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Discussion of *Iran Awakening* by Shirin Ebadi

Abstract

In preparation for our book discussion on *Iran Awakening* by Shirin Ebadi for our *Iran: Beyond the Headlines* series, we created some of our own discussion questions about the book. Please feel free to use for your own book discussion!

Keywords

Gettysburg College, Musselman Library, Iran, reading series, book discussion, film series, Iranian, Tehran

Disciplines

Family, Life Course, and Society | Gender and Sexuality | History | International and Area Studies | Islamic World and Near East History | Near and Middle Eastern Studies | Race and Ethnicity | Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies | Religion | Sociology of Culture | Women's Studies



**Discussion of *Iran Awakening* by Shirin Ebadi
"Iran: Beyond the Headlines" Series
April 15, 2015**

Balancing her professional life with home life and parenthood is a common thread in Ebadi's memoir. In what ways do Ebadi's experiences as a wife and mother in 1980s Iran mirror the experiences of American women during that time period? In what ways are they different? What steps did she take to provide an atmosphere at home that supported her beliefs, and where was she willing to compromise?

Early in her childhood, Ebadi experiences a spiritual awakening, writing, "Since that moment, my faith in God has been unshakable" (10). Why does she make a point of stating this up front? Where does religious belief and practice show up in her story?

In several of our discussions over the course of the year, we have noted that the 1979 Revolution was largely about class, as well as religion and politics. How does Ebadi's role in and reactions to the Revolution shed light on its nature and objectives?

Ebadi takes a strong stance against leaving Iran during the years immediately following the Revolution and rails against those who do. What strategies do Ebadi and some of her friends take in order to remain in Iran and have a professional life under an authoritative regime? How do these strategies change over time? How does she cope as more and more of her friends and family flee?

Throughout her memoir, Ebadi discusses several cases of severe injustices against women, children, and government dissidents. Through these cases, the reader is provided insight into the workings of Islamic law as well as the growth of Ebadi's legal career working for change. Which case(s) stood out to you the most? Why?

At one point Ebadi realizes that she must fight for human rights, and particularly women's rights, within an Islamic framework. Do you agree with this choice? What are the benefits and drawbacks of this strategy?

The status of women changes a great deal over the course of Ebadi's narrative, and today women are the majority of college students in Iran, almost half the workforce, and hold prominent places in government. Ebadi writes, "The Islamic Republic had inadvertently championed traditional women, yet it has also left them ruthlessly vulnerable, for they had been given a new awareness of their rights but only crude tools with which to advance them" (109). What stood out to you about women's rights? How do Ebadi and other women advocate for them?

What role does the media play in Ebadi's human rights work? Do you believe Iran's leadership is affected by public scrutiny within Iran? internationally?

Ebadi's 2003 visit to Paris (during which she learns she has won the Nobel Prize) includes seeing some Iranian films. She mentions *SOS Tehran*, which documents the city's social service and psychological institutions. The films we viewed together were made a little later: *Offside* in 2007, *Persepolis* in 2008, and *A Separation* in 2011. Prof. Udden made a case that Iran's political structure allows for some anti-regime expression through the medium of film. How does this loosening of control square with Ebadi's exile from her home in 2009?

Ebadi explains the deep entanglement of the U.S. and Iran, beginning with the U.S. role in the overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh in 1953 and ending with President George W. Bush's 2004 speech stating that "As you stand for your own liberty, America stands with you" (213). What were the key events in the history of relations between the U.S. and Iran? What has kept them from the "honest exchange" Ebadi would like to see (212)? Why does Ebadi argue that their interests are so entangled, and do you agree or disagree?

As a memoir, *Iran Awakening* provides Shirin Ebadi the opportunity to present herself to an American and then worldwide audience. In the end, how do you feel about Ebadi as a person? as a woman? as a human rights lawyer? as an Iranian?

How has this work expanded your understanding of life in modern Iran? What questions do you still have?