



Women in Iran: Emerging Voices in the Women's Movement (Contributions in Women's Studies, No. 198)

Hammed Shahidian

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Examining controversies that developed chiefly after the end of Iran-Iraq War and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, this study focuses on Islamic and secular feminisms, especially as they treat such issues as individuality, gender roles, sexuality, cultural authenticity, and interculturalism. Shahidian emphasizes challenges to governmental policies in daily life, Islamic reformist politics, and secular opposition. He investigates various ideological and political means that female activists employ to resist state policies and achieve legal benefits. Relying on reformist Islamic writings, oppositional literature, personal contacts with feminist authors and underground activists, Shahidian discusses how individuals experience and respond to coercive gender policies.

Reformist bargaining with the patriarchy, which has secured for some women an active role in some spheres of life, diverts feminist attempts to alter gender relations in any fundamental way, Shahidian contends. In Iran, reformists have espoused an agenda that reflects the interests of middle- and upper-class, professional, gainfully employed, heterosexual (Muslim) women. Though weaker and less ideologically and organizationally consolidated than reformist women, many secular feminists have drawn attention to working women's rights, and have sought re-vision of such key issues as morality, sexuality, and the relations between individual and community. These activists and authors question the very assumptions of existing political culture and reject prioritizing socio-political objectives that relegate gender to peripheral significance.

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