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“Globalization, Islamization, Women’s Employment: A Catalyst for Change”

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This lecture will provide an overview of Iranian women’s employment in the context of the post revolutionary Iran. This period is divided into three eras. The first section will examine the impact of the 1979 revolution. The second era will focus primarily on the ways in which President Rafsanji’s open market economy effected overall economic dynamics of the country and female employment. The last section will discuss the impact of open market economy in the late 1990s and structural adjustment policies (SAPs) and its consequences for women’s employment. This era corresponds with the election of President Khatami and the birth of the reform movement in 1997. Concentrating on contemporary issues, this paper will analyze the ways in which female employment has become a central focus on policy makers in Iran as a reaction to SAPs. Since the late 1980s’ free market economy there has been a rising poverty and income inequality and female employment that has forced many families to rely on two incomes. This does not necessarily mean that women have become economically empowered. However, since the reform and the election of President Khatami, women have become a forceful political constituency. A high percentage of highly educated women, rising number of female journalists and political activities are changing Iran’s political scene. There is a quiet revolution taking place as women enter into the public space that will have profound implications for the country in the near future and will provide the back bone of political openings. However, if the trend toward pulverization of people continues to grow, Iran may be a place of political unrest and the state in the process of repressing the unrest may kill the seeds of political openings. The key is the extent to which Iran can resist forces of globalization and rising poverty and income disparity.