

Photography, desire and resistance  
in the lives of women, following the  
1979 revolution in Iran

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## **ABSTRACT**

In my last four years of PhD by practice at the Royal College of Art, I have conducted extensive research on archival photography including materials held at the Museum der Weltkulturen, Frankfurt am Main; the Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies (IICHS), Tehran; and the International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam.

My project started with the fortuitous encounter with a photograph taken by Iranian photographer Hengameh Golestan on the morning of March 8, 1979. The photograph shows women marching in the streets of Teheran in protest against the introduction of the compulsory Islamic dress code. In 1936 Reza Shah had decreed a ban on the headscarf as part of his westernising project. Over forty years later following the 1979 Revolution, Ruhollah Khomeini reversed this decision by ordering that women should now cover their hair.

This 'found image' presented me with a glimpse into the occulted history of my own country and the opportunity to advance towards a deeper learning and understanding of the event of March 8, 1979 a significant date in the history of feminism in Iran.

In what follows I revisit the history of Iran since the 1979 revolution with a particular inflexion on the role women played in that history. However, as my project develops, I gradually move away from the socio-historical facts to investigate the legacy of the revolution on the representations of women in photography, film and literature as well as the creation of an imaginary space of self representation. To this end my writing moves constantly between the documentary, the analytical and the personal. In parallel I have made photographs and video works which are explorations of the veil as object of fascination and desire as well as symbol of repression.

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During this period of registered study in which this thesis was produced the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Azadeh Fatehrad, November 2015.

To Shahla & Azimm  
For your everlasting love,

to my country of birth, Iran  
And to my adopted country, the UK

I do present and dedicate

These my labour