World countries, however, his ability to resist the pressure for liberalization of the economy is limited.

### **Challenges for the Future**

Women have come a long way in Iran. The 1979 Revolution provided an opportunity millions of women had long been waiting for. But the aftermath of the revolution and the rise of conservative religious factions posed new challenges. The persistence and resilience of both Islamist and secular women together have been able to earn greater access to education, employment, and

political offices. Iranian women managed to introduce a dynamic interpretation of Islamic religion and bring about some legal changes. Moreover, throughout the post-revolution period, the government has provided basic goods and services—attributable to the social justice component of the Islamist movement. These efforts have produced an overall improvement of basic indicators, such as infant mortality (of male and female children), maternal mortality, and women's literacy.

These social, political and legal gains may soon be lost as the war on terror and the possibility of an attack on Iraq put Iran in a state of alert. Political instability in the region will make efforts to gain equality more difficult; the reform movement may be put in jeopardy. President Bush's declaration of Iran as a member of "an axis of evil," sent a shiver down the spines of political activists and advocates of women's rights because it was exactly what the religious conservatives needed to legitimize their control over the country and clamp down on civil right groups. If the Bush administration decides to wage a war on Iraq, the first on its list of evils, the region will be destabilized. Fear of President Bush moving down the list to Iran will undoubtedly shift Iran's internal balance of power in favor of the conservatives. Many women may not press for reform if Iran's security is threatened, and sacrifice their rights for the sake of national sovereignty.

---


**Political instability in the region will make efforts to gain equality more difficult.**

---

Even a warming of U.S.-Iran ties could prove detrimental to women's rights in Iran. The United States has demonstrated in its relationship with Saudi Arabia that it may be willing to support a conservative Islamic country if it is broadly supportive of U.S. policy and open markets. If Iran were to shift toward liberalization and away from its hard-line anti-American stance, it may find itself on good terms with the United States. This scenario is not entirely implausible: reform would almost certainly have to come under some Islamic authority, since popular opinion doesn't favor secular pro-Western dictators like the Shah. Religious conservatives such as President Rafsanjani have supported liberalization of the economy and adherence to strict religious codes simultaneously. This would be a nightmare for women's groups in Iran, endangering putting political, social and legal gains and threatening economic justice.

The recent protests against the death sentence of reform-minded professor Hashem Aghajari has led many to believe that a change of regime is not far. But the nature of the new regime is a source of worry for civil society and women's groups. The battle inside the country is not just between the conservatives and reformer; there is also a battle between those who favor neo-

liberalism and those who oppose laissez-faire economics. Women have strong representation in the latter.<sup>26</sup> Given the complex political scene, Iranian women generally favor slow change that secures what women have already gained by guarding against free market policies and violent regime change that may bring to power a regime favored by the United States. Furthermore, Iran's history of violent political change has not been very encouraging. Women's groups have had to carefully push a pace of reform not animated by U.S. foreign policy, as it has been the case in Iraq on the edge of war.

Iran's women, unlike women in many developing countries, face two challenges simultaneously: clerical conservatives and neo-liberal economic policies. The battle on both fronts looks increasingly difficult. The U.S. stance on Iraq and its high-profile presence in the region plays directly into the hands of conservatives in Iran. Progress on women's rights will likely suffer as a result. On the economic front, even if Iran is untouched by U.S. intervention, it's likely that international market forces will further promote market reforms in Iran. While for many this translates into progress, neo-liberal economics will harm the welfare of Iran's women. Free trade, privatization, deregulation and social spending cuts to promote "growth" have become the gospel of the IMF and World Bank, which impose them on developing countries. It is unlikely a small country like Iran will be able to resist effectively. While the economic debate is not within the scope of this article, it is fair to say that when the government's safety net is withdrawn, women will bear the heaviest burden. 

## Notes

1. <http://www.iranchamber.com/history/coup53/coup53p1.php#top>.
2. M. Moadel, "Cladd Structure in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 23, 1991.
3. James Putzel, "The Ladejinsky Model of Agrarian Reform: Philippines Experience," M.A. Thesis, (Montreal: McGill University Department of Political Science 1986).
4. Fred Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development*, (London: Penguin, 1979): 191-93.
5. Mansoureh Piyria, *Salar Zanana Iran*, (Maryland: Mehran Iran, 1995).
6. Roksana Bahramitash, "Women's Employment and Modernization in Iran," in Fred Dallmayr (ed.), *Iran from Tradition to Modernity*, (New York: Lexington Books, forthcoming).
7. W. H. Bartesh, "The Industrial Labour Force of Iran: Problems of Recruitment, Training and Productivity," in J.A. Momeni (ed.), *The Population of Iran, A Selection of Readings*, (USA: East West Population Institute, Pahalavi University 1997).
8. E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982): 464-73 and Zoreh Sullivan, "Eluding the Feminist, Overthrowing the Modern? Transformations in Twentieth-Century Iran," in Bonnie G. Smith (ed.), *Global Feminisms Since 1945*, (London and New York: Routledge 2000): 239.
9. William R. Darrow, "Women's Place and the Place of Women in the Iranian Revolution," in Yvonne Y. Haddad and Elisson Banks Findly (eds.), *Women, Religion and Social Change*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985).

10. Bahramitash, supra note 6.
11. Maryam Poya, *Women, Work and Islamism*, (London: Zed, 1999).
12. I was one of the young women who had joined the jihad for literacy; we had to use second hand books from school children at local Mosques. Our classes were full of women who often brought their children with them. It was then that I started a volunteer daycare program staffed by women. This daycare was extremely successful and it freed many women who could never afford any childcare for social and political activities.
13. Golnar Mehran, "Lifelong Learning: New Opportunities for Women in a Muslim country (Iran)," *Comparative Education*, Vol.32, Number 2, 1999.
14. Roksana Bahramitash, "Islamisation, Gender and Economic Development Strategy in Iran." Paper presented at annual Conference of the Centre for Iranian Research and Analysis, University of Toronto, May 2001.
15. Haleh Afshar, "Islam and Feminism: An Analysis of Political Strategies" in Mai Yamani (ed.), *Feminism and Islam*, (New York: New York University Press, 1996).
16. D. Salehi-Isfahani, "Labor and the challenge of economic restructuring in Iran," *Middle East Report*, Number 210, 1999.
17. Poya, supra note 11.
18. The figures from the World Development Indicator differ from those provided by the national census. The percentage of female employment is higher in the World Development Indicator than it is in the national census and does not show a relative decline of the employment for women in the 1980s. In spite of these problems I have chosen to use the data from the World Development Indicator because the paper puts the experience of Iranian women in a global context, therefore, it is necessary to work with the type of data which is put forward by the international sources rather than national ones. Cross national comparisons are only meaningful if comparable date is used. This paper analysis female employment trend in Iran in a general world data analysis on female employment trend put forward by the International Labour Organization and in the work of scholars such as Richard Anker and Martha Fetherolf Loutfi. See M. Loutfi, *Women, Gender and Work*. (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2001) and Richard Anker, *Gender and Jobs: Sex Segregation of Occupations in the World*. (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 1999).
19. Saneh Rouz, "*Kahesbeh Sabmīyeh Dokbtaran dar Reshteh Peseshky*," No. 1863, 7 September, 2002: 7.
20. Homa Hoodfar, "The Women's Movement in Iran at the Crossroad of Seclusion and Islamisation," in *The Women's Movement(s) Series*. (France: Women Living Under Muslim Law, 1999).
21. Rosksana Bahramitash, "Islamic Fundamentalism and Women's Economic Role: The Case of Iran," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, forthcoming.
22. Saneh Rouz, "*Shorayeh Negabban Hagh Talagh barayeh Zanan ra Rad Khard*," No. 1867, 5 October 2002: 7.
23. BBC World Persian, 2 January 2003.
24. See, Guy Standing, "Global Feminization Through Flexible Labour: A Theme Revisited," in *The World Development*, Vol. 27, number 3, 1999: 583-601 and Richard Anker, *Gender and Jobs: Sex Segregation of Occupations in the World*, (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1998).
25. United Nations, *Human Development Report 1997*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
26. Currently there is huge protest in Tehran against privatization of one its major hospitals (BBC World Persian, 5 January 2003).