



AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT
FACULTY OF ARTS & SCIENCES

CENTER FOR ARAB
& MIDDLE EASTERN
STUDIES

THE EFFECTS OF THE **1979 REVOLUTION ON THE PRACTICE OF FAITH**

HOW TO DISCUSS RELIGION IN IRAN TODAY?

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ABSTRACT

Far from being confined to the public policies of the Islamic Republic, post-revolutionary religious practices have continued to evolve at the intersection of everyday life's triviality and mysticism. These developments have not always aligned with the regime's official Islam or the habitus of the Qom clergy. New debates, new forms of mobilization or religious expression, and a new Islamic public law rooted in fiqh have emerged, sometimes in tension with the political sphere. These innovations reflect the social and economic transformations that Iran has undergone—such as the rise of a child-centered culture creating a true “babyocracy,” increasing individualization, financialization, and mass consumption—as well as regional and global upheavals.

As an anthropologist of religion, my method has always been participant observation—whether studying a group of revolutionary Islamic women in the 1980s, pilgrimages in the 2000s and 2010s, elections, business circles, Afghan migrants, or theological education in Qom in the late 2010s. My approach to religion falls within the anthropology of power and popular modes of political action, drawing from African studies, particularly the work of Jean-François Bayart. This is simply because the religious sphere is also a field of power relations, spatial occupation, distinction, and competition. It is likely for this reason that the 1979 revolution profoundly reshaped it.

BIO

Fariba Adelkhah is an anthropologist and research director at CERI (Sciences Po Paris). Her field research has focused on post-revolutionary Iran and Afghanistan in the 2010s. In Iran, she devoted herself to the mobilization of Islamic women during the revolution and in the early years of the Islamic Republic. She also focused on business and financial circles, elections, diaspora, pilgrimages and travel practices, religious civil society, and different expressions of individualism. In Afghanistan, she focused on land tenure issues, the institutionalization of Shiism, and the transformation of Hazara society.

Her publications include *La Révolution sous le voile. Femmes islamiques d'Iran* (Karthala, 1991); *Être moderne en Iran* (Karthala, 1998); and *Les Mille et une frontières de l'Iran: Quand les voyages forment la nation* (Karthala, 2012). In her latest book, *Prisonnière à Téhéran* (Le Seuil, 2024), Adelkhah provides an anthropological account of her imprisonment in Tehran from 2019 to 2023.

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