

metroZones (ed.)

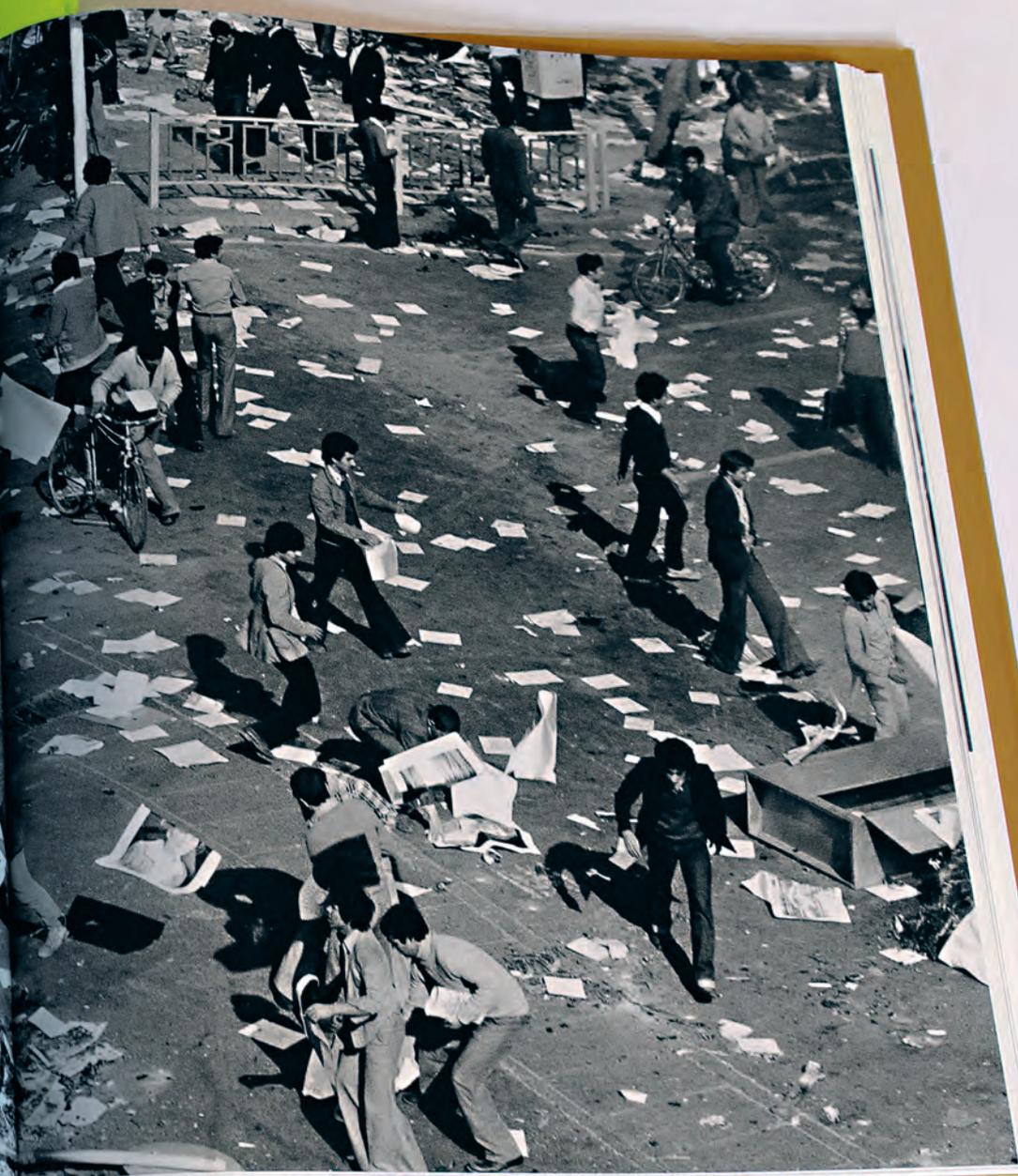
FAITH IS THE PLACE

the Urban Cultures of Global Prayers

metroZones 11 / **b_books**







on the set of 1978ff

SANDRA SCHÄFER

256

The Iranian Revolution in 1978/79 brought down the Shah regime. A broad base of leftists and workers, slum dwellers and peasants, members of the middle class – including feminists – and the clergy supported the revolution, which was internationally also interpreted as anti-monarchic, anti-imperialist, nationalistic and/or religious. Shortly afterwards, the Islamic Republic of Iran was proclaimed.

In the video installation, *on the set of 1978ff*, I pursue the questions of why at this point in time political Islam played such an important role and why the foundation of the Islamic Republic was advocated by so many people with different political convictions and from different factions. I regard the Iranian Revolution not as a purely national event but expand the view to interconnections, perspectives and modes of reception in the neighbouring countries, like the Middle East and the Global North.

I reconstruct the Iranian Revolution both exemplarily and fragmentarily as an urban phenomenon based on its representation in film, television and photography. From the perspective of media production and reception, I am involved along with further participants in a re-reading of the events. The focus is on processes of handing down and of translation into different contexts. Within this re-reading I don't approach history as a linear narration of change and progress. I rather focus on ruptures, fragments, temporalities, translations and struggles. Beside the installation is the photograph *Burning Archives* by Kaveh Golestan. People move between the torn and burning icons of the old regime. The image marks the moment when it is unclear how the vacuum the old regime left will be filled.

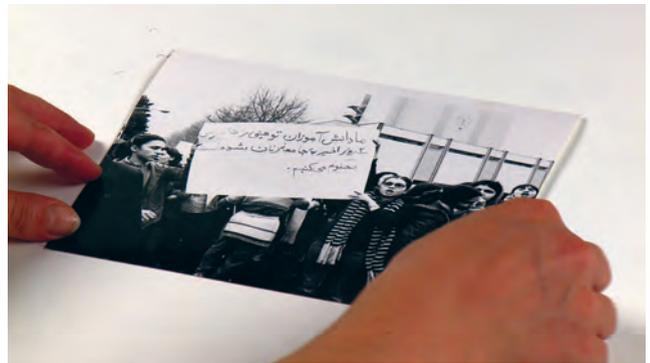
The two-channel installation, integrates contributions from East and West German television, BBC Persian, Time Magazine, pictures by photographer Hengameh Golestan, excerpts from the documentary *Schah Matt*¹ by Thomas Giefer and Ulrich Tilgner, and sequences on the intellectual Ali Shariati. I interweave the historical material with interview passages, excerpts from staged public debates and text commentaries.

In my contribution for this book focus on the fifth chapter *Your Own Choice* of my video installation *on the set of 1978ff*. In this chapter I address the first protests against the newly established regime: the protest of women against the new gender policies and their effects on different women, depending on their class background, political opinion, religious belief etc. I decided to make a montage of image and text as this close twist represents the way I worked within my video as well.

¹ The German *Schachmatt* (=checkmate) playing with the Persian *Schāh Māt*.



HENGAMEH GOLESTAN Dictatorship is dictatorship in any form and in any case.



This is in front of Tehran University and it says: "Us female students, we are not going to tolerate the offence to the women. We are going on protest against it and we are not going to wear that thing".



Religious women, I mean, some women like for instance that friend of mine, who is from Khomein, from the childhood she used to wear tchador, and she is religious, but not in that way. She was always my friend. She was always alright with women without the hijab. It was an ordinary thing, nobody cares, it was your choice, if you want to wear it or not.



Photographer Hengameh Golestan amongst the protesters.

HENGAMEH GOLESTAN Because they started fighting and they started to attack women, Ayatollah Taleghani who was a very peaceful man and he always talked about hijab in a good way, he said "it's your own choice" and everything. He sent the mullah to calm down women.





HENGAMEH GOLESTAN It was very funny, because the whole day people could see all this. And when you came home and turned on the television or radio, there was nothing in it. So everybody knew. I mean, it was just national TV. And there were lots of male students, who came to support women. And this is just the minute that they started to attack women. We were surrounded by some people and they started pushing. We didn't realise what was going on at the first, but then they started beating up everybody.



ZIBA MIR-HOSSEINI On 26th of February, there was a directive from the office of Ayatollah Khomeini, saying that family protection law, that was a law, which was introduced by the previous regime in 1967, which gave men and women more or less equal rights to custody after divorce and also to divorce, said that this is not Islamic, this is not in line with the Sharia and announced a return to Sharia, which basically was a return to the civil court, which was codified in 1935 and it was based on authoritative Figh or jurisprudence short texts. And that really came as a shock. And from then there were announcements that women can not be judges, women can not study certain topics and then there was also another announcement, that women who are working in the government offices should appear with Islamic hijab. So women and the progressive forces and especially women were becoming aware that there are regressive policies, one by one are coming. And women's groups in these organisations, they announced a rally for 8th of March. And they used this occasion as making their voices heard and also protesting against the policies that was being introduced one by one.



MARZIEH MORTAZI LANGROUDI March 8 did not mark the start of the challenges to women thinking in a new religious way. Nor to women who had Marxist beliefs in regard to challenges posed to women. The women's campaigns in Iran did not start because of the hijab, though later on the hijab became a part of it. Despite wearing a hijab, I believe that the hijab should not be forced, because the religion is not imposed. Holy Quran says: "There is no duress in religion." If there is originally no duress in religion, how can it be said that women have to wear a hijab on their heads. This is a private affair. The power belongs to a traditional thought that is paradoxical, as it says that women should stay at home, while on the other hand, introducing templates of Muslim women such as Hazrat-e Zainab, Hazrat-e Zahra, Hazrat-e Khadijeh.

These were all housewives who did not stay at home. Hazrat-e Khadijeh, the wife of the prophet, was a businesswoman. She ran a business, and Hazrat-e Mohammad was her employee. These are the templates for both the traditional and new-thinking women to show that these women did not stay at home. There are many other reasons as well, such as poverty. We had the war and the revolution. Society became impoverished. This also led to women participating more than before. The third reasons as well, such as poverty. We had the war and the revolution. Society became impoverished. This also led to women participating more than before. The third reason that caused women to enter into social life more actively was that the traditional society of Iran and even traditional Iranian thought trusted the authorized clergy.



ZIBA MIR-HOSSEINI In the 1930s, Iranian women were just coming into the society. It was just the time that girls' schools were established. It was just the time that Tehran University had opened. So as a result by making hijab illegal, it really excluded a large number of women from society. But at the same time, it emasculated the clerics. Because basically Reza Shah with this policy was doing more than humiliating women - of course he didn't want to humiliate women, he wanted to honour women and modernise

them - it was actually humiliating the clerics. Because they stood so much for hijab. Emasculating them. So as a result when the revolution happened the first thing that the clerics wanted to do was to impose the hijab. That was to emasculate the secular forces, to emasculate the monarchists. And it is a male power. And it is a male game and it is played over women's bodies. And women also for different reasons go towards it and reproduce the same kind of discourses or structures of dominance.

The liberation movement of Iranian women in the year zero.

Conceived, shot and directed by: Iranian women and the women of the political and psychoanalytical group on whose side we fought. March 1979

Teheran: On the 8th of March thousands of Iranian women took to the streets and women worldwide were happy about the beginning of a women's movement in an Islamic country. From the first day on – and during the whole week of the revolution by the women – we were at their side at demonstrations, sit-ins, discussions. And in Paris, Lyon Bordeaux and Marseille many of us spared no effort in making this movement known. Day after day we reported on the uprising their quest, their violence and their success. We – the women of the liberation movement the political and psychoanalytical group – are convinced that it is a success for all the women in the whole world when the Iranian women free themselves from their chains.





If they had wanted that, they should have told us that immediately, before the revolution. They should have said immediately that men and women did not have equal rights. We raise our voices for our rights. To have the same rights as men. We thought that if we did not act, the constitution would be written and we would lose all our rights. We are demonstrating not only against the obligation to wear headscarves, but for many rights that are even more important. The women lawyers were the first to react, and we followed them. Now they are no longer on our side. They claim that the problem has been solved. But we don't want to give up the struggle.

265

We, veiled and unveiled, have fought together against the Shah, now we should also protect our freedom together. The Committee to Protect Women's Rights

A French documentary on Iranian women and women who fought at their sides.

TRANSLATED BY KARL HOFFMANN